



HANDBOOKS IN COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA

# The Handbook of Global Online Journalism

Edited by Eugenia Siapera and Andreas Veglis



# The Handbook of Global Online Journalism

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# The Handbook of Global Online Journalism

Edited by

Eugenia Siapera  
Andreas Veglis

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# I

## Introduction: The Evolution of Online Journalism

Eugenia Siapera and Andreas Veglis

In 1993, a couple of months after the launch of the first web browser, Mosaic, the University of Florida's Journalism Department launched what is generally considered to be the first online journalism web site. It was a very basic, static web site, with a picture of the red-bricked wall of the Journalism Department. It was updated only occasionally, at nights and weekends, when the machine was not in use by others, running on a 486-25 processor with 4 megabytes of random access memory (RAM). About a year later, in November 1994, The UK's *Daily Telegraph* launched the *Electronic Telegraph*, which was a similarly static page, with articles one on top of the other. The online publication followed the rhythm of print publishing, posting online contents once a day. In a 2001 article, Derek Bishton detailed the *Electronic Telegraph's* remit: to explore the new medium, its technological and commercial possibilities, as well as the scope for the launch of the *Telegraph* as an online brand (Bishton, 2001). And in this rather slow, uneventful manner began the history of online journalism, and the creation of a new kind of journalism that has changed the face of journalism forever.

The 20 years or so since then have seen developments that were both gradual, such as the slow adoption of the Internet's features of hyperlinking, interactivity, and multimedia, and radical, as witnessed by the shift toward the participatory web and social media. The initial reluctance of journalistic sites to employ these features was eventually replaced with unfettered enthusiasm, while more recently no self-respecting journalistic site remains without a blog, a Facebook, and Twitter account. Thus, the relationship between the new media and journalism, which began in fits and starts, has become a close embrace to the extent that it is difficult to imagine an exclusively offline journalism. Theorists, practitioners, students, and readers/consumers/users of online journalism are all involved and have a stake in this relationship, and seek to understand how journalism

is changing, their respective positions in it, the various directions it takes, the ways in which it is practiced, and the implications these may have in public and social life.

It is therefore this relationship that this book attempts to document, map, and understand. It is this relationship and its trajectories across a globalized world that it examines and presents. But this relationship, as with all relationships, has its issues. As an entry point to these issues, this introductory chapter traces the evolution of online journalism. The word evolution is used to denote the ways in which some aspects of journalism were inherited through a kind of “natural selection” and some sub-species of journalism have become or may be about to become extinct, while others may be thought of as genetic mutations. But all these contribute to the dynamism and eventual survival of journalism.

This chapter will discuss the history and evolution of online journalism, as well as the development of the “species” itself, tracing the various traits and characteristics and the ways in which these may have changed. This will be followed by a section mapping research into online journalism, concluding with a discussion of the rationale and structure of this Handbook.

## **On Dinosaurs, Extinction, and Mutations**

The Wikipedia entry for “Evolution” lists the three main premises for natural selection as follows: firstly, there is more offspring than can possibly survive; secondly, traits vary among individuals, leading to different rates of survival and reproduction; and thirdly, trait differences can be inherited. But natural selection is not the only means by which evolution proceeds: there is extinction, in which a whole or a sub-species disappears, making way for other species to appear or thrive, but also mutation, whereby a sudden and spontaneous change occurs in the constitutive parts of an organism.

The most famous case of extinction is of course that of dinosaurs, a diverse species, whose life spanned over 160 million years only to come to a mysterious end about 65 million years ago. The exact cause of their extinction is still under discussion. Among the most likely explanations is an asteroid crash that led to their sudden demise, their failure to evolve brains and brain functions to adapt to their changing environment, and the pressure to survive in a challenging environment increased their stress level to the extent that led to their eventual shrinking and demise (see [dinosaurfact.net](http://dinosaurfact.net)). What is beyond dispute, however, is that their extinction made way for the rise of a new species, the mammals, who currently dominate the earth. On the other hand, while most dinosaurs disappeared with no trace, a particular family of dinosaurs, the Manuraptora, which includes the velociraptor, a small, fast and agile dinosaur, is generally considered to be the ancestor of birds, another hugely successful and thriving species. Extinction and adaptation feed into new life and/or the prolongation of older forms of life, while sudden changes, failure to adapt, and increased stress are very likely to have contributed to extinction.

This brief excursus on dinosaurs provides an instructive analogy with the current fate of some of the many species of journalism. The parallels are many: just like dinosaurs, traditional journalism, and print journalism more particularly, dominated for over 300 years. Just like dinosaurs, it faced a (more or less) sudden threat: the rise of the Internet and digital content platforms; it has difficulties developing new functions to adapt to a

changing environment; it faces prolonged stress due to a decrease in profits and an increasingly competitive environment. Will it survive or will it go the way of the dinosaurs?

Looking at the theory of evolution, alongside the history of online journalism, we can argue that some species may become extinct, while others may adapt to their environment. The extinction may pave the way for new kinds to emerge, while adaptation may lead to interesting and perhaps more robust forms of journalism. We can therefore examine the major traits that were inherited by the previous species, but also the new traits that have emerged, as well as their combination, which informs the new species. Finally, we can examine the mutations that have occurred, which may take the species into an entirely new direction: social media and open source/citizen journalism.

To begin with, it is now clear that newspaper and print journalism more specifically cannot continue in the same way as if nothing has changed in the last 20 years or so. For almost 300 years it followed more or less the same principles, the same routines of production, the same 24-hour news rhythm, the same way of addressing its audiences, the same structures for reporting the news. But now this is no longer possible: journalism's environment has changed dramatically and journalism needs to develop new functions to adapt to this environment. If it does not, it will face the fate of dinosaurs. But, it is also clear that journalism is beginning to take on new features, expanding on its strengths and developing new ones, designed to adapt to its environment. It may be seen that it has bequeathed to its "descendants" its main traits and characteristics such as reporting facts, and providing informed analysis, comment, and opinion.

More specifically, the key "traits", values, or defining characteristics of journalism, as listed by Deuze (2005: 447), drawing on Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) include: (i) that journalism provides a public service, typically in the form of collecting, collating, and disseminating information to the public; (ii) that journalism is objective and fair and therefore credible; (iii) that it is autonomous from vested interests; (iv) that it has a sense of immediacy and the 'newest' news; and (v) that it has an ethics of what is and what is not appropriate. These traits may form the backbone of journalism, but the reality of a fast developing technology, as well as socio-political and economic changes, means that journalism needs to reinterpret these values or traits in new ways in order to adapt to this environment. Indeed, new technologies are analogous to an asteroid crashing, with journalism feeling the ripple effect years later: new developments pose important challenges for journalism's key traits, which may no longer suffice for its survival.

Public service is typically understood in terms of a top-down approach that journalism knows and can serve the public's needs. However, as Deuze (2005) has argued, new technologies and new media have fragmented publics, which may have diverse understandings of their needs and interests. Here, the politics of journalism need to be rethought, and journalism must reinterpret its political functions in both a pragmatic and a normative manner (see Chapter 7 for a critique, and Chapters 6, 8, and 9 for alternative and radical reinterpretations). Objectivity and fairness may remain as guiding principles, but in the days of blogs and user-generated content, they are increasingly under strain; journalism's credibility must be reinterpreted, perhaps through a reworking of accountability practices (see Chapter 15). Autonomy is a much-discussed value in journalism, praised by some (e.g. Bourdieu, 1999), but criticized by others (e.g. Schudson, 2005). The new media have had a very ambiguous impact on journalistic autonomy, as,

on the one hand, they offer journalists the possibility to operate independently, outside the confines of media corporations, but on the other hand, the proliferation of journalistic content on the Internet removes autonomy as it removes sources of funding that may have allowed independent investigative journalism. New, innovative ways of reinterpreting autonomy as collaboration or open source may fill in the void created (see Chapters 14 and 16). However, one thing that technology has done is to amplify the sense of immediacy that pervades journalism: scoops and new stories are broken every minute or so, while there is continuous coverage on Twitter and Facebook or live blogs running from newspapers such as the *Guardian*. Journalistic ethics is an area that needs urgent reconsideration due to the proliferation of online contents. At the same time, more broadly speaking, journalism ethics may be seen as a strategy by which journalists seek to exclude or discredit others who they consider are impinging on their “turf;” from this point of view, ethics is a kind of symbolic capital, mobilized in order to safeguard journalistic status and prestige (see Chapter 5).

While online journalism can be seen as a case of adaptation to the new environment through a reinterpretation of journalism’s main traits and values, this is but one of three evolutionary possibilities. The second one is the genesis of a new kind of journalism that has its own characteristics and fits perfectly in the new environment. This kind of journalism has developed its own features and requires a more tailor-made approach to understand its specificity. To an extent, the remit of this Handbook is to provide precisely this: a theoretical and empirically informed understanding of this new species of journalism. New traits, such as multimediality, interactivity, and hyperlinking, the rise of user contents, and the convergence of production, lead to an online journalism that is characterized by personalization (see Chapter 20), a different news-story structure (see Chapter 19), and which has been described as experiential and/or ambient (see Chapters 4 and 17, respectively) and which has its own values and conditions for excellence (Chapter 3).

The third evolutionary possibility is that of mutation. Here, journalism mutates into something new, different, and which may open new horizons. Mutations may occur randomly and in a random pattern. They may however be attributed to specific changes in the environment. In connection with online journalism, we can observe at least two such major changes: in the economics of online journalism (see Chapter 13) and in its production norms (see Chapter 2). The proliferation of business models detailed by Richard van der Wurff in this volume (Chapter 13) in fact implies a loss of economic capital for journalism (see also Chapter 5), while new production modes may be linked to new forms of journalism (see Chapter 9). We can therefore count social media journalism (see Chapter 17) as well as open source journalism (see Chapter 14 on crowdsourcing and Chapters 8 and 9 on Wikileaks) as two such “mutations.”

It would be neat to consider these three descendants of journalism as occurring in distinct phases. And to an extent, they do: the first phase can be seen as one in which journalism sought to impose its own norms and criteria on the new media; a look at the history of online journalism confirms this. The first, static pages of legacy news organizations, such as Cable News Network (CNN), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the *Daily Telegraph*, and so on, were quickly succeeded by new sites tuned toward multimedia and interactivity. Thus, in a second phase, journalism sought to adapt by

importing the features of interactivity, multimodality, and hypertext. In early 2000, Associated Press launched AP Streaming News offering multimedia content. A few months later, the *International Herald Tribune* launched its new site, which allowed users to flick over page turns and store headlines for viewing later, introducing customization and applying interactivity (Meek, 2006). The immediacy of online news was put to the test on September 11, 2001, when the stunned world turned to the Internet to find out what had happened; sites crashed under the demand, and news editors realized that immediacy is a much prized attribute in the increasingly competitive online news environment. In a third phase, new kinds of journalism emerged out of the new media environment. Two events are considered pivotal for the rise of new kinds of journalism: the Asian tsunami in December 2004 and the terrorist attack in London in July 2005. These two events were reported through the contributions of eyewitnesses, whose photos, videos, and stories appeared in blogs and news sites across the world. The shift of journalism toward a collaborative, open source model through social media was clear. In more recent years, the live and direct reporting of events such as the Mumbai attacks in 2008 (see Chapter 18), the Iranian elections in 2009, and the North African revolts through Facebook and Twitter, cemented the relationship between social media and journalism.

This kind of time-based classification, however, belies a messier development of trial and error, regressions, and resistance. Journalism is following different paths in different settings; sometimes it leaps forward, while in other instances it seems stuck in the past. It is well worth looking at the concrete contexts in which journalism has evolved to understand the complexity of this evolution. Several chapters in this book provide historical and sociological analyses of online journalism in specific contexts, such as Australia (Chapter 22), Brazil (Chapter 21), China (Chapter 26), Germany (Chapter 23), Nigeria (Chapter 24), and the UK (Chapter 25). The different trajectories of journalism in different contexts point to the need to complement theoretical analyses with empirical studies that allow an in-depth understanding of the various paths of online journalism and its future directions.

Online journalism is an increasingly popular topic as recent titles suggest. Research has contributed immensely to our understanding of its shifting present and promising future. The next section will explore recent research with a view to highlighting what we have learned so far.

## Reviewing Online Journalism Research

A search using ‘online journalism’ as keywords in Google Scholar returns over 30 000 results, while Google Books returns about 2500 results of books with “online journalism” in their title. This shows the increasing development of research into the field of online journalism and also the difficulty of summarizing and categorizing this growing body of research. Different researchers have used different entry points in reviewing online journalism research. In one of the most recent and comprehensive reviews, Steensen (2011) has explored this research from the prism of the three main new media features of hypertext, interactivity, and multimodality. While Steensen focused on technology, Eugenia Mitchelstein and Pablo Boczkowski recognized the volume and diversity of research into

online journalism and wrote two very informative articles, reviewing research on the production and the consumption of online journalism (2009 and 2010), respectively. To these dimensions, we may add the dimension of theory, which cuts across research but which provides a more complete picture of research developments in the field. Theoretical developments increase our in-depth understanding of the past, present, and future of journalism, its internal dynamics and external relationships, as well as the main drivers for its development.

### Technologically oriented research

Research into the new media inevitably looks into technology and the role it plays in socio-cultural shifts. Research in online journalism could not be an exception: in fact technology-driven research in online journalism dominates to the extent of attracting criticisms of technological determinism (Domingo, 2006). Such research, as Steensen notes, focuses on the features of the new media and traces their impact on journalism. While different researchers have explored different features, the three main ones are those that we have repeatedly used throughout this text: hypertextuality, interactivity, and multimodality. Research into these has attempted to conceptually specify them, to examine the possibilities to which they are linked, and to measure up the extent to which journalism actually employs them.

The conceptual specification of these features is actually a more complex task than it may appear at first glance. This is not only due to the shifting and overlapping patterns of these features, but also to the diverse ways in which researchers use them. Rost (2002) summarizes several definitions of hypertext, concluding that there are several types of hypertext, and that these may have a different relation to journalism. In its simplest form, interactivity has been defined as the extent to which users are allowed to participate in the modification of media contents and forms in real time (Steuer, 1992: 84, cited in Paulussen, 2004: np). At its most complex, interactivity is approached through its constitutive dimensions: for Downes and MacMillan (2000) these include direction of communication, time flexibility, sense of place, level of control, responsiveness, and perceived purpose of communication. Multimodality is defined in terms of a news output that contains more than two media, as well as the ways in which a news output travels across media (Deuze, 2004), but very often multimedia is conflated with both cross-media and convergence.

These conceptual difficulties are evident in the diverse operationalizations of these terms in research. In Steensen's comprehensive review, we can see that hypertext is typically operationalized as links to other stories in the news site, as links within a story, and as links to external sites. The first kind, that is, links to other stories in the same site, is the most common form of hyperlinking. Interactivity may be operationalized in terms of human-to-human, that is enabling a two-way communication between people; it can also be seen as human-computer interaction, which includes the kind of interface available (e.g. menus, search tools, etc.); and as human-content interaction, which refers to the ways in which users are able to construct their own contents (Steensen, 2011 after MacMillan, 2005). In general, interactivity is on the rise, especially the human-to-human kind, with more and more news sites allowing users to comment and otherwise participate in the site, although



this does not include the selection and editing of stories. Multimedia, operationalized as the combination of different media in telling a single story, is, according to Steensen's review, the least developed feature in online journalism, with journalists unsure as to how to use it and readers indifferent to it.

### Research on production of online journalism

The above-discussed body of research, as Steensen rightly points out, shows that online journalism is lagging behind new technologies, and thus, to an extent, new developments in journalism cannot derive from technologies alone. It is perhaps this realization that drove researchers to examine the conditions of production of online journalism, which may explain the gap between new technologies and online journalism. In their review of the relevant literature, Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) have identified five different research themes within studies of production. These include the historical and broader context within which online journalism operates; the adoption and impact of innovations; the changing newsroom practices; professional and occupational issues in the production of online journalism; and the role of users as content producers.

Studies conducted here have contributed greatly to our understanding, showing the continuities but also transformations occurring in the production of journalism, partly driven by market and economic forces: for example, the competitiveness of the journalistic market has been an important driver of its online expansion (Allan, 2006; Boczkowski, 2004), while economic factors are certainly behind the movement toward convergence (Quinn, 2004). But shifts in production are also driven by resistance or readiness to the adoption of innovative practices in the newsroom (e.g. Domingo, 2008; Paulussen and Ugille, 2008; Thurman, 2008). Partly, such resistance may be understood as new technologies and innovation more broadly set different requirements to journalists, and impact their work in equivocal ways. For example, both Deuze (2004) in the Netherlands and Klinenberg (2005) in the USA have showed how multiskilling and the requirement to do more tasks than before have had a negative impact on journalists, while Quandt (2008) in Germany found that increasing time pressure has made journalism dependent on news agencies as well as on repetition of the same material. Given these changes, it is small wonder that the professional and occupational identity of journalists has also changed. Such changes mostly concern the role and function of journalism that can no longer be thought of as gatekeeping (Bruns, 2003); Deuze and Paulussen (2002) found that journalists have begun to prioritize elements such as speed and interactivity. There is little doubt that one of the major factors of change in journalism, is that new technologies have enabled users or the traditional readers of journalism to actively participate in the creation of contents. The participation of users led to claims that journalism has been radically altered – as Gillmor (2004) put it, it can no longer be thought of as a lecture, as it has become a conversation. But the rise of user-generated content is not universally seen as a positive development. It creates jurisdictional issues for journalism, as it impinges on its domain, creating debates such as the bloggers versus journalists debate (see Rosen, 2005; Rosen, 2011). Nevertheless, user content is here to stay and many journalists accept that their work has now changed to a more collaborative one that is the result of an interaction with users.

Notwithstanding the contributions of this research, Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) rightly point out significant gaps and possible future research directions. They call for more comparative research both across the field of cultural production and across different countries; for more historically informed studies; for ethnographic works on content creation; and for the creation of new, more radical concepts for apprehending online journalism. They hold that the traditional distinction between production and consumption of journalism needs to be reexamined, given the rise of user participation, and also because, we could add, professional journalists are themselves ardent consumers of journalism. However, the distinction is still valid, at least insofar as we can recognize news consumption as a distinct process in journalism even if it does not always correspond with a particular group of people. The next section discusses this strand of research.

### Online news consumption research

There is little doubt that news consumption is on the rise, as more and more people become active new media users, and as more and more news media migrate online across the world. On the other hand, and as with most research in online journalism, research into online news consumption is very much driven by concerns relating to traditional journalism and traditional news media. Thus, one of the first questions to be asked concerns the extent to which online news consumption replaces the consumption of traditional media (see Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2010). A related body of research deals with the ways in which online consumption patterns differ from traditional news media consumption. Another issue identified by Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2010) concerns the extent to which online news consumption leads to audience fragmentation or conversely to homogenization. Underlying research into online news consumption is the normative notion that news and, more broadly, information is a necessary condition for political participation.

Specifically, as Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2010) contend, one of the main questions regarding online news consumption has been the extent to which it complements or displaces traditional news consumption. Research so far has failed to come up with conclusive and robust findings, but overall it seems that newspaper reading is, in general, on the decline. Thus, while Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham (2007) report that news readers consume the news in multiple media without necessarily distinguishing between them, large surveys, such as the one conducted by The Pew Research Center for People and the Press (2010) shows a steady decline of consumption of print news in the last 20 years. When people were asked where they got their news “yesterday,” only 31% said “from a newspaper” as opposed to 56% in 1991. In contrast, 34% said they got their news online, and when mobile media, e-mail, and social media were added, the percentage went up to 44% (Pew, 2010). However, the Pew research also showed that about two-thirds of all news consumers in the USA use traditional news sources, concluding that people have integrated the new media into their news consumption patterns, increasing the overall time spend on the news. In addition, online news consumption is mediated by demographic factors, especially those of socio-economic status, education, and age. The younger, better educated, and more affluent users are more likely to use the web as a news source (Nguyen and Western, 2007).

If we consider news consumption to vary not only in terms of the platform or medium used, but also in terms of the actual pattern of consumption, we can see some important differences between traditional and online news consumption. Firstly, the time spent on online news averages 13 minutes, compared with 10 minutes spent reading a newspaper, 15 minutes listening to the radio, and 32 minutes watching TV. But the most important change in news consumption concerns the ways in which this takes place. Most online news consumers only graze the news, checking headlines from time to time rather than committing a certain time of day to getting the news. Moreover, the percentage of those getting their news at work has increased significantly, as more and more of us keep track of news sites from work (Pew, 2010). These patterns show an increasing fit between the ways in which online news is structured and presented and news consumption habits.

Such shifts contribute to debates concerning the extent to which the proliferation of news sources has led to an overall fragmentation of audiences, who no longer all tune in to watch the same news broadcast or read more or less the same newspapers. Thus, the rise of the “Daily Me” kind of news customization contributes to this fragmentation whose detrimental effects are described as balkanization (Sunstein, 2001). As we have seen above, news consumers are stratified in terms of socio-economic and other demographic criteria, and this is another cause of fragmentation. On the other hand, research has also found that this fragmentation may not be important as online news is characterized by less and less diversity and more and more homogenization either due to political economic factors (Fenton, 2010) or due to agenda-setting effects across the media (Coleman and McCombs, 2007). Thus, although audiences and consumers may well be divided across several categories and classes, they still consume the same news, as this is increasingly the same across both online and offline media.

Underlying this research is the understanding or normative assumption that news consumption is linked to political or civic participation. But again, research has failed to come up with conclusive evidence supporting this. Thus, while studies have shown that some young people may profit from the interactive presentation of online news (Tedesco, 2004, cited in Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2010), other studies have used user-generated content, especially in blogs, as a proxy for increased participation. However, most blogs do not feature political content, and those that do tend to reproduce and comment upon journalistic contents (Papacharissi, 2007; Haas, 2005). Other theorists, such as Bimber (2001), argue that if there is a correlation between online news consumption and political participation, this is due to the predisposition of news consumers to be interested in politics and not the other way round. Thus, they looked for news because they were already interested in politics and it is not news consumption that caused or triggered their political participation.

This body of work has provided important insights into the ways in which people engage with the news in online contexts, but, as Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2010) point out, there is still work to be done. They therefore propose an integrative research agenda that will combine theory building, innovative research strategies, and methods, and which will radically overhaul existing assumptions underlying research into news consumption. At the same time, we could add that the relationship between politics and online news and journalism needs to be clarified from both ends: both in terms of what

politics, and specifically democratic politics, requires from journalism and citizens, and in terms of the varied ways in which citizens engage with online journalism.

### Research and theory

The plethora of research projects and findings in online journalism shows that important empirical work has been undertaken in this area. On the other hand, it may hide the dearth of theoretical work, which can help make sense of and contextualize these findings. In other words, we should try to apprehend theoretically the inconclusive and often conflicting evidence, the variety of viewpoints and approaches, the dichotomies and controversies found in the research of online journalism. Some of the studies cited above have employed a theoretical perspective, and this is reflected in their research questions and methods. Although there is no agreement yet as to which theoretical approach is more appropriate for the study of online journalism, most of these approaches can fit in one of the following theoretical strands: the sociology of journalism; grounded theory; and theories of technology and society.

#### *Sociology of journalism*

The sociology of journalism, which includes the sociology of news production, has contributed greatly to our understanding of the dynamics in journalism. Broadly speaking, the sociology of journalism looks at the ways in which journalism is created as a product of distinct historical, social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances (e.g. Chalaby, 1998). The sociology of news production looks at journalistic work more closely, and seeks to unpack the practices, values, organizational routines, ideas, and concepts by which journalism constructs the world (see Schudson, 2003). Clearly, there is much scope for this kind of theoretical work in online journalism. Most studies in Patterson and Domingo (2008) belong to this theoretical paradigm. For instance, Domingo examines the construction of online journalism as a set of practices, while others, such as Cawley (2008) and Quandt (2008) examine the practices, organizational routines, and cultures that feed into and construct online journalism. Steensen (2009) examined a particular kind of online journalism, that of feature writers, and concluded that the new routines and practices lead to a new kind of journalism professional, more attuned to the audience and less to news sources. More broadly, findings here indicate that online journalism has begun to develop its own routines, norms, and practices, which then shape the overall outcome, that is, online news; such practices include immediacy, interactivity, and multimodality. In this theoretical strand we can classify work on convergence (see among others, Singer, 2009; Chapter 2), which examines the ways in which media and their journalisms are meeting and creating an altogether new kind of convergent journalism, with its own characteristics and requirements.

#### *Grounded theory*

A second strand can be considered as grounded theory, even if this term is not explicitly used. Grounded theory is understood as building theory from the bottom up, through observing, noting, categorizing, and analyzing data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Although grounded theory has a very specific approach to data and analysis, and although it is

rarely mentioned explicitly in online journalism research – the exception here is Steensen’s (2009) work on innovation – it is a useful way of describing and understanding a strand of theory that does not begin with any assumptions, but which collects and analyzes data, seeking to understand inductively online journalism. Typologies and models of online journalism may be classified here, as they follow an inductive approach, beginning with the common characteristics of some forms of online journalism and coming up with broader inferences from there. Thus, Jo Bardoel’s (1996) and Mark Deuze’s (2003) contributions on the various models of online journalism may be understood as grounded theory, as well as Robinson’s account in this volume on experiential journalism (Chapter 4), and Siapera’s chapter on forms of journalism (Chapter 9). This work, operating at various levels of abstraction, describes the different parameters that define online journalism, its contents, and the different ways in which it relates to its publics. A parallel body of work seeks to identify more broadly how new media has changed the relationship between online journalism and society – for instance, work such as Hermida’s (2010; Chapter 17) describes the way in which the new media, and especially the ubiquity of social media, have made journalism so pervasive that it can only be understood as ambient, surrounding us all, all the time. Of note here is the conceptual agreement between Robinson and Hermida on the experiential dimensions of online journalism.

### *Theories of technology*

A third strand of theoretical work on online journalism focuses on new technologies and the relationship between technology, society, and journalism. The main idea here is that since online journalism depends on technology, theoretical accounts should explore the relationship between technology and society as a means of understanding the development of online journalism. However, theories of technology are multiple, each positing a different relationship between technology, society, and journalism. The best known approach is the diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 1995), which looks at the processes through which innovations are adopted by social groups. Combined with journalism, this approach understands online journalism in terms of a gradual adoption of new technologies, on the basis of factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, simplicity, triability, and observation (see Rogers, 1995). For example, Jane Singer (2004) has examined newsroom convergence as a case of diffusion of innovation, showing that its adoption depends on the extent to which it offers relative advantages, is compatible with existing technologies and practices, and so on.

Diffusion of innovation has, to some extent, explained the different rates of adoption of innovations in journalism, but followed to its logical conclusion, this perspective implies that eventually all journalists will adopt new technologies and that all journalism will become new media or online journalism. It moreover sees the process as driven by technologies themselves, thereby overlooking the dynamic interaction between different factors. This is where actor-network theory comes into play: it holds that technology is but one actor in a complex network, which includes not only journalists, but also new media engineers, programmers, designers, media organizations, users and the different ideas, cultures, and concepts they carry with them, and so on. These actors are all engaged in the production of online journalism, each with a varied contribution but which inevitably influences the whole ensemble. From the actor-network theory

perspective we cannot expect technology to have consequences or effects, rather, it constitutes one of the many actants in the network. Work here has examined how different actors in online journalism can be conceptualized (Turner, 2005), but perhaps, as Plesner (2009) has argued, the actor-network theory's contribution to understanding journalism lies in the unpacking of associations, in de-normalizing what has become normal practice. Bradshaw's chapter in this volume (Chapter 14) shows the role played by different actors in the network created around HelpMeInvestigate in steering the project in different directions. Some of the problems associated with actor-network theory include its lack of explanatory potential and the lack of attention paid to matters of power, as it more or less assumes that human and non-human actors are equally involved in the network (see Bloor, 1999).

A third perspective on the relationship between technology and society is the one associated with Wiebe Bijker (Bijker *et al.*, 1987; Bijker, 1997). The social construction of technology perspective holds that technology is itself the outcome of a set of complex factors, including social, cultural, political, and economic parameters, whose interaction shapes technology and its adoption. This perspective views it as firmly embedded in society, and shaped by the interests and views of various social groups. On the other hand, technologies are themselves shaping the future as they influence and shape their social contexts, and as they are differentially appropriated by different social groups – in this respect, the relationship between technology and society is one of mutual determination. When it comes to online journalism and its relationship with technology, this approach holds that its adoption, as well as the ways in which it will be put to work, depends on a variety of factors, ranging from broader economic and social factors to narrower organizational and professional ones. For instance, Domingo (2008) has argued that technological development and implementation in online journalism must be seen as the result of a set of decisions made in concrete circumstances and shaped by the wider socio-cultural and economic context. Similarly, Boczkowski (2004) holds that adoption of innovation in online newsrooms is the result of organizational structural factors, work practices, and the representations of such innovations held by users. In the same vein, Paulussen and Ugille (2008) identified organizational and professional–ideological constraints in adopting user-generated content.

Taken together, these three theoretical perspectives have greatly enhanced our understanding of online journalism, its emergence, and development. Yet more work is still necessary to uncover the different dynamics at work both from a theoretical point of view and with an eye to the empirical world out there. Notwithstanding the contributions of these theories, we need to sharpen our theoretical lens if we are to understand the continuous and ongoing development of journalism in concrete settings.

To some extent the situation in online journalism resembles Rumi's parable of the elephant and the blind men: one touched the elephant's trunk and said it is like a tree branch, the other touched its leg and found it was like a pillar, yet another touched its tail and thought it was like a rope. In a similar manner online journalism is approached in a somewhat fragmented manner and the key is to understand that we can at best have a partial understanding of online journalism. And to complicate things even further, the dynamic nature of online journalism precludes any firm conclusions, as it develops and evolves continuously. In these terms, the current book constitutes an attempt to provide

further, albeit no less partial, insights into the “nature of the beast.” It seeks to contribute to the existing body of theoretical and empirical research, to continue its work, and to enable students and researchers of journalism to think further about some of the issues involved, while inspiring them to take things further.

## **Structure of the Book**

The Handbook is structured into six parts. It begins with theory and ends with analyses of online journalism in concrete settings, reiterating the importance of both theoretical and empirically informed work. Thinking of these two parts as the ends of a continuum, we can position the various parts across this continuum: sections on politics, production, practices, and contents approach online journalism and seek to understand its various and complex constituent components, elements, and processes ranging from the theoretical to the empirical, but mostly combining both.

Thus, Part I on Theory approaches online journalism from an abstract theoretical perspective, drafting the ways in which routines, organizations, and the identity of the field of online journalism have evolved. Chapter 2, by the Infotendencias Group, provides a clear and thorough analysis of the issue of convergence and its implications for journalism. John O’Sullivan’s contribution in Chapter 3 examines the changing values of the profession of online journalism. A new model for online journalism, focusing on the experiential aspects of journalism, is proposed by Sue Robinson in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, Eugenia Siapera and Lia-Paschalia Spyridou examine online journalism through the prism of Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory.

The second part of the Handbook, titled “Politics,” is organized into four chapters, each looking at the shifting relationships between politics and journalism. Chapter 6 by João Correia clarifies conceptually the necessary conditions for the contribution of online journalism to a public sphere that satisfies the requirements of a strong democracy: public use of reason without coercion and equality and reciprocity between the participants in the collective debate. In Chapter 7, Natalie Fenton investigates the relationship between news, new media, and democracy. The purpose of this study is not only to reconsider what news is now or has been in the past, but also what news ought to be and how its potential value to society can be realized. Lee Salter’s task in Chapter 8 is to examine the relationship of radical online journalism and the state. Salter considers the state, the hegemonic order associated with it, and the ways in which radical forms of online journalism challenge it. In Chapter 9, Eugenia Siapera seeks to contribute both to discussions of the different forms of online journalism, as well as to discussions regarding the political role of journalism and shifts therein from an empirically informed point of view.

Part III on Production looks at the conditions of producing online journalism and the continuities and shifts in this domain. Ivar John Erdal, in Chapter 10, outlines a model that aims to supplement or nuance existing models of convergence journalism and enable a more detailed analysis of cross-media production processes. Steve Paulussen in Chapter 11 focuses on the transformation of news work, identifying and describing some of the key trends in the organization of labor in journalism. In Chapter 12, Andreas Veglis discusses the issue of cross-media publishing. This chapter identifies and studies the channels

that can be employed in a cross-media scheme and proposes a customizable model for cross-media publishing. In Chapter 13, Richard van der Wurff looks at the economics and business models in online journalism, focusing on the news industry's search for a viable business model. The author uses the concept of value chain to describe the news industry while considering the peculiar characteristics of news as economic product.

In the fourth part, chapters focus on the practices of online journalism, examining both the creation of new ones, as well as the change in established journalistic practices. In Chapter 14, Paul Bradshaw, with Andy Brightwell, discuss crowdsourcing through an analysis of HelpMeInvestigate, a crowdsourcing project they run in Birmingham. The chapter performs an 'anatomy' of the project, using it to discuss the implementation of crowdsourcing in investigative online journalism. In Chapter 15, David Domingo and Heikki Heikkilä examine media accountability practices in online news media. The chapter presents investigations into how media organizations have launched online practices fostering media accountability in the USA and Finland. In Chapter 16, Andreas Giannakouloupoulos, Iraklis Varlamis, and Stelios Kouloglou provide an analysis of the role of technology in journalism, the extent to which it may foster the active participation of citizens, while also examining some of the basic characteristics of traditional media that have been maintained during their transition to alternative media. The last chapter in this section explores the much debated role of social media. Specifically, Alfred Hermida in Chapter 17 explores how journalists and audiences are navigating social media and considers the implications for journalistic norms and practices. It aims to provide a framework to understand how social media may be impacting the role of the journalist, raising questions about the notion of what is journalism.

Part V focuses on the contents of online journalism. In Chapter 18, Stuart Allan introduces the term citizen witnessing to understand the role of user contents in the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008. In Chapter 19, João Canavilhas offers clear guidelines for web journalism writing. The chapter explores hypertextuality, multimodality, and interactivity, examines the different writing techniques proposed for web journalism, and proposes rules that should guide the use of links in online news. Neil Thurman and Steve Schifferes in Chapter 20 employ an existing framework of the different types of news personalization features and investigate how these features have been adopted by major national news web sites. This is linked to the ongoing debate on the role of interactivity in the development of web-based media.

The last part of the Handbook focuses on the trajectories of online journalism in different contexts. Authors here examine the ways in which online journalism has developed in different economic, cultural, and political spaces, offering a comprehensive history and geography of online journalism. In Chapter 21, Olga Guedes Bailey and Francisco Paulo Jamil Marques examine Brazilian online journalism, through an analysis of some of the most reliable and influential Brazilian journalistic blogs. In Chapter 22, Axel Bruns explores the case of Australian online journalism, tracing its political connections and links to News International. In Chapter 23, Thomas Hanitzsch and Thorsten Quandt give an overview of research on German online journalism, describing the variety of online media and online journalists, the journalists' qualifications, educational backgrounds, and practices, as well as their role perceptions. Farooq Kperogi in Chapter 24 traces the evolution and idiosyncratic features of online journalism in Nigeria; explores its various manifestations; captures the relational and



professional tensions that have erupted between web-only, mostly diasporan, citizen journalists and more traditional homeland journalists; and shows how all this has altered journalistic practice in Nigeria. In Chapter 25, Kostas Saltzis looks at online journalism in the UK from the point of view of news organizations and their quest to adapt to the new environment. The last, but certainly not least, chapter of the Handbook, by Jin Shang and Hao Zhang, looks at the case of China and especially the rise of j-blogging, examining the extent to which it has contributed to the development of the nation's media in general.

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Part I  
Theories



# Media Convergence

Infotendencias Group<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In five years' time, newspapers printed on paper will certainly still exist. In ten years, if we do things right, they'll probably still be there. In fifteen years, I'm not sure that they will go on existing in the way that we know them at present. They will still be there if we fight for them to be there.

This opinion was given on January 20, 2009 by Juan Luis Cebrián, CEO of Prisa, the leading Spanish media group, to a meeting of the editorial staff of its daily *El País*, whose journalists had been on strike a few weeks earlier as a protest against the cuts and redundancies announced by the company. In his address, Cebrián announced measures that would guide the way forward for the newspaper and for the company as a whole. These measures were based on a “new organizational model” aimed at modernizing the newspaper's production structure and putting an end to its system of vertical integration, which, in its own chief executive's words, had become “antiquated, obsolete and sclerotic” (*El País*, January 21, 2009). By early 2011, these plans had culminated in the integration of the newspaper's print and digital editorial staff, with new editorial strategies that brought an increasing degree of coordination between the different platforms. But the changes had also resulted in the loss of many journalists' jobs (in the Prisa group as a whole, cuts affected around 15% of the workforce).

The example of *El País* is naturally no exception. It is just one newspaper among many which, across the world, have begun to take measures in terms of internal reorganization as a way of responding to the challenges posed by a media market with new rules. The media are going through a period of thorough-going change, as the structures and

processes that characterized the journalist's profession in the twentieth century seem to have been superseded by new habits and demands among the newspaper-reading public of the twenty-first century. In view of this changing scenario, a considerable number of the strategies adopted by media businesses can be understood as ways of adapting to one of the key concepts in journalism today: *convergence*.

Plagued both by external circumstances – the adverse financial situation around the world – and by structural difficulties – people turning away from the traditional media – media companies are seeking ways of maintaining their leadership in the news business. In this context, editors are talking of convergence and, more specifically, of integrating their editorial teams, as a solution that will enable them to extend their former hegemony in traditional media toward the Internet.

However, this is not the only tenable position. Not a few journalists have pointed to the risk entailed by these measures, which are supposedly intended to improve the quality and diversity of newspaper contents. According to these critical voices, convergence is a business maneuver to prop up the dominant medium, motivated only by the aim of increasing journalists' productivity and reducing costs. Some data are available that lend credence to these fears: in the USA alone, the financial crisis has already cost the jobs of 13 500 journalists, who were made redundant between 2007 and 2010 (ASNE, 2010).

Whatever the reason why media businesses have embarked on a process of convergence and integration of editorial teams, this tendency is extremely widespread. Moreover, it is not new.

Long before the Internet attained the importance it has today, the first processes of concentration of editorial staff were set in motion. From the late 1980s onward, the development of multinational news corporations in the USA led to increasingly strong links between the media within particular groups. However, at first this coordination was confined to commercial issues, so that the purely journalistic activities of each medium maintained a high level of operative independence. The rapid expansion of the Internet in the mid-1990s brought about a change in this dynamic and acted as a catalyst for initiatives that led to greater coordination between people working in different media, which also affected editorial activities. News businesses came to be organized typically as multimedia, multiplatform conglomerates, not only as far as financial matters were concerned.

This new concept of the newspaper business gave rise to a new idea: the brand is more important than the medium. In 2002, Arthur Sulzberger Jr, editor of *The New York Times*, summed this concept up in the following provocative terms:

I'm not in the newspapers business... Right now, many of our [audience] want it on paper and we will try to serve the market... If they want it beamed directly into their minds, we will create a cerebral cortex edition.

Quinn, 2003: 14

This trend to reinforce common identity across multiple platforms evolved into an innovative strategy: the merger of editorial teams. If a news business was already trying to coordinate its publications during the distribution phase, many editors came to think that it would be a logical corollary to extend coordination to the production process.



One aspect in favor of this was the overwhelming success of the online media. In the face of the decline in the traditional media, online publications were developing at an extraordinary pace. Within news corporations, it became increasingly obvious that an editorial model based on mere replication in the Internet of contents that had previously been written for print newspapers, radio, or television was no longer sufficient. Now, in the twenty-first century, it was essential to develop a production model that would meet the demand for news both in the traditional media and in the dynamic digital media.

Coordination between editorial teams – at the very least – was now seen as vital, on both technological and economic grounds. An integrated editorial team would be able to meet the demands of readers who were increasingly operating on a variety of platforms, and it would have the advantage of being more economical to run. Thus news corporations across the world gradually came to embark on “convergence processes,” which gathered momentum so that by the early years of the new millennium what was a trickle had turned into a roaring torrent.

The first significant international example of the merger of editorial teams was carried out in 2000 by the US group Media General in Tampa (Salaverría and Negredo, 2009: 39–47). In this city in the state of Florida, Media General put together in one building the editorial teams of *Tampa Tribune*, the local web site Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com), and the TV broadcasting company WFLA-TV, which is affiliated to the NBC network. By doing so, they put into practice a model of *three-way* convergence – newspaper, Internet, and television – which is more ambitious than straightforward *two-way* convergence – paper and Internet, or any of the dual variants on radio and television – which were to become the usual model in the years that followed.

At the start of the 2000s, various initiatives intended to integrate editorial teams for various media were launched, although they were generally somewhat tentative and regarded as exceptional. During this period, organizations such as the IFRA<sup>2</sup> began to promote this production model through Newsplex (<http://newsplex.sc.edu>), an experimental laboratory for the formation of multimedia editorial teams, which was inaugurated in November 2002 in the University of South Carolina.

The most ambitious schemes for integrating editorial teams appeared from 2007 onward. At the end of this year, the *Daily Telegraph* launched its new integrated editorial department in London, which was soon to become the model for most other newspapers that wanted to go down a similar path (Salaverría and Negredo, 2009: 48–55). Outside the world of newspapers, in November 2007 the BBC also established a new working dynamic, by virtue of which the television, radio, and Internet editorial departments ceased to be divided by the criterion of medium and were reorganized in accordance with the production flow: one editorial department for urgent last-minute news, another for features or reports of a less urgent nature (Horrocks, 2007). In 2008, the number of integration schemes proliferated, and they were implemented in different forms in a large proportion of the main media groups on a global level: *The New York Times*; the British Guardian Media Group, *Financial Times* and *The Times*; *O Estado de S. Paulo* in Brazil; *Clarín* in Argentina; *El Tiempo* in Colombia; *El Mundo* in Spain; and so on.

All of these companies have recently been the scenario for editorial integration processes of one kind or another. The importance of these brands means that their

internal reorganization processes have enjoyed considerable attention in the academic and professional forums. Nonetheless, these phenomena actually date back a considerable time. In reality, the dynamics of convergence have been perceptible for some decades. To ground this assertion, however, it is necessary to explain what is meant by “editorial convergence” since, as the reader will have noticed, in the way that this term is being used in this chapter, it goes beyond the straightforward notion of “integration of editorial staff.”

In recent years, many authors have risen to the challenge of explaining what media convergence is and what forms it may take. In the first part of the chapter an exhaustive analysis of contributions from different theoretical schools around the concept of convergence is carried out. This overview reveals that interpretations about convergence are somewhat heterogeneous. Afterward, taking the previously described contributions as a starting point, we provide a specific definition of convergence in journalism. Despite the conceptual difficulties inherent to the concept of convergence, we offer a new definition of convergence conceived as a gradual, evolutionary, and multidimensional process. Finally, the forms that media convergence may adopt when it is put into practice are also described.

## Divergence on Convergence

It is enough to visit any current discussion group on journalism or leaf through any publication on the media to become aware of the massive recent propagation of the term “*media convergence*.” This label has established itself as one of the mantras that are continually being invoked by everyone who has something to do with the media, whether they are actually working for a newspaper or their involvement is of a more academic nature. However, it is not entirely clear what it might mean.

If we look at different sources, we can rapidly see that not everyone uses the term to signify the same thing. Most of the people who use the term “convergence” in the professional world do so to refer to the process by which editorial teams are merged together, which is one of the logistical solutions that is currently in vogue among media enterprises as a way of adapting to the challenges of the digital environment and, it must also be said, increasing the productivity of their human and material resources. In the academic world, however, the interpretations proposed concerning convergence are generally much richer and more varied, and perhaps for the same reasons, also more divergent. As a consequence of the prevailing understanding in the professional world, a fair proportion of the academic bibliography identifies “convergence” with “integration of editorial teams.” But as we shall see in the pages that follow, other authors broaden the meaning of this concept, opening their interpretations to different spheres and perspectives.

Before becoming a core concept for understanding the processes of journalism in our time, the notion of convergence had already formed the object of theoretical analyses in areas as diverse as physiology, mathematics and biology (Gordon, 2003; Moreno, 2009). In the early eighteenth century, the clergyman William Derham (1657–1735) referred for the first time to the concepts of “convergence” and “divergence” to describe

the adaptive mechanisms of the eye in different animals, and in the nineteenth century, the concept of convergence was discussed by some scholars working in mathematical theory. Even the theory of evolution itself, formulated by Charles Darwin (1809–1882) in *The Origin of Species*, adopts a perspective in which the manifestations of convergence and divergence can be clearly identified under the phenomena of “anagenesis” and “cladogenesis.”

Nonetheless, all these antecedents are remote and can scarcely be applied to the area of the media. The introduction of the concept of convergence to the media is much more recent. In reality, the academic bibliography on convergence in the media dates back to the late 1970s. Since the end of the 1990s, as a result of the profound changes caused by the innovations in journalism resulting from digital technology, this concept has taken on particular importance.

In its 30-year history, the theory on convergence in journalism has developed considerably. Three broad approaches or schools can be identified as far as the definition of the concept is concerned, which appeared in what seems to be chronological order. These three schools define convergence, respectively, (i) as a product, (ii) as a system, and (iii) as a process.

### Convergence as a product

The earliest definitions of convergence (Negroponte, 1976, 1995; De Sola Pool, 1983: 23; Golding and Murdock, 1996: 79; Fidler, 1997) placed the stress on the generation of new communicative messages through the combination of different linguistic codes. This concept of convergence only designates the process of confluence of different technologies propitiated by digitalization, without contemplating their possible implications for related fields such as business organization or the profile of the journalist. In short, this is a relatively reductive view, which is resonant of a certain technological determinism.

According to this view, which is still influential today, the concepts “convergence” and “multimedia” are to a great extent synonymous. One of the first theorists in this school was Ithiel De Sola Pool (1983: 23); he sees convergence as a process which “is blurring the lines between media,” so that “a single physical means – be it wires, cables or airwaves – may carry services that in the past were provided in separate ways.” Taking this interpretation, other authors have subsequently defined convergence as the process through which information technologies and telecommunications come closer together (Winseck, 1998).

After the rise of the Internet in the 1990s, the concept of convergence broadened to include the web. Authors such as Thompson (1999) describe convergence as the integration of the Internet with other media, particularly television and telephone communication. Along similar lines, Pavlik (1996: 132) defines convergence as the “coming together of all forms of mediated communications in an electronic, digital form, driven by computers.” From this point of view, the concept of convergence implies the disappearance of the traditional frontiers between these sectors and the confluence of media platforms where new contents and new applications will come into being.

### Convergence as a system

Once the concept of convergence had been formulated as the result of a confluence of technologies, some researchers took a second step: they drew attention to the way that this phenomenon affected the whole system. In these authors' view, far from confining our vision to an exclusively technological sphere, to gain an in-depth understanding of the concept of convergence it is necessary to consider not only the purely instrumental aspects, but also other facets of media production and consumption. This perspective offers an all-round view of convergence as a phenomenon in which different spheres are interconnected, exerting a reciprocal influence on each other.

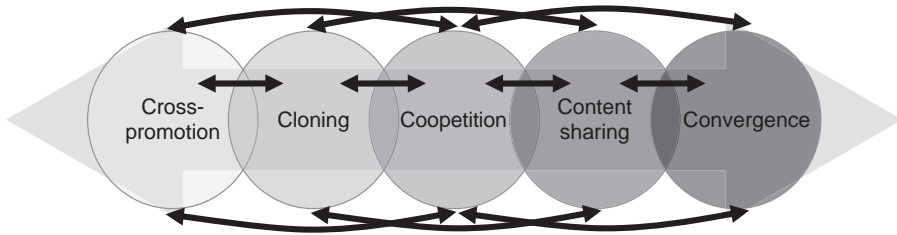
Although there is now a high degree of consensus regarding the view of convergence as a phenomenon that affects the system as a whole, there is little agreement as to the nature of the spheres that are involved. For example, Flynn (2000) writes of three "areas" of convergence: (i) apparatus, (ii) networks, and (iii) contents. Singer (2004), on the other hand, refers to convergence as "some combination of technologies, products, staffs and geography among the previously distinct provinces of print, television and online media," and centers on the changes in the structure of editorial activity, journalists' practices, and contents. Gordon (2003) points to five "types:" (i) convergence of ownership, (ii) tactical convergence, (iii) structural convergence, (iv) convergence of information gathering, and (v) narrative convergence. Jenkins (2006) takes an even wider view, emphasizing five "areas" of convergence: (i) technological, (ii) economic, (iii) social or organic, (iv) cultural, and (v) global. Fagerjord and Storsul (2007), for their part, identify as many as six interpretations of media convergence: (i) convergence of networks, (ii) convergence of terminals, (iii) convergence of services, (iv) market convergence, (v) rhetorical convergence, and (vi) regulatory convergence. Finally, Dennis (2006) considers five areas of convergence in the media, namely: (i) technology, (ii) regulatory issues, (iii) business matters, (iv) contents, and (v) human resources.

We could go on to list more accounts of the way convergence affects the system, but what we have seen already suffices to show the heterogeneous nature of the current theories in this respect. Most concur that convergence is a multidimensional phenomenon. However, they cannot agree about what the constitutive elements are, or where the borders between them lie.

This conceptual disparity is largely conditioned by the points of view adopted by each author. Some, like Singer (2004), Gordon (2003), or Verweij (2009), restrict their interpretations to the field of journalism alone. Others, like Jenkins (2006), situate their analysis in a wider perspective, as would be appropriate in sociology and cultural studies. The theoretical approaches do not stop there, since we should also mention authors who, like Dennis (2006), find their starting point in the world of business and organizational management, or who, as we saw in the preceding section, still analyze the phenomenon from a strictly technological point of view.

### Convergence as a process

The studies on convergence that focus exclusively on the field of journalism can be seen to operate within a perspective that has been acquiring some currency in the last few years. Authors working in this framework assume that convergence affects the entire



**Figure 2.1** The convergence continuum model.

Source: Dailey, Demo, and Spillman, 2005.

system, but also understand it as a longitudinal process made up of different stages which are ultimately intended to culminate in newsroom integration.

The authors who adhere to this view include Zavoina and Reichert (2000), Dailey *et al.* (2005), Lawson-Borders (2003), and Appelgren (2004), among others. These authors take the starting point outlined above, but add some useful contributions.

First, they understand that analyzing convergence solely from a technological point of view, as authors in the first school do, amounts to reductionism. After stating that it is useful to distinguish and take into account the different spheres of convergence (assuming, therefore, the systemic model proposed by the second school), they propose that each of these spheres should be dealt with separately to avoid confusion. This has important methodological consequences for any study on convergence processes.

Second, these authors think of convergence as being a process that occurs in a gradual way. The concept of convergence, rather than being an isolated phenomenon, is thus a *continuum*, a frame of reference in which each of the media markets, companies and/or newspapers reaches a particular level of convergence.

Perhaps the clearest example is the theoretical model proposed by Dailey, Demo and Spillman (2005). These authors understand the phenomena of coordination between media as a gradual process, made up of different phases, the end result of which is convergence.

Starting from these premises, Appelgren (2004) recommends that we should distinguish between convergence itself and its consequences. According to her, we have to differentiate between the *processes* and the *effects* of convergence. Unlike the model devised by Dailey *et al.*, Appelgren's model views convergence not as a final goal, but rather as a framework for action. Within this framework, different degrees can be attained: coexistence, mutual promotion, cooperation, integration, and even, on the highest level, complete fusion. In any case, as Deuze notes (2004), in this kind of approach we should avoid the type of deterministic logic that takes the "highest degree" of convergence as the ideal goal for all such processes.

Other approaches that belong to this third school are those of Klinenberg (2005), Boczkowski and Ferris (2005), and Boczkowski (2004a). These authors emphasize another major methodological aspect: the most relevant objects of research when empirical studies are conducted on convergence should be media businesses or multimedia corporations, and not, say, one particular newspaper, as was the case with some of the earliest research into this issue (e.g. Cottle and Ashton, 1999; Huang *et al.*, 2004; Ketterer *et al.*, 2004).

Cases of media convergence occur with varying degrees of complexity, depending on the different cultures, companies, and countries that are involved. To research into the changing processes of convergence, some authors propose using a matrix based on a large number of descriptors that are designed to measure the level of development of convergence in the institutions that form the object of the study (García Avilés *et al.*, 2009). This matrix encompasses four areas of study: the focus of the project, editorial management, journalists' practices, and the organization of work. In this way, it is feasible to distinguish models of convergence that range from full integration to the coordination of isolated platforms, including many different strategies by which editorial teams might cooperate. Nonetheless, as García Avilés *et al.* (2009) point out, "none of these models does exist in a pure way and none of the analyzed companies completely fulfils the requisites of each model."

As well as analyzing convergence, the most recent studies center on the parallel importance of the phenomena of *divergence* in the media (Appelgren, 2004; Boczkowski, 2004b; García Avilés, 2006). These phenomena of divergence – which particularly affect the contents to be found in each publication or medium – are one of the reasons that prevent, or at least limit, the transposition of the same model of convergence from one media business to another. Convergence therefore takes shape as a dynamic process subject to continual change, in which the traditional mass media are losing out to personal media and social networks, and the processes of acquiring, producing, and distributing contents are subject to constant innovations (García Avilés, 2009).

## Defining Convergence in Journalism: A Proposal

Our review of recent bibliography suggests that the theoretical definitions of convergence have been mainly expressed implicitly. It is certainly surprising that very few authors have expressly formulated a definition of the concept. Researchers trying to obtain definitions from this literature therefore must often be guided by inferences. This is the first theoretical problem one faces when attempting to define the concept of convergence in journalism. However, it is not the only difficulty.

The next problem is that there is enormous disparity between the proposals made by those authors who have tried to come up with an explicit definition of convergence. It is somewhat paradoxical that a concept like convergence should give rise to such divergence. This disparity is partly motivated by the variety of approaches adopted in studies on media convergence: business (Murdock, 2000; Killebrew, 2005; Lawson-Borders, 2006), technological (Lei, 2000; Forgacs, 2001; Idei, 2002), between platforms (Thompson, 1999; Theodoropoulou, 2003), professional (Salaverria and Negro, 2009; Moreno, 2009), cultural (Jenkins, 2006), and even legal or regulatory (Blackman, 1998; Iosifidis, 2002; Dennis, 2006). This multiplicity of approaches turns media convergence into a multifaceted issue that affects spheres as far apart as technology, industry, markets, genres, and audiences. But as well as being multifaceted, it is also essentially a dynamic concept. In fact, many authors maintain that convergence, rather than being a static phenomenon or the final outcome of some kind of transformation, is really a kind of development. Media convergence can be conceived

of as a process that affects both the way in which contents are produced, and the way in which they are consumed (Jenkins, 2006).

In fact, there is no single, unanimously accepted definition of the concept of convergence. Most of the studies on this issue stress the difficulty in reaching a consensus (Erdal, 2007). This conceptual discrepancy is apparent in both academic and professional literature on the subject. However, there are some differences between the two. Academic papers – particularly the most recent ones – tend to adopt definitions of convergence as a phenomenon affecting the system as a whole, taking in different areas of the media, and so their vision is generally broader and encompasses more dimensions. Professional definitions tend to be more reductive, limited to logistical aspects of the media, and in particular to the set of relations and phenomena of integration in these spaces (Bierhoff, 2002).

This conceptual discrepancy does not usually have a linguistic correlate. In contrast to the disparate nature of the definitions proposed, there is a curious consensus when it comes to selecting the term used to describe them: the term “convergence” is used for everything. Awareness of this terminological problem has led some authors to propose alternative words (cooperation, coexistence, coordination, merger, confluence) as a way of specifying particular *types* or *phases* of convergence (Appelgren, 2004; Dailey *et al.*, 2003).

There are five main difficulties that beset anyone trying to formulate a definition of convergence:

- 1 *Polysemy*. The term “convergence” has many meanings. The theoretical divergence explained above serves as incontrovertible evidence for this problem.
- 2 *Polymorphism*. The ways in which the concept of convergence takes on a concrete form in each media market, in each news business, or even in each newspaper are usually very different. Even when convergence is interpreted only as meaning integration of the editorial teams, the manners in which this is achieved are very varied.
- 3 *Complexity*. Despite its apparent simplicity, convergence is a complex phenomenon because of the profound implications it has for the technological, business, and professional areas, and in terms of contents.
- 4 *Instability*. Convergence is a process that takes place over a period of time. It is not enough to study it or form concepts about it through “snapshots.” Instead, it is necessary to take account of the systemic, gradual nature of this phenomenon, and to approach researching it from this perspective through longitudinal studies that show how it has developed over a given period of time.
- 5 *Proximity*. The convergence processes in the media have been accentuated, accelerated, and multiplied by the impact of digital technology. The massive scale of these processes and the lack of a sufficient time perspective in which to analyze them make the task of conceptualization even more challenging.

Despite these difficulties, in our view it is possible to define media convergence. Our proposal is as follows: *convergence in journalism is a multidimensional process that, facilitated by the widespread implementation of digital communication technologies, affects the technological, business, professional, and editorial aspects of the media, fostering the integration of*

*tools, spaces, working methods, and languages that were previously separate, in such a way that journalists can write contents to be distributed via multiple platforms, using the language that is appropriate in each medium.*

## 4 Types of Convergence in the Media

How does this definition work out in practice? To end this chapter, we shall discuss the forms of convergence that can be observed in the media today, in the light of the definition set out above.

### Technological convergence: Multiple platforms

From its very beginnings, the history of journalism has been linked to technological innovations. At the outset, the time interval between each technological discovery and its implementation in the field of journalism was usually considerable. The appearance of the first gazettes and newspapers from the seventeenth century onward occurred a century and a half after Gutenberg invented the press with movable fonts. From this point onward, the delay in putting instrumental advances into practice in the media grew gradually shorter. The telegraph and the telephone were soon adopted by newspapers in the nineteenth century to speed up the reception of news from their correspondents. Later, at the end of this century, the invention of radio transmission paved the way for the advent of radio broadcasting, which emerged just a few decades later. The transition between the experimental phase of electronic television in the late 1920s, and its commercial application in the early 1930s, was extremely brief. From the 1990s onward, we have witnessed a repeat of the same phenomenon, which if anything has gone even faster, in which the media are incorporating digital technologies very quickly.

The current process of technological innovation is being led by telecommunications companies, the producers of computer devices, and the developers of digital applications. These actors are establishing the technological framework to which the media have to adapt.

Within this framework of technological convergence, the media are tending to adopt a multiplatform approach to production and diffusion. In fact, the process of digitalization is obliging news corporations to migrate from a production model that is constrained to the highest degree by the medium of reception – the paper newspaper, the radio transistor, the television set – to another model that is relatively independent of this factor. In journalism today, unlike what happened in the past, the same piece of news is often consumed through multiple channels and media, often simultaneously.

In parallel to this, devices that give people access to news are evolving rapidly. Such equipment is becoming more and more likely to be portable and interactive, and have multimedia options. This technological convergence means that almost any digital device with a screen – smartphones, electronic diaries, tablets, online video-game consoles – serves to reproduce almost any kind of material.

These new technological possibilities are automatically converted into a demand for services that the media is obliged to meet. To respond to this challenge, the production processes and internal organization of these news corporations have to be adapted. So



the development of production methods is being stimulated, following through on the process of digitalization of print and audiovisual media that has been underway since the 1980s. New content management systems (CMS) are thus being devised, which take the industry from production in a single medium to a situation in which polyvalent multimedia systems are the norm, making it possible to create and publish material in different formats. At the same time, the working environments are changing: editorial teams that were previously separate are being merged together, and are no longer organized according to the medium in which their work is to be published, but rather in accordance with the type of contents they are supposed to produce.

In short, the move from “analog journalism” to “digital journalism” sparks a mutation in all the print, radio, television, and online media, and in their various production processes. This change not only affects each of the media separately, but also leads to the creation of new editorial and commercial links between them. This phenomenon may be termed “*cross-media*” or “multiplatform” journalism.

### Business convergence: Concentration

The process of technological convergence has triggered various secondary effects in the heart of news organizations. These businesses have to reconfigure their production structures and processes to respond to the challenges of a communications market governed by a new set of rules. Their response is materialized through two development strategies: one which is centrifugal, the other centripetal.

The centrifugal strategy consists of media diversification. Since the early 1990s, many news corporations have undergone simultaneous processes of horizontal and vertical development. On the horizontal plane, growth has consisted of multiplying their presence in different media and on different platforms, either by launching new projects, or by acquiring pre-existing publications. In other words, businesses that formerly owned only one newspaper or television channel have turned into multiplatform operations with interests in print journalism, audiovisual media, and the Internet, thanks to their investment policy. At the same time, vertical development has taken place in the form of the purchase of companies and businesses that are present throughout the value chain of entertainment and news products. Today it is far from unusual for news businesses to have shares in news agencies, audiovisual production, and distribution companies, digital service providers, media firms, media agencies, publishers, and so on, in addition to carrying out their traditional functions.

Centripetal strategies in news businesses can be defined by using a term that is common in the business sector: concentration. In this case, the novelty is that processes of convergence result not only in the merger of news companies on a business level, but also in the concentration of production processes.

In fact, convergence on the business level leads to new forms of logistical organization designed to increase productivity. The media reorganize their editorial teams in order to foment more flexible and diverse means of news production that can respond to the requirements of the new digital platforms. Within this framework of logistical reorganization, one of the measures that has been most widely adopted has been the integration of editorial staff.

### Professional convergence: Polyvalence

Convergence also modifies the profile of those who exercise the profession of journalist. This mutation is, to a certain extent, a logical consequence of the development of technologies and working environments. Journalists are immersed in a process of adaptation to a changing technological and logistical habitat, which requires new professional skills and updated means of organization.

These changes have one common denominator: increasing polyvalence. Journalists who are used to carrying out a single task – writing, photography, design, research – for a single publication are becoming a relic of the past. Current news businesses are looking for journalists who are capable of taking on different types of work within the editorial department, and who are versatile enough to work in different media either at different times or at the same time.

This growing trend toward polyvalence is often used to illustrate the degradation from which the profession of journalist has suffered in recent years. Many journalists maintain that they are compelled to produce more and more news, more quickly, in the course of longer working days, in exchange for lower salaries or other forms of payment. Many companies have opted to employ “multitasking journalists.” Whatever the truth of this, polyvalence is a double-edged sword, because there is a risk that managers will turn this trend into an “excuse” to cut costs, “do more with less,” and ultimately reduce the quality of the end product.

Whether this is due to the momentum of technology, or the need for companies to increase productivity, it is a fact that journalists are increasingly involved in a process of polyvalence. This has three possible variants: (i) functional polyvalence, (ii) thematic polyvalence, and (iii) media polyvalence.

*Functional polyvalence* could be regarded as a synonym of “multitasking” itself. It refers to the multiplication of practical tasks carried out by journalists inside and outside the editorial department. In the not-so-distant past, these were separate disciplines. For example, in the area of television, only 20 years ago, conventional news was generally covered by no fewer than four people: a driver, a camera operator, a sound technician, and, of course, a news writer. Today, it is usual to cover the same type of news with just a cameraman and a journalist. In fact, on many occasions all the different tasks are starting to be done by just one person: the newswriter. In the newsroom a similar phenomenon can be found, not only in print media but also in television and radio and, of course, in the online media. In the latter, many journalists already combine the tasks of writing, researching, designing, and editing news in any format, be it text, photographs, sound, or video.

The second variant is *thematic polyvalence*. This is the opposite of specialized journalism, and means that the journalist has to write about any topic, depending on the needs of the day. This kind of polyvalence, like the functional variant, has been common practice in small companies for a long time, particularly on local television and radio stations, and in the case of correspondents. Where the editorial team is very small, the journalist has no choice but to cover a broad range of topics and develop all-round reporting skills.

The third and final variant is that of *polyvalence of media*. It designates a form of multiple employment that consists of working as a journalist for several media at the same

time. It is understood that these belong to the same company. When a journalist performs the same kind of activities for different businesses, his or her role would be the modern version of the classic *freelancer*.

Within the framework of the ongoing editorial integration processes, firms usually want their journalists to be able to adapt to the different media. The most widespread formula is that of implanting multiplatform polyvalence in all the media belonging to the same brand name. In such cases, journalists who used to publish in one format now work on all the different platforms operated by their employer.

In the professional (and business) dimension of convergence, another key term is often heard: *compensation*. Gracie Lawson-Borders defines this as:

A growing concern for journalists, particularly in print, as the organization's demands for more skills and knowledge increase. Media managers must consider how to recognize and reward the additional skills and expertise required of their staff as they evolve. In a digital environment with multimedia delivery of content, journalists and other workers may specialize in one medium, not having an understanding of the multimedia environment is at a premium. Although some media organizations include multimedia initiatives in performance reviews, most managers have not taken any steps to reward the skills monetarily.

Lawson-Borders, 2003: 16

Above all, convergence is a duty for companies and a challenge for managers, while it also means – or may be seen to mean – an extra workload for a workforce that was not always particularly well paid in the past. Salaverría and García Avilés highlight this point: “Convergence of editorial teams is prone to a number of risks. There is a need to provide journalists with updated training in writing, editing, presenting, recording and publishing skills for multimedia production, as well as a need to recompense them for their work, which has increased as they are increasingly required to provide contents for several different platforms” (Salaverría and García Avilés, 2008: 44).

Other authors, like Huang, are equally conscious of the problems or tensions that could arise alongside the different opportunities afforded by convergence, amid the different professional cultures involved:

Both editors and news professionals do care about quality, but they are not prevalently concerned about the quality of work currently re-purposed for multiple media platforms. Therefore, there is no reason to be concerned that future journalists who are being trained on multiple media platforms and better prepared for convergence will be jacks of all trades but masters of none or will produce worse reporting.

Huang *et al.*, 2004: 94

Resistance to accepting every kind of convergence within the editorial team comes, on the one hand, from general opposition to changes in working patterns, which certainly exists on the part of journalists and their representative bodies; and on the other hand, from a certain awareness among journalists – present also in other sectors connected to intellectual production, such as photographers and artists – that they are missing out on an opportunity to get a better financial deal for their work, while companies have been diversifying the places where their work is published, or the other companies to which

they are prepared to release it, either within the media group or outside it. “Some print reporters find it intimidating and call it cheap labor, since they are not paid extra for the additional duties. But some are going with the flow,” stated Leisner, an Associated Press writer in 2000 (Leisner, 2000). For some time now, the International Federation of Journalists has been expressing some concern in this respect:

Journalists need to work in reasonable conditions which include the presence of fair rules concerning the use of their work. This means that they should still receive payments for what is their intellectual property, and all the more so when the use of new technologies facilitate the repeated exploitation and manipulation of their work in different media.

FAPE, 2011

In Europe, trade unions, associations, and professional bodies representing journalists have made appeals in defense of journalists’ rights over their own intellectual property. In May 2009, the International Federation of Journalists made public the Varna Declaration:

Journalism needs to be reliable and credible and that requires investment in jobs and the work that journalists do and the elimination of precarious social and working conditions. The right of all journalists – permanent staff or freelance – to work in decent conditions, with their authors’ rights and professional status underpinned by protective regulation is a guarantor of quality journalism.

European Federation of Journalists (2009)

Along similar lines, it states that “multimedia convergence requires new models of governance; press council and broadcast media councils and different forms of self-regulation, co-regulation and legally-binding rules. Existing structures are increasingly made obsolete by the realities of the Internet.”

### Convergence of contents: Multimedia

All the modes of convergence described up to this point ultimately affect the area of contents. News corporations are organizations oriented toward the ongoing production of a news product. It is thus inevitable that a change in the technological and logistic elements and in the professional profiles involved will ultimately have consequences on the level of contents. The outcome can be summarized in just one word: *multimedia*.

The contents of a network combine different communicative codes, principally text, image – which may be static or moving – and sound. These elements are later organized at the editor’s discretion in digital documents, giving rise to multimedia products.

The multimodal nature of the cybermedia pushes increasingly toward convergence. News companies feel the need to feed their digital publications with contents presented in text format as well as in audiovisual formats, and to update these constantly. This creates an enormous demand for raw material, which news companies try to meet, partly through coordinating their activities across the different platforms. In the large communications corporations that own printed publications, audiovisual channels, and digital

sites, it is usual for the digital editions to include contents from several of these media at the same time, which gives a heightened effect of confluence as far as the contents are concerned.

Another effect of convergence in contents can be observed in the trend toward coordinated news coverage in different media. In the case of important news events of an organized nature, such as elections, certain parliamentary sessions, major sports events, important cultural occasions, and so on, it is starting to be common for news companies to coordinate the news coverage provided by their respective print, audiovisual, and digital media beforehand. It is no longer a question of planning the coverage in each medium or publication separately, but rather of projecting the potential collaboration of each medium. In this way, news companies aspire to creating a *group effect*, something resembling a virtuous circle that favors all the different branches of the company. On the other hand, the trend toward integration of editorial teams boosts the dynamics of increasing hybridization of contents and formats offered to the public via different platforms.

In any of its forms, convergence is a key factor of today's media industry. However, we are in front of a complex phenomenon, to some extent erratic, which creates much dissent and doesn't lead toward a single and universal model.

This lack of consensus is perceived not only through the observation of professional practices in the newsrooms, but also in the theoretical approaches to the concept that have been made so far. The confusion, then, is evident. There are different definitions of convergence depending on the disciplines, but even within a single discipline, such as journalism, there is also great diversity of interpretations. The definition of media convergence posed in this chapter aims to facilitate the comprehension of the concept, helping to its appropriate use both by professionals and academics in an environment of constant transformation. Therefore, it should be understood only as a step in the study of convergence in journalism, not as a finishing line.

## Notes

- 1 Infotendencias Group is a research team working on online journalism, made up of researchers from various Spanish universities. This chapter presents work from the research projects "Digital convergence on the media" (ref.: SEJ2006-14828-C06) and "Evolution of Spanish cybermedia in the convergence framework" (ref.: CSO2009-13713-C05), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. The editors of this chapter were Ramón Salaverría (Universidad de Navarra), José Alberto García Avilés (Universidad Miguel Hernández), and Pere Masip (Universidad Ramón Llull). The following scholars, listed here in alphabetical order, also took part in the projects: Juan Miguel Aguado, Jaime Alonso, María Ángeles Cabrera, Javier Díaz Noci, David Domingo, Concha Edo, Álvaro García Gómez, Teresa de la Hera, Mar Iglesias, José Larrañaga, Ainara Larrondo, Moisés Limia, Guillermo López García, Xosé López García, Koldo Meso, José Luis Orihuela, María Bella Palomo, Xosé Pereira, Idoia Portilla, Pedro Antonio Rojo, Charo Sádaba, María Sánchez González, Carlos Toural, and Alfonso Vara.
- 2 This acronym comes from INCA-FIEJ Research Association, a world-leading association for newspaper technology founded in 1961. In 2010, IFRA merged into a new organization together with the World Association of Newspapers, called since then WAN-IFRA.

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# Challenging Values: The “Good” Journalist Online

John O’Sullivan

## Introduction

At a conference entitled “Exploding Media” held in Dublin in 2011, the editor of Britain’s *The Observer* newspaper, John Mulholland, brought his audience back some decades to the era of his illustrious predecessor, David Astor, whose leadership and advocacy has been credited with vitally sustaining the African National Congress’s (ANC’s) resistance to South Africa’s egregious apartheid regime. Mulholland’s argument, presented in an atmosphere of febrile celebration of empowering social media and repeated predictions of the death of print newspapers, was that the determined pursuit of the story was the essence of journalism. Video interviews showed senior historical figures from the anti-apartheid movement praising *The Observer* for its uniquely committed journalism, in what Mulholland called the newspaper’s biggest story (Mulholland, 2011). More than one Twittering attendee described the narrative of Astor and his colleagues’ activism as “inspiring.”

Addressing digital media, Mulholland showcased a guardian.co.uk animated, interactive timeline logging key points in the development of the Arab Spring protests in the Middle East (Blight and Pulham, 2011). There was no assertion here of the high ideal of campaigning human rights journalism: rather, the production was offered as a demonstration of the value of interactive media in helping audiences understand complex events. Though enigmatically understated in its presentation, the gap between journalism as practiced in a medium produced via molten lead and that now being effected in the white heat of digital networked media development could not have been more apparent. Mulholland made no reference to a reforming crusade in the current era, nor was he asked to do so, in the brief after-discussion, in which he offered the opinion that it was immaterial whether journalism ceased to be provided on paper.

Defining good journalism is not a simple task, since the adjective inescapably is value-laden and relative. There is, perhaps fittingly, no objective standard, and so we are left with normative interpretations of what journalism should be, typically promulgated by journalism's critics, and with what news producers believe it should be (Hafez, 2002). Academic, professional, and industry discussion is replete with assertions, explicit or implied, of what makes, or would make, good online journalism, most commonly in relation to the porously interconnected dimensions of multimodality, interactivity, and widened participation. Broader techno-society perspectives resonate here, sometimes to the exclusion of any consideration for a role for mainstream journalism. This chapter seeks to examine such claims for improvement of journalism in the context of the social-political reality of embedded values of journalism in evolved democratic societies, as practiced and produced by news workers in a professional environment.

In the 1994 edition of his introduction to mass communication theory, Denis McQuail, wrestling with the concept of the "public interest," admits that, ultimately, it is a "slippery" idea. However, without an assumption of a public role for mass media, there is little point, he says, in discussing social-normative principles (p. 136). McQuail puts forth a set of principles that emerge from issues of controversy and debate in and about the media. These issues include concentration of ownership, news quality, commercialism, and cultural problems, with cultural dependency highlighted as a particular cause for concern, not only for poorer countries but also for Canada and for smaller European countries. The principles thus developed are those of media freedom, media equality (relating to access), diversity, information quality (relating to objectivity), social order and solidarity, and cultural order (McQuail, 1994: 131–153).

It can be argued that these principles have changed little, even at this remove, and even as later editions of the classic text have seemingly dispensed with the candid admission of being on slippery ground. If its worth is strongly contested, both from without (Herman and Chomsky, 2002; Curran and Seaton, 2003), and from within, with the profession lately described as "transgressive," with malice as its "animating impulse" (Malcolm, 2010), most discussion of the quality of online journalism shares the assumption that journalism's normative values have some substance. In particular, in McQuail's terms, and in an era of information chaos in social media, professional journalism should be independent and objective. The following sections in this chapter attempt to identify the intersection of such problematic ideas with the hopes and realities of online news, which, as shall be seen, primarily concerns journalists' truth claims and, therefore, their fundamental claim to legitimacy.

The section on "Online News: Expectation and Practice" focuses on the realization, or lack of it, of changes in journalism that had been expected to occur in response to the emergence of online news. The next section on "Interactivity's False Promise" looks at the role of interactivity, often held forward as a new dimension in journalism thanks to the affordances of the web, and the muted response of mainstream news sites to such opportunities. Also noted is the distinction between interactivity as offered in site features by news organizations, and the more pervasive, distributed interactivity now apparent online through blogs and later forms of social media. The section titled "Journalists' Ambivalence" records the confused and sometimes rather skeptical response of working journalists to the new possibilities, and observes how the Internet and

its associated developments have been seen as bringing new threats to the quality of journalism. "Constructing Objectivity through Transparency" explores the idea of objectivity and the related issue of trust, and draws a link to the necessity, in the now inter-connected world, for journalists to respond with increased transparency. The next section, "Link Journalism: An 'Easy Win,'" situates the practice of linking to news sources in the context of a view of the Internet that seeks to identify achievable gains for democracy. Links, it is argued, represent just such a win for journalism as a public good, potentially offsetting to some extent the growth of PR and other negative trends in the news sphere. The concluding section proposes that link journalism is a type of potential practice that is already reflected in what is considered good journalism, which is reporting in which attribution is clear and accurate. Such transparency is increasingly important to journalism as an antidote to data and press release processing, and to societies generally as global trends militate against coverage of local and regional news.

### Online News: Expectation and Practice

Ever-present in the multifarious dimensions of these discussions is the already-observed, at the wider level, tension between celebratory, often commercially driven accounts predicting transformation (or, in some economic analyses, simple ruin for "old" media), and the recognition of broader forces. In the latter stream, there are strong currents of critical, sometimes vexed debate around the nature of professional journalism, with, typically, a sharp opposition of opinions and practices framed as progressive and democracy-enhancing versus the legacy of compromised "traditional" journalism.

It is risky, if tempting, to frame ideas and observations of online journalism in terms of a dumb professional resistance to the new openness of the Internet. Such an approach tends toward assuming that the application of network technologies in itself can address clear deficiencies in news as a public good, capable of contributing to rational debate in the public sphere. Nevertheless, such has been the nature of a considerable segment of the research and commentary on online news, as if there is a contest in embracing of technologies that is separate to competition for readers and advertisers (Quandt and Singer, 2009). But there are more relevant currents, beyond notions of inevitable progress, around the interplay of traditional journalism and the Internet, and the possible focus for any fundamental adaptation by journalism. At the heart of the debate has been the validity of the journalistic enterprise, critiqued in the context of the inter-relationships between journalism, its culture, values, processes, tools and technologies, its publics, its sources, and the net. "New" media, therefore, re-poses old questions.

The claims for improvement or reform of journalism via the Internet are by this point familiar. The compellingly spiced early *Wired* rhetoric of Jon Katz, decrying newspapers' inability to "get" interactivity (Katz, 1995), has been echoed by those such as Hall (2001, 2008), Pavlik (2001, 2004), and Gillmor (2006), who similarly have heralded leaps of progress in news by dint of the novel affordances of the digital online space. Interactivity, we are told, will shift power to the reader or user, and citizen and participatory journalism will remedy the deficits of aloof traditional journalism and bring news closer to the lived realities of its audiences. Immersive multimedia news, produced by

new generations of multitasking, tech-savvy journalists, will make news more engaging and more meaningful to audiences.

Researched accounts of news as a materialization of professional values and processes, however, have not matched the aspirations of the technicians. In the USA, newspapers' response – and necessarily within that, the response of newspaper journalism, although the distinct domains of publisher and journalist frequently are conflated in the discussion – has not been that of an industry or profession eager to break the earth-bound shackles of traditional news. Rather, they have reacted defensively with hedging and shovelware (Boczkowski, 2004) in an attempt, in Brian Winston's terms (1998), to suppress or at least neutralize the radical potential or potentials that confront them. This gap between aspirational description and the observable materialization of news online has been identified at a relatively early stage by empirical research (Gunter, 2003).

A more problematic picture also emerges in examination of the reporting by British national online news outlets (Redden and Witschge, 2010). In spite of its focus on leading news sites, instead of new possibilities in user empowerment, greater depth, and increased diversity, this study has found that the drive for immediacy and the constant updating of the online offering effectively has produced less news, not more, and more news that takes the same angle and even, because of institutional connections, identical outputs. This work, based on actual content rather than pre-selected illustrative narratives concerning high-profile news stories from conspicuous global news actors, as has often been the case in discussions asserting the transformation of news (Hall, 2008; Allan, 2005; Allan and Thorsen, 2009), challenges the more sweeping claims of the advocates of digital networked journalism. At a more specific point in the discussion concerning journalism processes, it is more in tune with grounded observations of the pragmatic, selective, and limited adoption by journalists of online research techniques (Machill and Beiler, 2009).

The view of relative stasis in the form of online news, with links to professional imperatives, is further reinforced by a 2008 content analysis study of prominent online outlets in the USA, UK, Russia, France, and Germany, which concluded that, even if modest levels of experimentation are apparent, news on the web is “basically good old news journalism, which is similar to what we know from ‘offline’ newspapers,” and that such news shares the national boundaries prevalent in the older medium (Quandt, 2010).

A similar pattern has been observed across Europe in a large-scale and broad-focused content analysis of newspapers and their web sites, which found wide variations in the characteristics of online news, but, overall, strong adherence to the news offerings in print, even if web editions were not always simply defined by shovelware (van der Wurff and Lauf, 2005; van der Wurff *et al.*, 2008). The major feature identified as differentiating online news from its print parent was frequency of updating, and certainly one can observe this pattern taking ever-greater hold in online news editions of late. Nevertheless, rolling news is a long-established attribute of broadcast news and problems associated with the accelerated news cycle have been discussed in the context of the net but also in relation to television news (McNair, 2006). Further, this author's examination of Irish national news titles found that, far from setting out to exploit the potentialities unproblematically heralded by the Internet, they settled, after some initial experimentation, on a model in which the online edition overwhelmingly followed in the

wake of the analog master, providing little more than a skeletonized version of print news primarily dictated by commercial aspects of web publishing. While still the core material of such sites, news diminished in importance as more directly commercial publishing agendas asserted themselves online, and this compression was also reflected in continued adherence to official and business sources online. It was apparent that news, beyond the occasional special production, received little additional human intervention, but instead primarily was automatically re-mediated via content management systems (O'Sullivan, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2011).

It is, of course, easy to dismiss this outcome as simply news by algorithm, but this is to ignore the deeper processes in the re-mediation of print news online, in which social and economic factors, including journalistic values and practices, still have powerful valence. However much they are championed by the multitasking, multiplatform gurus telling journalists to "get with it," the token presence of a YouTube video or an AudiBoo from a fledgling multimedia department or isolated digital media enthusiasts does not represent a transformation of the underlying nature of journalism.

### Interactivity's False Promise

Interactivity, contrary to its apparent promise, similarly has been found to be signally underdeveloped in online news (Quandt, 2010; Massey and Levy, 1999; Imfeld and Scott, 2005; Zeng and Li, 2006; Greer and Mensing, 2006; Dimitrova and Neznanski, 2006). In spite of its status as a metaphor for online news, it specifically has been seen to fail to alter the power relations between news producers and their audiences (Fortunati *et al.*, 2010). Yes/no news polls and unanswered reader comments, often overwhelming in number, do not constitute true interactivity. At a more fundamental level, the commonly unspoken assumption of the desire of the audience to participate is undermined by empirical evidence showing that most users prefer to adopt a passive role (Bergström, 2008).

Many studies of interactivity deal with a multifaceted concept, sometimes formulating indices based on accumulations of occurrences of specific interactive features, such as comment boxes, forums and journalists' contact details, perhaps including hyperlinks in this measure. However, most probably because of their (literally) essential role in the creation of the web (Berners-Lee, 1999) and their significance in constructing media (Elmer, 2006; Gao and Vaughan, 2005), or simply because of their relative ubiquity, the use of hyperlinks as a specific interactive device in online news, and, equally, as a defining feature of its format, garners much separate attention. Even as web news outlets cannot function without the indexing and navigational properties of the humble HREF tag, a by-now considerable body of empirical analyses of mainstream online news sites points to the relative absence of links to external texts and sources, and to their conservative use (van der Wurff *et al.*, 2008; Oblak, 2005; Chang, Himelboim and Dong, 2009).

In spite of the potential for freeing up the news discourse and expanding their narratives at the click of a link, newspapers are signally cautious. Against the seemingly trivial editorial or technical demands of this simple technology, the hyperlink encapsulates fundamental questions around the professional role of the journalist, but the response of

mainstream media has been to cling fast to an unchanged gatekeeping function. Thus is established, for some, a categorical divide between so-called old and new journalism. Conventional journalism is seen as a closed, fossilizing, and now fearful system, and is contrasted in terms of deficit with the fresh, open ethos of net-native sites and the blogosphere (Rosenberg, 1999; Rosenberg, 2010), although it must be noted that others are moved to complain that too many links subject the reader to information overload and circular reading (Luzer, 2008).

Distributed interactivity, over which news producers have less gatekeeping control, evident in blogging and newer forms of social media, and necessarily intermeshed with user-generated content and citizen journalism, has been interpreted as further interrogating journalism's norms and practices (Allan, 2006; Matheson, 2004; Johnson and Kaye, 2004; Bradshaw, 2008). However, others (Haas, 2005; Messner and Distaso, 2008; Meraz, 2009) have firmly underlined the dependence on traditional journalism of much of this apparently new news landscape. As Meraz puts it, the elite hold of traditional media remains cemented in place by "the sociopolitical boundaries of the press pass or knowledge of journalism norms and traditions." This reality is explicitly recognized by the emergence of new forms of online media, not least Google News or Yahoo! News, whose express mission is to repurpose the outputs of other media, but also in the "curation" culture that specialized new entrants such as Storify, along with more generic social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, seek to exploit. Rather than everyone being a journalist by blogging, everyone, or anyone who chooses by dint of the liking, in Facebook terms, or clicking and dragging of text, video, and sound, or tagging with a label to be found in searches by others, is a meta-journalist, a curator, or guide of what is worthwhile in news. In the fray, journalists, it is asserted, are losing their gatekeeping function: instead, unable to stem the flow, they are to become "gatewatchers" who similarly offer a guiding path through the confusion (Bruns, 2005).

## Journalists' Ambivalence

Alongside such higher-level discussions, the Internet has become invaluable to journalists, providing not only stories – the role of social media in the aforementioned Arab Spring being just the latest example – but also a rich array of tools, and they are ostensibly comfortable with its presence, with little impulse to explicitly decry its potential negatives. However, newspaper journalists also are seen to be hesitant and to opt for safer positions in respect of many questions put to them, suggesting a prevailing "principle of continuity" as it seeks to legitimize its practices. Contrary to frequent characterizations, journalists are not stubbornly defensive technophobes – they have been dealing with digital printing technologies since the 1980s and before (Smith, 1980). They welcome the net when it suits their professional needs, but are much more cautious when it raises the possibility of radical change in news work (O'Sullivan and Heinonen, 2008) or even the opportunity to bolster journalism's aims through the use of new media (Fortunati *et al.*, 2009). Such passive resistance is expressed in their continued primary identification with print, and in a striking lack of detailed knowledge of their organizations' new media initiatives (Sarrica *et al.*, 2010).

Former BBC documentary maker Peter Lee-Wright shows little prevarication on the subject of journalism values and new media, pointing to the fears of journalists that power is shifting to technical staff, and of the Orwellian "Get web-savvy or we die" newspeak associated with the public service broadcaster's powerful Future Media and Technology (FM&T) cross-divisional body. He highlights the problems facing editors confronted with audience power, as "most-read" web listings (a collective interactivity feature favored by many news sites) show BBC News web site users to be more interested in a macabre tale of Canadian Mounties finding five severed feet than they are in election news from Zimbabwe. Thus, he endorses critiques of academic research as obsessed with new media, even as journalists are having a "collective nervous breakdown" (Fox, cited in Lee-Wright, 2010: 79), and he argues that even the most enthusiastic fans of new media recognize the dangers of news being delivered by mechanisms of associative choice rather than directed content.

A related thread of the same study, in which British journalists were surveyed for their views on sources, found an experienced reality in professional media work that did not match claims for user-generated content, or UGC (Phillips, 2010). In this account, journalists, under increased deadline pressure in an accelerated news cycle, refuse to pay attention to UGC because, overwhelmed with material aimed at them, they are forced to rely even more heavily on filtration systems of known hierarchies and established news values. Thus, rather than providing for greater source diversity, the net intensifies the logic of existing restrictions on diversity. At the same time, cannibalization of copy from other online media produces a tendency toward homogenization.

David Domingo interprets the difficulties encountered in the implementation of interactivity in terms of Brian Winston's suppression of radical potential, which in this context he characterizes as relentless in ensuring that the "inertia" of journalistic culture prevailed (Domingo, 2008). Journalists are nominally receptive to new dimensions of news but, in practice, audience participation is seen as "a problem to manage" rather than a benefit to the news product. Addressing the prevalence of showcase productions much favored in narratives of change in the nature of online news, Domingo offers a telling insight. Such events provide a space for utopian experiments, with user-involved, media-rich, highly hyperlinked, and in-depth content. These specials, he says, represent the institutionalization of myths, but ones that daily journalism routines cannot accommodate. In short, one could say, they are little more than stunts.

If news cannot simplistically be reduced to a conversation (Gillmor, 2006), journalists nevertheless must now work within the new ecology characterized by "liquid" (Deuze, 2009) or "ambient" (Hermida, 2010) journalism. The outlook for the support of quality journalism is not encouraging, even beyond consideration of demographic change in news consumption habits. The Internet's unbundling of news from more commercial content that previously has provided it with a subsidy is seen as a threat to democratic discourse, undermining the press's role in maintaining an informed citizenry (Starr, 2009). Instead, one can observe the rise of the fabled "Daily Me" (Sunstein, 2001), not simply by virtue of enabling technologies, but through market forces, and so it is not surprising to observe the relative success of online business publications, as providers of information with concrete exchange value, or of celebrity gossip sites. At the same time, it has been observed that, just as the explosion of social media is producing its own transnational armies of

producers of free content, leveraged by corporate interests (Terranova, 2004), so news work itself is being incorporated into the realm of immaterial labor of postmodern economic systems, as network dynamics shift power to publishers and the audience, or the former audience, now variously labeled prosumers or producers who both consume or use content but also produce it (Deuze and Fortunati, 2011). Journalists, it would appear, have been losing the battle to retain control, which goes to the heart of the reason for their professional organization (Evetts, 2003), as their economic and cultural capital wanes (Benson and Neveu, 2005).

The professional journalistic view of such developments is to assert despairingly that they will result in an erosion of standards, in the face of the profit-driven reality of Gawker Media and the like (Fallows, 2011). But concern over standards also is expressed in relation to elite news titles, and even to the much-admired Internet pioneer guardian.co.uk, which has successfully positioned itself both in the view of the international news audience and the academy as an exemplar of good online practice. Historian Christopher Harvie, finding himself at the receiving end of some old-fashioned gatekeeping practices in the web site's highly promoted Comment is Free section, offers a damning, if wholly partisan, analysis of the newspaper's cultural loss as it has abandoned its original northern English regional focus, the better to reinvent itself as a coolly London-centric global entity:

The 1970s generation of *Open University* staff and students is ageing while the kid(ult)s are into twittering, gaming, and fashioning ignorance into the art-form of postmodern irony... And apparently it only sells 6,000 copies in Manchester. Certainly its web site is a deterrent: a couple of news stories and it's straight into footie and "Guardian Soulmates." The quality press, at once hip and desperate, eagerly follows the new generation – almost certainly downmarket ...

Harvie, 2010

Such complaints are not exclusive to the online sphere, however, and the normative values set out by McQuail in 1994 have not abruptly come into question with the advent of the net. Writing before the full impact of twenty-first-century celebrity mania, Bob Franklin traces in dispiriting detail the shift from the news of public information and discussion to entertainment and sensationalism, which he sees as a product of heightened commercial competition, government policy, essentially in the form of permitting and encouraging exposure to market dynamics, new technologies attended by union de-recognition and casualization, and changes in journalism itself, with an explosion in the numbers of freelance journalists and in PR practitioners, and a change for the worse in the willingness of employers adequately to fund training (Franklin, 1997). Similarly, Thussu (2007) traces the emergence of global infotainment, and places it as part of a neo-liberal imperialism, with its values universalized in an emerging global hegemony, while the role of spin and the power of sources in news production is the focus of Paul Manning's critical analysis. Here, source relations are discussed in the context of journalism production routines and news values, with particular reference to Tuchman's interpretation of objectivity not as a property of journalistic accounts, but as a set of practices, or rituals, that journalists can defend as objective, as, while working under pressure, they seek to insulate themselves against professional criticism or legal threats (Manning, 2001).



In his highly publicized text (Davies, 2008), *Guardian* journalist Nick Davies reports the results of a study on news sources (Lewis, Williams and Franklin, 2008) as an indictment of standards in British journalism. With national press journalists forced to produce three times as much copy as they did 20 years ago, 60% of press articles derived either wholly or mainly from pre-packaged sources, that is, either wire agencies or PR material. Journalism's fundamental ills are neither of the digital era nor independent of it. Rather, the discussion of good and bad journalism is intermeshed with change, in which technological change is a part. Davies' book coincides with the "Stand Up for Journalism" campaign by the National Union of Journalists (which also represents PR workers) seeking to redress the cutting of resources for good journalism, saying:

Journalists are reduced to a cross between call-centre workers and data processors. Stuck at their desks re-jigging press releases. Who knows what corruption, lies, and law-breaking is going on in the corridors of power – no-one has the time to look.

National Union of Journalists, 2009

## Constructing Objectivity through Transparency

The happy view of news as a self-correcting, democratic agora of bloggers, tweeters, and amateur curators whose crowd wisdom co-exists in harmony with the contributions of professional gatekeepers or gatewatchers is, of course, a mirage. As we have seen above, news, even as it is seen as freed from the confines of mainstream, professional newsrooms, nevertheless coagulates around established media. For all of the surveys revealing public distrust of journalists, here, it would seem, is evidence that their legitimacy claim remains effective. Through their practices and routines, journalists, in spite of their seeming recalcitrance on the full potentialities of online news, still construct the news, offline and on. Further, the new ambient journalism cannot simply be dismissed as amateur (Keen, 2007) or naively intentioned. Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and the like are just as amenable to public relations and news management (Eyrich, Padman and Sweetser, 2008). In the face of the postmodern social media frenzy, journalists' essentially modernist legitimacy claim remains: in terms of McQuail's quality criterion, they say they tell the truth, and it is on this understanding, however qualified, that we consume news.

Stephen Ward has outlined how notions of a pure, value-free rationality were challenged in the twentieth century by relativist ideas of socially constructed knowledge, the questioning of Enlightenment ideas by members of the Frankfurt School such as Adorno and Horkheimer, and the contributions of postmodernists such as Baudrillard and Lyotard casting doubt on the role of meta-narratives that attempt to make sense of human experience on a grand scale (Ward, 2004). He points to a parallel erosion of the doctrine of objectivity and truth-telling, one that belongs to an invented ethics of journalism in a creative process of evolving values that took place between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. This analysis of the origins of the norm and its later undermining, which runs parallel to Habermas's account of the transformation of the public sphere, leads Ward ultimately to dismiss simple objectivity as a spent force.

Instead, he calls for the application of a “pragmatic objectivity,” a more pliable variant founded not on absolute claims of truth, but which focuses on process and which allows for investigations to arrive at other than a single truth. Here, journalism is seen as imperfect, “an active empiricism full of judgements, selections, values, and decisions under conditions of uncertainty” (Ward, 2004: 314). This is a view of journalism that, without recourse to technology-bound neologism, resonates with the views of multi-source news as uncertain, contingent, and incomplete, and with the open and meshed authority of bloggers (Matheson, 2004), the first wave of non-mainstream media online news producers.

Among the qualities most frequently hailed as flowing from the open blogosphere has been transparency, a concept that does not always sit well in a traditional news culture of closed editorial meetings, secret briefings, source proximity, and the myth of “news sense” as the essential quality of a good reporter. Transparency has become increasingly relevant in recent years, not only in the context of networked communication, but also in the crisis of credibility being suffered by US news media (Plaisance, 2007). Discussion of blogs has ranged from the extent to which their characteristics meet the criteria for the reconstitution of the Habermasian public sphere (Ó Baoill, 2004), to criticisms by professional journalists on the grounds of inaccuracy and absence of verification (Carlson, 2007), and the raising of questions as to who now is a journalist (Blood, 2003; Andrews, 2003). The informal, discursive nature of blogging potentially carries with it a culture of explicit linking to sources, of contingency and uncertainty, and of a process of development of a story, set against the relatively closed narrative of conventional journalism. Such aspirations are expressed in a series of blogger codes, or collections of principles – and clearly they must remain to a large degree unfulfilled in the largely unregulated publishing space that blogs represent (Singer, 2007).

Transparency has become a watchword, with multimediality and interactivity, of online journalism, with celebrated instances of a cyber-newsroom Glasnost letting the audience in to see the workings of the news operation (Robinson, 2009; Smith, 2005). As with online editions’ special productions, however, initiatives such as open editorial meetings or editor’s blogs do not fit easily with working newsroom life. Further, they too may be a case of protesting too much. Karlsson, making a case that chimes with that of Domingo’s, discussed above, argues that ritualized transparency features at the level of the web site often are the subject of anecdotal attention or generalized observation. Instead, he suggests, this quality should be studied at the news content item level, since it is here that objectivity and truth-telling claims repeatedly are made (Karlsson, 2010). His study of the web sites of *The New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and Sweden’s *Dagens Nyheter* found that, while a variety of transparency features exist to varying degrees, they are marginal in nature. The online journalism in these titles takes confidence from more traditional journalism values and routines. Nevertheless, a study based around the views of selected media experts and commentators in the Netherlands found that participants put a “strikingly strong” emphasis on transparency in news as an “overarching norm,” online or offline. In the context of the new, open media system, with attendant potential exposure of professional journalism, transparency emerges as “the major measure to secure the quality of modern-day journalism” (van der Wurff and Schönbach, 2010).

## Link Journalism: An “Easy Win”

In his high-level discussion of technology, liberty, and enslavement, Tony Curzon-Price, editor of *openDemocracy*, discusses the prospects for “freedoms” and “unfreedoms” emerging in techno-society (Curzon-Price, 2010). His essay integrates contemporary threads of the debate concerning individual and collective notions of freedom, with familiar claims for a wired world of libero-genic technologies set in opposition to renewed fears of tyranny. Curzon-Price outlines a number of potential unfreedoms that have strong relevance here. He cites Cass Sunstein’s fear of hyper-individualism, fragmentation, and the loss of “broad tent” institutions such as newspapers and political parties, thus damaging societal cohesion, as separated communities lose the ability to negotiate compromise; he points to familiar Kafka-esque and Orwellian scenarios concerning government and corporate (in particular Google) control of dataphagous networks; and he emphasizes Jonathan Zittrain’s concern that the once open, generative Internet has become “self-closing,” not least through commercialization. Such unfreedoms find expression in media terms in the triumph of the solipsistic news consumer, and in an attempt to tether communication to specific devices as a process of economic enclosure, as seen in mobile communications, games, and, most recently, in the case of Ipad news editions (Bunz, 2010).

Curzon-Price’s consideration of communication freedoms significantly and perhaps pointedly bypasses direct consideration of journalism – journalism seems not only already irredeemable but irrelevant. Instead, in a “call to action,” he urges individual and collective initiatives by an idealized “good netizen” in the arenas of citizen journalism. However initially attractive it may be, such a rallying call, based as it is to a large extent on the rather particular, if not unique, cooperative virtues of Wikipedia, is surprisingly naive. Good professional journalism, or, more specifically, a re-orienting of journalism practices toward values that reflect its role as a public good, is more likely effectively to counter-balance the power of state and corporate gigantism in the midst of information chaos than is citizen journalism alone.

While print and print-rooted journalism is archly dismissed by Curzon-Price in McLuhanite terms as belonging to “the Gutenberg parenthesis,” his notion of “easy wins” serves as a useful device. Evolution toward more credible online journalism is most likely to occur through seemingly smaller and less technically oriented changes that relate to existing priorities, and at the level of the story, rather than through transformations relating to full-blown multimedia and interactivity. Rather than impatiently anticipating meaningful movement in such areas, when, as has been demonstrated, practitioners demonstrate considerable reticence, journalism can instead seek ways in which web technologies and practices enhance those existing characteristics that support its claim to legitimacy.

In an era of market-led interlocking of state and private interests and activities globally (Gray, 2002) and in formerly public functions such as health or education (Coulter, 2011), of the commercialization and trivialization of news, the fragmentation of audiences into islands of consumer interest, the feared erosion of knowledge and thought (Carr, 2008), and of the press release recycling of churnalism (Lewis and Franklin,

2008), all of which bodes ill for the holy grail of reconstitution of the public sphere, it is still possible to discern potential in the new technologies that can help preserve and advance normative values of journalism, that is, that offer new ways of practicing good journalism. Searchable archives already are implemented, fitting well as they do with the database-driven systems of digital content management and with online strategies to leverage existing assets (Tremayne, 2006). Where, before, newspaper articles were located in obscure library clippings collections, it is now a trivial matter, in terms of production effort, to offer them to public view. This facility provides news with a much-strengthened dimension of memory, and potentially adds to the diversity of interpretation of news, since stories from differing sources can now be grouped meaningfully, overcoming the linear constraint of the single-focus content item. However, commercial considerations impinge again here, and archives, easily enclosed as a saleable asset, are prone to being locked behind subscription paywalls not applied to other content.

Linking practice goes beyond the requirement to maintain a church–state separation between editorial and advertising (Friend, 2007a), or the oft-rehearsed exceptional dilemmas of connecting readers to content that is universally regarded as undesirable, such as execution videos or extreme pornography. Rather, it is an expression of the currently opaque defining relationship between sources, journalists, and the audience. Where social media producers routinely link to their media sources – frequently because those sources patently are the sole substance in their items, without which they have little or nothing to offer beyond “curation” – we have seen that mainstream news media online largely continues to ignore the potential of the hyperlink to show, at story level, how the news is constructed and thus to assert its legitimacy. Although journalists’ blogs and tweets may offer some degree of repair in this regard (Robinson, 2006), for the most part, even beyond the secret briefings by powerful political or business actors, sources ultimately are hidden in principal news outputs, while they may be available directly online. Thus, in many newspapers, it is possible to read a news report based on, say, a social or economic report, with an associated press release, when these documents are themselves easily available online, but with no link recognizing this reality. This denial is a curious inversion of the Wikileaks phenomenon, in which secretive sources are exposed, that is held out as a transformative force in journalism (Pilger, 2010).

So, news reporting now routinely shields online sources that are not supposed to be secret and which are of critical relevance in the construction of news. In a world in which links are now ubiquitous, such cloaking cannot be seen as a passive expression of professional inertia but rather shows the news outlet as working contrary to the professional ethic of clear attribution. Hyperlinks connect the journalist–source relationship, the process of newsmaking and the emerging ethos of an effective, routinized transparency in a way that sits more comfortably with journalism’s values and practices than the more commonly expressed expectations that newspaper reporters should repurpose articles as audio packages or interact endlessly with readers. Bill Kovach, one of the most influential thinkers on modern journalism, speaking from within the “legacy” camp rather than as a new media evangelist or academic assailant, argues for transparency as an appropriate response to what he sees as the obsolescence of journalism’s gatekeeping function

in an age in which "the Internet has torn down all the fences." Journalists should instead become referees who, in order to maintain trust, must be transparent:

Tell them what you know and what you don't know. Tell them who your sources are and if you can't name the sources tell them how the sources are in a position to know and what biases, if any, they may have. In other words, provide your information so that people see how it was developed and can make up their own minds what to think.

Kovach, 2005

Kovach's dramatic claim that gatekeeping is at an end is absolutist and surely impracticable. However, his plea for source transparency goes to the center of the question of the role of the journalist in a news ecology with mainstream media at its core but with an ever-burgeoning mass of social media feeding off it. As Brian McNair puts it, the sociology of news sources proposed by Paul Manning, which is tasked with tracing "the sources of order and control" (McNair, 2006: 207) also can be turned toward how, or if, informational meaning can be maintained within the paradigm of chaos. Even as the role of gatekeeper changes, rather than disappears, good journalism remains at the center of making sense of the world.

As matters stand, the news, even as it has come increasingly to depend on press releases and official content, remains largely opaque, with few links to sources. But a news culture of full declaration of sources, based on the explicit, in-text linking to the primary source, where available online, would indeed represent a development of reporting practice that would serve the aim of a better-informed polity, while re-positioning journalism as seeking its validity not from claims to absolute objectivity, but from Ward's pragmatic focusing on the process of newsmaking (Ward, 2004). The adoption of routine linking to declared sources in no way represents a revolutionary up-ending of journalism: clear and accurate attribution already is a cornerstone of reporting and editing (Sundar, 1998; Sundar and Nass, 2001), and the practice of link journalism would represent no more than a low-tech extension of accepted values. As Scott Karp has argued, the link is the online equivalent of the "standard journalistic technique for providing context and support for assertions," which is to quote sources (Karp, 2008). Source transparency, therefore, is nothing new, and so such transparency effected through the device of the hyperlink is not an alien imposition.

In a crowded media environment wherein almost all texts link to others, and where openness and transparency have become more strongly related, via the ethics of blogging and later forms of social media, to trust and credibility (Friend, 2007b; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2010), it eventually may become incongruous for news not to evolve to link to source texts and other media artifices such as videoed parliamentary debates, even if, at present, there appears an almost wilful denial of this potential. This is especially relevant in view of Karlsson's important insight, outlined above, that journalism's truth claims are located at the level of the individual story (Karlsson, 2010). As social media grows, as political and economic actors establish their own online presences, with press releases already widely available online, and with industry and academic experts becoming self-publishers, it is unlikely that news organizations indefinitely will be able to rely for their status on privilege of access to information generated by sources. In this

networked media environment, transparency achieved via widespread adoption of considered hyperlinking would indeed be an easy win, part of the response to the need for informational and journalistic authority.

The emerging practice of data journalism (Cherubini, 2010) serves a related need. Here, wide availability of and access to raw data and information from primary sources is already assumed. Data journalism concerns itself with the presentation, contextualization, and organization of super-abundant information, combined with the gatekeeping function, even if it is more current to refer to gatewatching, refereeing, or curation (Bruns, 2005; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2010), answering, through the production of new levels of meaning in news, concerns of splintering of communication. Data journalism serves readers by making sense of complexity, and here journalists can be said to act as curators, as opposed to originators, and in this sense they are similar to the individual producer-user, or produser, whose original content is elsewhere but who adds to understanding by collecting and organizing. The extension of linking connectivity generally to individual news stories beyond the boundaries of data journalism would require similar, deliberate journalistic attention to online materials, recognizing such texts' news potential, and would free online news from the current model of breaking news and re-purposing of print content systems.

## Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the relationship of the declared potentialities of news on the Internet with the experience of news workers and with the outputs they produce, and has discussed how expectations of any fundamental improvement or reform of journalism via the Internet have for the most part been aspirational. Journalism professional values have intervened in how news online has been implemented, and for the most part mainstream journalism has not actively sought to exploit the Internet to its ends. However, it has become clear that the organic use of hyperlinks, which are essential to the net, connects relatively unproblematically with the standards-enforcing practice of source attribution: a good Internet text, whether in a smartphone app or a web page, will most likely have a hyperlink reference, while most worthwhile news texts will have clear attribution. Where the relationship of journalism's professional values to Internet technologies is questionable, here there is a close match that refines generalized discussion of journalism values toward transparency and objectivity as a process.

In terms of the quality of reporting, its independence and objectivity, the use of sources in reporting is the key characteristic that distinguishes labor-intensive reporting from facile punditry, and is the characteristic that differentiates journalism from the processing of press releases. Similarly, in the new environment of ambient journalism, reporting of information from relevant sources is that which separates good news work from social media commentary, aggregation, re-purposing, and simple plagiarism. No revolution or paradigm shift is needed for link journalism, and it is unlikely instantly to win the attention of those for whom a dramatic transformation of journalism rests on fixations of technical novelty. A reporter need not be a "digital native" or a coding wizard to create a hyperlink to a source document. Rather, the routine use of source

links potentially can occur as part of the natural extension of professional journalism, in a more considered response to both technological change and a wider societal need for transparency and accountability.

Most of the above discussion has been framed in the context of western, Anglophone journalism, even if some of the major research cited has applied across Europe, and so geographic variations in journalism cultures must be acknowledged here (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). However, as globalization and conglomeration continue apace, raising further concerns for diversity, online, it is the leading news brands of elite nations, like *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the BBC, guardian.co.uk, and *The Financial Times*, *El País*, and *Le Monde*, which are most likely to prosper, thus reinforcing the political and cultural dependency of smaller nations. As the American net-native Huffington Post launches a British edition, it is at the level of local or “city hall” accountability reporting that fears for American journalism have been most expressed (Starr, 2009; Fallows, 2011). What applies to holding truth to power in regional reporting in the USA, can be equated in the context of smaller countries to the reporting of national affairs. In the age of the Internet, citizens of the world are unlikely to be deprived of information on Afghanistan or on authoritarian oppression in the Middle East, even though such news can be expected to be skewed toward a western perspective. The age also is characterized by the rise of political spin, of the “sexed-up dossier” kind that played an intimate part in the launch of the Iraq invasion, in which the “reality-based community” of news professionals is seen as marginalized (Suskind, 2004). Most informed news consumers will be aware of these issues and will be duly skeptical receivers on such matters. However, in the context of national and local affairs, in the absence of a reinforced ethic of source transparency, implemented through active external hyperlinking, citizens remain at the mercy of machine politics and corporate communication (Miller and Dinan, 2008) as news work migrates toward data processing and dependence on PR.

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# Experiencing Journalism: A New Model for Online Newspapers

Sue Robinson

The unique Internet attributes of interactivity and multimedia are forcing significant evolutions in journalistic culture as the basic mission of the reporter has evolved for the digital world. Web technology has provided opportunities for sources and audiences to participate in news production. Scholars have begun calling reporters “gate-watchers” (Bruns, 2005) and information “monitors” (Deuze, 2003), insisting that they share authority willingly and embrace “citizen media” (Gillmor, 2004). Buzz words such as “networked journalism” (Jarvis, 2006) and “communal media” (Jenkins, 2006) demonstrate how some people are thinking about the web technology as an opportunity for a journalistic revolution (Bruns and Jacobs, 2006) where citizens have a responsibility to speak up, create content, and counter mainstream media in virtual venues (Kline and Burnstein, 2005). This largely theoretical essay puts forth a new online model for news production functionality that takes into account the dynamics of information production, dissemination, and consumption online – at least for the intentions of journalists.

This model expands one proposed by scholar Mark Deuze (2003) with the idea that the news has taken on the qualities of an open-source process, modifying conceptions of journalism as a discrete product. In the new millennium, each journalist must set out to achieve a broad continuum of goals that include a concentration on public experience in addition to the well-known orientating, instrumental, and monitorial intentions. The successful journalist today must embrace the ideal dialogic form of news production online, even for those whose media companies cling to old-world standards and practices. The model presented here adds to Deuze’s contributions by suggesting that converged and participatory aspects of online news are being incorporated into journalistic missions. In writing blogs and taking part in conversations online, journalists participate in the news as much as gather it; in uploading photos and producing stories in forums

and other spaces, citizens are also sharing in news production. This changes not only the fundamental experience of news production but also the essential relationships between information purveyors and consumers. The model is meant to be a snapshot of how journalism appears to be transforming according to the intentions of working journalists. In other words, the model may not work for all news organizations at the time of this writing, but given new technologies, the model represents emergent understandings of what seems to be happening with the news product. It is a useful exercise to document and visualize the operating paradigm of news functionality so that scholars, media watchers, and journalists themselves can continually refine the purpose of journalism as new technologies are used in its production.

First this article will lay out previous models of journalistic production before discussing how newsrooms are adopting new technologies and the implications those institutional changes might be having on the purpose of news. In particular, this research offers a substantial literature review on multimedia and interactivity in exploration of evolving American news production practices. Throughout the article I draw from this previous research as well as my own in-depth interviews with more than 100 journalists, bloggers, and citizens during a series of ethnographies, surveys, and audience studies between 2007 and 2010.<sup>1</sup> The guiding question I want to explore in this essay is: how does convergence within a participatory culture (and vice versa: participation in a converged culture) change production models and the *intended* functionality of journalism? The answers to this question lead us to a new model that encapsulates an emerging philosophy of digital news production. During these transformations, significant resistance to digital culture remains, and institutional habits, motivations, and corporate interests persevere. So this research will reiterate how traditional paradigms stubbornly endure as well.

## A Literature Review

### Traditional model of journalism

Generally journalism can be defined as: “Any authored text, in written, audio or visual form, which claims to be (i.e. is presented to its audience as) a truthful statement about, or record of, some hitherto unknown (new) feature of the actual, social world” (McNair, 1998: 4). In the past, many news scholars have examined the influences that bear on the news product and its consumption. The model developed by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) laid out a matrix of influences contributing to the news production process from power structures to ideology. Others have explored the news as a reality representation that is constructed by journalists, sources, and audiences in a way that perpetuates societal values (Carey, 1989/1992; Gans, 1978; Molotch and Lester, 1974/1997; Tuchman, 1978; Westerståhl and Johansson, 1994). On a fundamental level, news production has also followed Shannon and Weaver’s (1949) linear model of message transmission (sender–message–receiver) carrying out the journalistic mission of informing the public. Every day in the newspaper, journalists have presented a monologue to their audiences, helping to incite what people think about, orient people to

their world and provide useful information for their daily actions (Carey, 1989/1992; Zelizer, 2005). The news' main functions have been fourfold: surveillance, socialization, correlation, and entertainment (Wright, 1986). Considered to be a powerful institution, the press maintains its authority through these enduring missions and the standardized practices that support them (Cook, 1998). Newspaper journalists have aimed to inform society by providing a truthful, balanced, synthesized, and verified accounting of the day's events (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2003). Journalists filter and prioritize information, and observe and report "reality" (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Zelizer, 2005). In the process of newswriting, journalists perform institutional duties that nurture democracy, service society, and lead to individual knowledge (Cook, 1998; Zelizer, 2005). These instrumental, orienting qualities exemplify traditional, ideal-yet-declared missions.<sup>2</sup>

### When circumstances change

Over the years, scholars have documented cultural, economic, political, social, and technological events that have forced modifications in journalistic practice and objectives. With each new technology, the form of journalism language has become more precise and more real, according to Herbert (2000). Radio was heralded as the vessel for a "social destiny" that would engage citizens in politics and community (Douglas, 1987). VCRs would give television news watchers control over when, where, and how they consumed their news; their news would become a vehicle for social networking (Levy, 1989; Pavlik, 1996). Early computers and networking capabilities gave rise to videotext and teletext, whose interaction and multimedia would allow people to control their own intake of news (Boczkowski, 2004; Stovall, 2004). And while only a few of these ideals were realized, all of these technologies changed the way journalists went about their jobs of gathering and producing the news, as well as audience expectations for content. Once journalists could produce and publish photographs and graphics, news stories could be visual as well as textual, giving rise to "photojournalism" and the "picture story" (Barnhurst, 1994). Then broadcast and cable sped up the news dissemination process and heightened competition among journalists (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 1999). Newspaper editors began counseling reporters to write "second-day" stories on the first day of the actual news, since television and radio would have already carried the first blush of breaking news into customers' living rooms (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2001). Gannett CEO Al Neuharth (1989) developed *USA Today* in part as a response to television journalism, offering "bulk" news, short pieces that were confined to the front page and accompanied by colorful graphics and giant photos.<sup>3</sup> In some cases, the newly introduced medium helped create an entire new genre of journalism, such as Ed Murrow's hour-long "See It Now" television programming, which introduced documentary-style journalism during the 1950s. Thus, journalism evolved with each new technological capability and its particular diffusion in the newsroom (Altheide, 1985).

It is important to note that the resulting communicative forms of news have not evolved naturally, but have "derived from many interests and many competing claims that seek to define what constitutes our media" (Marshall, 2004: 3). Media rise above

the idea of a mere delivery channel for they represent cultural systems (Packer and Robertson, 2006), economic ideology (Bagdikian, 1971), and political circumstances (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston, 2007; Bennett, 2003). The traditional model of news function in the USA (i.e. that which endured from the 1920s until the present day) reflects not only the libertarian political structuring of the nation but also its capitalistic media ownership and the available technology such as telegraphs (Chafee, 1947; Hocking, 1947; Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, 1956/1963). For example, Abramson, Arterton, and Orren (1988) pointed out that “the shift from one type of democracy to the next coincided with changes in the media” (70). With the dawn of the information age (and electronic journalism), journalists’ functions shifted from information transmission to information processing (Jurgensen and Meyer, 1992; Schudson, 1995). In McLuhan’s works, we learn that every medium presents a different sensory experience to extend the self into the world. It comes as no surprise then that journalism’s foundational structure has begun to change with the latest medium – the Internet (McLuhan, 1964).

### A new medium mix

Enter the millennium when an intensely mediated culture enabled multitaskers, savvy information seekers (or “googlers”), and active producers (Jenkins, 2006; Marshall, 2004). Digital communication’s multimedia and interactivity have created a bottom-up information phenomenon that redirected traditional communicative content flows, prompting scholars and media critics to proclaim the opportunity for an information renaissance. First, two definitions of these crucial terms:

*Multimedia:* The term “multimedia” indicates the integration of a variety of information methods from verbal cues to text to animation. Multimedia combine separate technologies into one channel, such as both text and video or photographs paired with audio, but the term also refers to the ability to cross, intersperse, and mix content platforms. Scholars have understood multimedia as a way in which we can engage multiple senses through one channel, for it encourages reaction to content (as opposed to passive absorption) through manipulation of volume, picture, hyperlinks, and other modal features (Deuze, 2008; Marmolin, 1991; Willis, 1994).

*Interactivity:* Salwen, Garrison, and Driscoll (2005) defined the concept “interactivity” as the ability for users to “do something” with the online web page, to manipulate the content in some manner (133). If a news user can control, augment, contradict, or otherwise customize the content, then interactivity is achieved (Deuze, 2008). Interactivity is not so much about the particular information channel as it is a philosophy about a user’s relationship of control with the content and its author(s), and must signify two- (or even multi-)way communication on some level (Andrejevik, 2007; Cover, 2004; Downes and McMillan, 2000; Rafaeli and Sudweeks, 1997).

While some scholars have considered such digital abilities to be empowering, others have noted how multimedia and interactivity merely reinforce old connections, social roles, and institutional relationships. With some seemingly meaningless blog posts,



“you think, ‘why on earth would someone publish that?’ And the answer is, they’re not really publishing it, they’re having a conversation with their friends and you’re listening in” (Kline and Burnstein, 2005: 287). But this comment by web programmer and Professor Clay Shirky highlights another aspect of digital content: people can now experience the realms of other people in new ways (Kline and Burnstein, 2005; Turkle, 1995). The rise of the personal computer, electronic bulletin boards, e-mail, and web software propelled the individual’s hitherto private communicative experience into the public realm (Johnson, 1997; Meyrowitz, 1985). Via hyperlinking, file sharing, and remixing, audiences can play with previously bounded cultural commodities (Marshall, 2004). Online authors and readers become mutual performers, seeking content immersion that allows them to play with their identity and social lives (Markham, 1998; Murray, 1997). People develop new online personalities because of the anonymous nature of web chat rooms, for example, and these alter egos create new ways of seeing, listening, interacting, and being for both virtual and physical worlds (Markham, 1998; Turkle, 1995).

Early web scholarship determined that the ways newsrooms were employing digital technologies meant the essential reporter identity and his professionalism must adapt as well (Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2003; Pavlik, 2001). “New media are bringing about a realignment between and among news organizations, journalists and their many publics, including audiences, sources, competition, advertisers and the government” (Pavlik, 2001: 1). Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) and Kopper, Kolthoff, and Czepek (2000) suggested that scholars examine the Internet’s architectural differences and its resulting implications on the news product. Cyberspace has developed a “system architecture” that created another kind of press institution (Newhagen and Levy, 1998: 12). Whereas information must be condensed to fit into traditional media, the Internet’s capacity is diffuse and parallel:

Data concentration is unnatural in distributed network architectures that facilitate dispersed message production. Thus the application of canons or standards produced to deal with mass media systems may be unnatural, unrealistic and practically impossible to apply in a setting where any participant is equally likely to be a message producer as a message receiver. Members of such a system are likely to be true peers, further eroding social codes borne out of the need to protect against the amplification of error fostered by power imbalances. First, the reportorial act of data collection is dispersed, with data collection potentially taking place at any node on the Net. Second, and most importantly, editors may lose control of the agenda.

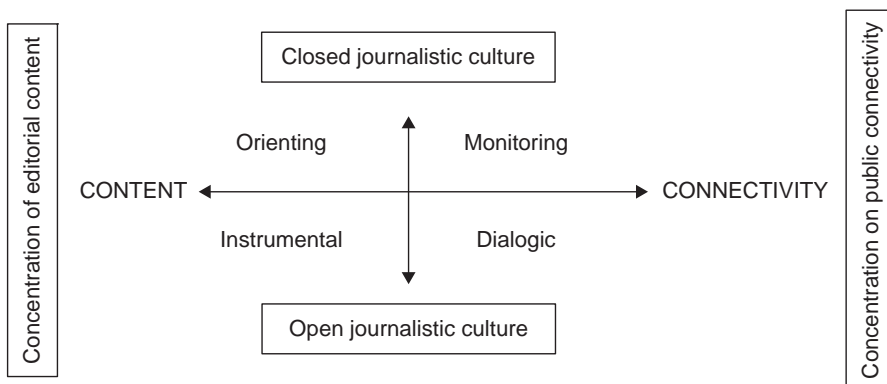
Newhagen and Levy, 1998: 16

The once-hierarchical information system becomes a platform for players of equal status. Control disperses, and the content itself loses its uniform, standardized structure. For Newhagen and Levy (1998), multimedia serve as the catalyst for this information metamorphosis. For other scholars, interactivity as exercised in hyperlinks and bulletin boards achieves productive transformation (Downes and McMillan, 2000; Pavlik, 2001).

Around this time (late 1990s, early millennium) several forward-thinking researchers started considering that journalistic missions must have also changed with such

influences. They began suggesting new ways to model news production. Bardoel (1996) wrote that this new technology must expand fundamental concepts of not only journalism but also its publics. In 1996, Bardoel tentatively drew a first online model paralleling traditional concepts of journalism in having a dual, but enhanced, purpose: orienting and instrumental. Journalists could use the web platform to bring information, much like a stockbroker brings investors options from which to choose (as opposed to what Bardoel refers to as “classical” journalism, in which reporters gather information and then serve it up on a platter like a waiter who can only carry so much). Furthermore, people can utilize the online attributes to find news that they can use (Bardoel, 1996).

But Deuze (2003) recognized that unique Internet characteristics – interactivity and multimedia – alter Bardoel’s model of orienting and instrumental journalism. Deuze proposed a new model built on Bardoel’s traditional concepts of news media, but also incorporating all the characteristics of the Internet, particularly hypertextuality, interactivity, and multimodality. His modifications (Figure 4.1) emphasized the concepts of monitorial and dialogic journalism (as first proposed by Schudson, 1999, and Martikainen, 2000): Whereas the first part of the model (Bardoel’s 1996 contribution) displays the content approach to news, the second part (Deuze’s 2003 addition) recognizes that the audience has now become involved in a two-way conversational journalism. Online journalism, Deuze surmised, concentrates on public connectivity as much as it does editorial content. His term “monitorial” refers to when “a website can operate as a platform upon which citizens may voice their opinions and questions regarding the issues about which they care” (Deuze, 2003: 218). And, “dialogic” journalism is a more liberating notion of news creation: “The content of a news medium is fully maintained by journalists interacting with citizens” (219). The audience member (or the receiver) is taking an active role in journalism. These categories are not mutually exclusive, and Deuze suggested that information often takes on all or only some of



**Figure 4.1** Deuze’s model of online journalism.

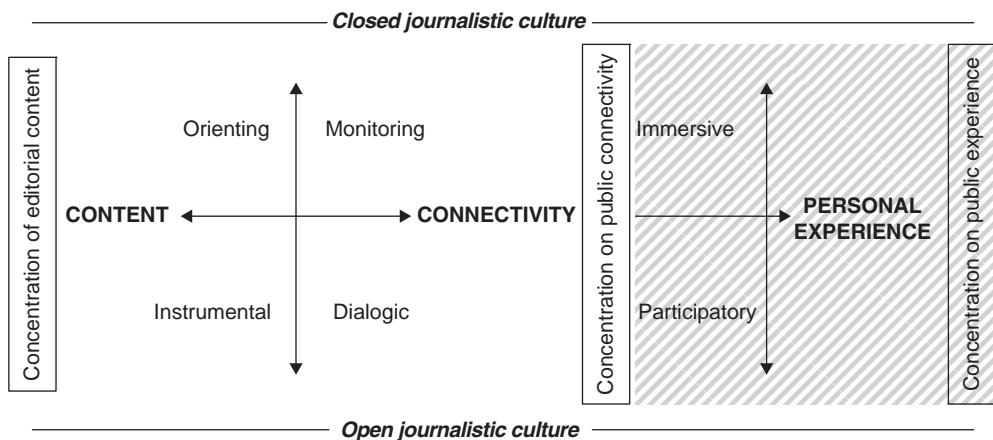
Deuze’s model (2003) of content and connectivity. Traditional journalism includes orienting and instrumental functions; online journalism allows concentration on public connectivity. Overlaps occur.

these functional components at any given time, for any given individual. At their core, these new models suggest profound changes for journalists' roles and their ultimate control over the news.

### A Suggested Expansion

The online research since Deuze wrote that article in 2003 has indicated that Deuze's 2003 model needs to be updated. In this section I propose an advancement of his concept. The revision acknowledges that traditional functions of the press – as an information vehicle – remain intact, that there continues to be a “closed journalistic culture” even as an open-source process becomes available. For example, newspapers have begun to restrict access to the deeper layers of their content, forcing people to go through their home pages and seek information from their own internally produced stories in an effort to maintain purview over the news – thus journalists are normalizing the Internet tool to their existing dissemination practices (Singer, 2005; Tremayne, 2006). But more and more, the news is intended as a starting point rather than the end product (Singer, 2006). At its core, the enhanced model reflects the emergent new media culture that demands a symbiotic relationship between content producers and their audiences that goes beyond two-way conversation.

The model (see Figure 4.2) incorporates the recent trend in the newsrooms to offer journalists' personal experiences alongside objective (orienting and instrumental) copy. It takes into account individual agency in news production on the part of so-called “citizen journalists.”<sup>4</sup> We are in a “converged,” “participatory” culture now (Bruns,



**Figure 4.2** Journalism missions online.

This expanded model incorporates both content and connective functions of journalism with a new concentration on public experience. Under “content” form, journalists engage in a one-way conversation; under “connectivity,” there exists a dialogue between journalists and audiences (Deuze, 2003). In the “experience” enhancement, citizens feel immersed in the news and participate in its production in a literal manner.

2005; Jenkins, 2006). This model reflects that “convergence” (exercised through a multimodal “immersion” as labeled in the model) and “participation” (exercised through an interactive “experience”) – based on the following research.

### Convergence (a multimodal “immersion”)

The term “convergence” in the news business once meant simply channel convergence (i.e. television and newspaper), before it morphed into story integration (i.e. a reporter telling a story in multiple formats). Convergence can be thought of either as a linear continuum (Dailey, Demo, and Spillman, 2005) or a nonlinear process happening at any stage of production from content gathering to dissemination (Aviles and Carvajal, 2008). Both conceptions submit the existence of a phased development that revolutionizes news business across media platforms. This chapter considers convergence much as Henry Jenkins explicated the term in 2006:

I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. Convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural and social changes.

Jenkins, 2006: 2–3

In true convergence, news production blends with the information itself, as opposed to being centered upon any platform-shaped product. True convergence involves the integration of different journalistic cultures as well as different work responsibilities and expectations (Aviles and Carvajal, 2008). Journalists at a Tampa, Florida, newspaper and television station said their channel convergence had led to a concentration on multimedia storytelling that explored more angles to any one news event, according to a case study by Dupagne and Garrison (2006). “It doesn’t make me think differently about journalism. It makes me think differently about presentation and opportunity,” one veteran local government reporter told the researchers. Mindy McAdams, author of *Flash Journalism: How to Create Multimedia News Packages*, travels to newsrooms teaching reporters about new ways of storytelling, forms that emphasize nonlinear experiencing of the news (McAdams, 2005). “The ability to provide a real user-controlled experience distinguishes online media from other news media” (19). In 2005 Quinn concluded that news organizations of the world were at various stages of convergence, which he determined made both good business and journalistic sense when achieved (Quinn, 2005).

Convergence and multimedia call for an immersive experience: the sense that one is present within the content in some way, that one can transcend any single information channel. The term “immersion” had been bandied about for years in journalism scholarship, particularly with the advent of first broadcast and then digital technologies (Gordon, 1996; Kawamoto, 2003; Pryor *et al.*, 2003).

The space created by the journalist allows a freedom of movement that becomes the defining quality of new media: user control of the point of view. This sense of control promotes

the creation of a virtual self, a sense of being there and doing things at a level that engages the unconscious – the non-verbal, graphics-dominated realm of understanding.

Pryor *et al.*, 2003: 2

Gordon (1996) argued that multimedia allow readers to feel as if they can be a part of any news event. Finnish mid-level managers reported that sensory news helps attract the attention of a media-saturated audience (Kunelius and Ruusunoksa, 2008: 669):

Packaging and visualisation are also important elements in experience-driven journalism, another theme through which the perceived cultural trends are interpreted. According to this frame, detached facts of news narration are no longer enough.

In my interviews with US journalists across the nation, editors told me they sought to give audiences new experiences. In my examination of web sites such as the spokesman-review.com and other innovative sites, journalists were posting features meant to convey emotion and sensory attributes to the textual stories, such as audio of reporters' interviews, the raw video of the entire news event, or a photo gallery with streaming audio. Reporters' blogs related the back-stories of the news. One *Los Angeles Times* photographer described for me how he paired audio of the doctors discussing the life or death of a soldier with powerful images of deadly wounds. He recorded one mother talking to her son, who must eat via a tube and "talk" using a pen and paper. "If you just saw her words on a page, it might move you. But if you hear his mom, hearing her voice catch, her frustration, well, every mother recognizes that anguish. It makes her more real" (personal communication, 2007). In providing "news experience," journalists said they are inviting readers into the world of the press and, more importantly, giving them a glimpse of the unfiltered, unedited, "real" news. News organizations hope that by being able to *experience* the news, people will feel as if they are getting the authentic truth about world and local events, according to my interviews with journalists. Other research has borne this out: Sundar (2000), for example, suggested multimedia allow for better synthesis of the news because of repetitive functionality for information delivery and the ability to position the viewer in a more realistic way.

Citizens, especially those used to contributing to news sites or blogs online, reported in recent interviews that they want information that allows them to "dig deeper" and several attributed this characteristic to multimedia:

When you read an article online you can do further research, you can dig deeper. They might have embedded videos or other things you can follow if you want to. But when you're reading just a print newspaper it's just one-dimensional. I like newspapers, but I like them better online just because of that tendency to explore it further.

Personal communication, 2009<sup>5</sup>

Personally experiencing the news in multiple formats fosters a greater sense of connection to what's happening, and an enhanced interest in the news because of the notion they can "explore it further." In consideration of these data as well as the previous research reiterated here, I added "immersion" to Deuze's model to incorporate the web

features that allow people to “be there” at the site of the news story, to emphasize the *experience* of the news as a means of conveying the convergence culture molding contemporary news production practices and functionality.

### Participatory (an interactive experience)

Once “there” alongside or in place of the journalist in some cases, readers are then expected to interact with the information, each other, and the journalists. Copy editors pair the newspaper stories with messages to readers in little side boxes, urging them to “visit” the web site where they can “listen,” “watch,” “talk,” and “view.” *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof told his newspaper readers: “For the sights and sounds of my trip to Darfur, go to [www.nytimes.com/kristofresponds](http://www.nytimes.com/kristofresponds)” (Kristof, 2004). A June 16, 2009 *Washington Post* feature requests viewers to: “Launch the project to see 360 degree panoramic photographs that take you to the scene.” Such terminology suggests cyberspace is a venue in which news is happening in the moment. It has become the place of the “news experience” where you can become a part of something. Audiences have learned to interact with the multimedia and play with their hyperlinking abilities. Online news “moves from being mostly journalist-centered ... to also being increasingly audience centered” (Boczkowski, 2004). For example, Ornebring (2008) found that the two newspapers he studied encouraged user-generated content that was of a personal nature (as opposed to merely general news and information). They are urged to *participate*. This is the nature of the “participatory” addition in the revised model.

Nip (2006) defined the term “participatory journalism” as user-generated content within a journalist-driven frame of news, such as reader forums. But for the purposes of this proposal, participatory journalism also includes the interaction required by users to manipulate interactive graphics, to submit photos, or produce other news tidbits – a growing trend on newspaper web sites. An example of this would be a feature on *The Times-Picayune’s* Nola.com site in New Orleans, which asks its readers to “become a citizen journalist.” In his case studies of non-newspaper news sites, Bruns (2005) examined how Slashdot, MediaChannel, Kuro5hin, blogs, and other open-source or peer-to-peer collaborative content sites have created a “participatory journalism.” “Users, then, are therefore enabled to participate in the roles of reporter (of firsthand news) or gate-watcher (filtering secondhand reports)...” (279), creating a blurring of producer–receiver roles. During a year-long ethnography I conducted at a Midwestern news organization (*The Capital Times*) going completely digital, one online director referred to citizen contributors to the site as part of their “team” of news gatherers:

It can open us up as the portal of discussion to community news events. We can make it a deeper more lasting relationship where if I am a reader I can go and feel as if I am part of this team when I go there, that they are giving me legitimacy. That has never happened before. I mean, we would send out newspapers and you could comment in a letter, but that was a dead end. Now there is this give and take, a back and forth where reporters can say “yes, this is a great idea. We will look more into this aspect of the story. What else do you think about this?”

Personal communication, 2009

The beauty of interactivity lies in its one-to-one, few, or many interpersonal engagement (Morris, 1996) as well as the content empowerment it allows (Khoo and Gopal as cited in Massey and Levy, 1999). Massey and Levy (1999) further note the variations and levels of interactivity according to the complexity of choice available online, the responsiveness of the user, the ease in adding (and manipulating) information, and the facilitation of interpersonal communication. Journalists who fail to implement interactive features leave audiences dissatisfied, as this participant in one of my 2009 audience studies told me:

That is why I go to blogs and the online comments, because I will look at the news and it is a very basic story and not really expanding talk to the problems of our town. I feel like there is a lack of participation. It all feels so ... unfinished. So I figure I can at least take my base knowledge and put it up against what I read online, and then look around and start making a comparison.

Personal communication, 2009

Another audience member from my study suggested that interactivity represented an “opportunity to engage energy in community building efforts beyond just the community informing effort.” Citizens want to use the news to find out more about specific parts of their communities, to better carve out their own niche in it. Thus, the idea of *participatory* assumed a philosophical indication: to interact with the news was to participate in community.

In response, online editors have been increasingly accommodating the interactive, participatory nature of the medium, simultaneously redefining and reaffirming their own space within it (Singer, 2006). Said one social media editor to me in 2009: “We have all this branded content that we are creating but clearly that is not enough ... and people are already wanting to share pictures and news. We need to respond to that.” Editors bragged to Singer (2005) and to me (Robinson, 2009) that their reporters’ blogs ignited lively debate over political issues. By 2007, editors were prioritizing their web sites’ interactive, participatory components (such as on-site blogs) first, before noting the updating capabilities they had once heralded in their earlier online forays (Domingo *et al.*, 2008). In my observed newsroom in the Midwest, reporters were being handed digital audio recorders and video cameras, and told to think of a compelling blog to record their own thoughts and experiences for the people. They were asked to contribute to discussion forums and message boards for the newspaper’s web site. At one meeting the following conversation ensued after an editor suggested reporters “get to know” their audiences in commenting spaces, blogs and forums:

“You mean like broadcast anchors,” asked one mid-level manager.

“Well... yes, but more interactive,” said the editor. “Let’s invite them in, let them meet us where we live, and let us meet them.”

As such ambassadors and hosts, reporters urged their sources and their readers to come together within cyberspace where anyone could pass along “news.” Their editors began describing their web sites as a “platform” for community building, as

opposed to an agenda-setting vehicle to disperse community knowledge (Robinson, 2009). Research is cataloging the resulting battle for control over the news product exacerbated by interactivity (Cover, 2004). Any new model of journalistic production must take new opportunities for participation – and the new participatory culture – into account.

## Model Discussion

Any study of this emergent phenomenon must incorporate an understanding of an enduring commercial, institutionally authoritative press with a closed culture and a traditional functionality. Domingo *et al.* examined newspapers in six different countries to formulate a new communicative model and found that the organizations maintained strict control over any interactive opportunities for audiences along every aspect of the production process (Domingo *et al.*, 2008). In an earlier piece he described the “myth of interactivity” – meaning that despite voicing support for interactive features, reporters were actually accomplishing very little interactive work (Domingo, 2007). Similarly, even as Deuze *et al.* (2007) described participatory news as the future for news organizations, he also found that the developing production habits for citizen “workers” clashed with journalists’ values of objectivity and accuracy. Consider the following comment by a social media editor at one of the news organizations I studied in 2009:

I cannot really interact with the people in the way good social media can because that would be editorializing. I find myself something typing something out and I start thinking “I don’t want to cross THAT line,” so I erase it. This is something that is industry specific: The problem is [news organization] is not a person in the way I can be a person on my own Twitter. I am an institution when I am working. It is so much bigger than me.

Thus, even within these participatory movements, any model for online journalism right now needs to recognize that a *continuum* of openness exists (see also Domingo *et al.*, 2008). In the Deuze/Bardoel model, journalists use digital information to help orient people and they monitor the content production carefully. Similarly, in the addition to the model (see Figure 4.2), editors provide immersive features such as multimedia and interactive graphics but that content (such as videos or interactive graphics) is produced largely by the newsroom, edited, and published at the whim of reporters and producers (as opposed to open-source sites). In some ways, journalists depend on nurturing such a closed culture in order to maintain the press’s institutional authority in society (Robinson, 2009). So even as journalists tout customers’ ability to achieve an immersive news experience that puts them in touch with sources directly and helps them access information digitally, they do so while resurrecting and reinforcing the borders of their world as the purveyors of societal knowledge.

But at its heart, this revised model also reflects the more macro-converged, participatory culture as a significant changing force. News scholarship holds that the press’s



authority results from its status as an institution, and that its power comes from the professional norms and intended purpose accepted by audiences. Schudson (1995) contended that: “the power of the media lies not only (and not even primarily) in its power to declare things to be true, but in its power to provide the forms in which the declarations appear” (54). The ways in which journalists are making use of digital technology is altering that form. Lowery and Mackay (2008) considered bloggers and other citizens producing news online as “occupational rivals” to journalists. In the sociological professional model for the digital transitions that they constructed, they showed how reporters were countering the external challenges of the virtual world (called objective qualities) with shifts in their own (more subjective) missions, routines, and evaluative measures (Lowery and Mackay, 2008: 68). Bruns *et al.* (2009), in declaring journalism to be a new kind of social networking, put forward four ways in which citizen journalism alters reporter routines: information gathering, professional networking, technological use, and community work. Now audience members have been invited into the “inside” of the journalism. Journalists have encouraged them to be “citizen journalists.” These people bring with them their own conventions, routines, and formats, according to my interviews (personal communications, 2008–2009). They contribute their own ways of making sense in this pre-journalism cyberspace. They reorder the facts according to their own perspectives and experiences. They establish new settings and can play with the temporal and spatial dynamics of the news. Of course audiences have always had the power to do this outside of journalism (Carey, 1989/1992; Hall, 1986). Now, however, audiences have been asked to look over the shoulders of the journalists as they work. Journalists’ and audience members’ collaboration chronicles the private experiences of individuals, eclipsing the mythical, institution-based news narrative. The “official” journalism can be changed right on the digital page of the newspaper web site. So, journalism today – at least as it is intended by the working professionals – also offers an opening of its culture, allowing people to seek out what they need, to discuss it, experience it, and participate in it.

## Conclusion

This kind of evolution must inevitably lead to relationship re-conceptualizations (Meyrowitz, 1985). In journalism, we can conceive of a liquefying of discrete roles for the reporter as information purveyor, for audience as consumer (Bruns, 2008; Deuze, 2007). These roles have become truly *converged* in such a way that every player *participates* in every other role. I have suggested that information is shared in the space of these web sites, and as a result, this cyber newsroom (Robinson, 2009) offers yet another site for the negotiation of news meaning. The institution of the press as a purveyor of information and connectivity is still fully functioning, but the news is no longer the sole purview of the press. Alternative journalisms – called “reform projects” by Carpentier – position authorial power with the readers and democratize news production to make information more accessible and egalitarian (Carpentier, 2007). News production is fundamentally changing, as evidenced by journalists who stated to me:

“We are in the midst of an evolution,” “We are changing the rules,” and “We are creating a new form of journalism” (Robinson, 2009). The evidence from these data as well as other recent studies suggests that journalism should not just be informative and instrumental as Bardoel suggested; and it should not be merely monitorial and dialogic as Deuze indicated. The press is striving to provide people online with opportunities to *experience* a more authentic news, to feel present within the news and to participate in it. Empirical research is already underway that would test the true impact of the changes depicted by this revised online news model. The advanced model here can guide future research in this area by offering a platform of manifest functionality that can be tested, or simply by offering a tentative conceptualization of online journalism as it seems to be developing.

## Notes

- 1 Some of these studies have been published (Robinson, 2009, 2011), other are in press, and still others are in draft form. Because this is a theoretical piece, I do not go into the methodology here.
- 2 See any mission statement of any news organization; as one example *The New York Times* reports that its “core purpose is to enhance society by creating, collecting and distributing high-quality news, information and entertainment” ([www.nytimes.com/company/index.html](http://www.nytimes.com/company/index.html)).
- 3 Neuharth (1989) even designed the newspaper’s sidewalk distribution boxes in the shape of a television.
- 4 This is of course a problematic term (Tilley and Cokley, 2008), but I simply mean those non-journalists who contribute news and other informational content in online forums, blogs and other interactive spaces within news organizations’ web sites.
- 5 Like the other quotes from citizens in this manuscript, these data come from a sample of 75 Madison, Wisconsin, residents. They were asked about their news habits, attitudes, and preferences in both in-depth, semi-structured interviews and in surveys during 2009.

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# The Field of Online Journalism: A Bourdieusian Analysis<sup>1</sup>

Eugenia Siapera and Lia-Paschalia Spyridou

## Introduction

Although only relatively few years have passed since the rise of the new media, the cumulative effect of techno-economic and socio-political changes on journalism has been nothing short of earth shattering. For most of the nineteenth century and the whole of the twentieth century, journalism was steadily increasing its power and establishing itself as one of the main institutions of contemporary democracies. Yet the dawn of the twenty-first century sees journalism depleted of power, and journalists find themselves expendable cogs in the wheels of the entertainment–media industry. To some extent technological developments and especially the Internet have been held responsible for the decline of journalistic power. If everybody can be a journalist, goes the argument, then journalism ceases to be powerful and to hold a special place in society. The main question then concerning online journalism is to understand the kinds of changes it introduces both in empirical and in theoretical terms: what has changed and how, and what is, more broadly, the effect of the rise of online journalism on journalism?

One of the most interesting approaches has been influenced by the sociology of professions, considering online journalism either as a new profession, or as changing the profession of journalism. For instance, in her influential article, Singer (2003) sought, on the one hand to outline journalistic claims to professionalism and, on the other hand, to find the extent to which online journalism can lay claim to professionalism. She argued that professionalism has three main dimensions: cognitive, normative, and evaluative, and mapped the ways in which online journalists differ in these respects, and hence the extent to which they can qualify as professional journalists. For Singer, the development of a new journalism associated with the Internet can either lead to the creation of an antagonistic relationship with traditional journalism,

or, conversely, traditional journalism can incorporate the new profession, forcing it to accept the professional norms and values associated with journalism, thereby consolidating journalism's position in society.

However, in the years following this study, online journalism has been flourishing. Web-only news production is steadily increasing; new forms of journalism, including the rise of citizen journalism, have been created; and traditional brands, especially newspapers, tend to prioritize their online editions. In the meantime, traditional journalistic jobs in print and broadcast media have suffered massive cuts, in a development that can be partly attributed to the new media. As presaged by Singer, newsroom convergence has intensified (see Chapter 2), resulting in a series of changes affecting the practice of journalism in all kinds of media. Within this context, it is difficult to see how the framework of professionalism can explain or account for the changes within journalism, or for the ways in which the rise of online journalism has shaped journalism and communication more broadly. A further problem with the sociology of the professions is that journalism cannot fully qualify as a profession.

This chapter proposes the application of Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) field theory as a conceptual framework within which to understand both the internal dynamics within online journalism and the changes in journalism ushered in by the rise of online journalism. The notion of the field, and the related concepts of social, cultural, and symbolic capital, the continuum of autonomy–heteronomy as well as the social morphology of the new–old, constitute the conceptual apparatus to be explained and employed here. Thus, the chapter will begin with a critical discussion of the sociology of professions and its applicability to online journalism. It will then discuss the main concepts of field theory and the ways in which it seeks to explain journalism. In empirical terms, the chapter outlines how the three main forms of capital are reflected in the sub-field of online journalism and how they differentiate between and position journalists. The empirical part draws upon secondary sources and an original survey with journalists in Greece.

## **Is (Online) Journalism a Profession?**

The extent to which journalism qualifies as a profession is a controversial one. This is not surprising given that the topic of the professions is a matter under study within sociology. This section will discuss the relationship between journalism and professionalism, beginning with a consideration of professionalism within sociology before looking in more detail at the debate over journalism as a profession. This section will conclude with a series of questions and issues raised by technological change and the rise of online journalism.

### **Sociology of the professions**

While there is a degree of agreement that a profession refers to an occupational body with some special skill (Abbott, 1988: 7), the details are still disputed. Specifically, there is still considerable variation regarding the main questions within this subfield of sociology. These questions concern firstly, the necessary and sufficient criteria of



professionalization; secondly, the conditions under which the professions emerged; and finally, why and how did some occupations professionalize?

In his well-known study on the professions, Andrew Abbott (1988) distinguishes between four main approaches to these questions: the functional, structural, monopolistic, and cultural approaches that explain professionalization in different terms. Notwithstanding the contribution of these approaches to understanding professionalism, the problem, argues Abbott (1988), is that they have not paid sufficient attention to the actual work undertaken by the professions within modernity. For Abbott, professions are distinguished from occupations in that they are thought to possess abstract knowledge. While any kind of occupation can obtain a means of control over who is allowed to practice it (licensure) as well as develop an ethical code, it is only those occupations that possess a body of abstract knowledge that develop into professions. This abstract knowledge is the result of formal training and the system of licensure, and allows professions to enter into competition over what they are meant to be doing and the areas that they should control. Thus, professions constitute a system, which has emerged after struggles for “turf” or jurisdiction – this refers to the link between a profession and its work (Abbott, 1988: 20). In this view, different groups compete for control over their realm of expertise and the professions emerge as the outcome of these struggles. The mechanisms of education and training and the existence of bodies that award licenses to practice, as well as the ethical codes that dictate the norms of professions, are all part of the institutional apparatus of professions by which they control and patrol their jurisdiction from internal and external antagonists.

One of the problems of the sociology of the professions is that, in its attempt to find the abstract principles that underpin and characterize the professions, it has overlooked the many nuances, the subtle and not so subtle differences between different professions. The emerging theories therefore appear to describe some ideal typical profession, loosely based on medicine, examining all other professions under this prism. However, and notwithstanding Abbott’s insistence on the dynamism of the professions, the result of much of this theory is to overlook firstly the different paths to professionalization – understood as the progressive acquisition of exclusive skills, specialization, and autonomization of certain occupations – as well as the internal power struggles that characterize most if not all professions. Secondly, the sociology of professions implicitly and sometimes explicitly assumes that professionalization is a positive thing because it allows distinct knowledge communities to develop autonomously and to uphold a set of widely accepted values. This, as Bourdieu (1991) argues, tends to overlook that these professions have themselves emerged through suppression and control of new knowledge, and thus find themselves at the center of wider societal struggles for power and the accumulation of capital. Thus, the next step is to take into account the concrete historical circumstances of the emergence of journalism, and the internal and external power struggles that defined it.

### Journalism’s path to professionalization

Historically journalism was developed as part and parcel of modernity (Anderson, 1983) but it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that it assumed its current characteristics and outlook. For Jean Chalaby (1998), journalism emerged as a discursive field,

with its own principles, traditions, values, and so on, in concrete historical circumstances. These included primarily the development of this field in the Anglo-American world, especially in Britain following the repeal of a series of taxes on knowledge between 1855 and 1861. This resulted in cheaper papers, which then created a marketplace and competition for news. The associated rise of journalistic values that emerged served as a means to order the field and control the capital(s) circulating therein. Alongside these values, such as objectivity and factual reporting, the field developed an institutional apparatus, in the form of unions, such as the (UK) National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Chartered Institute of Journalism. The existence of two such professional bodies reflects an ongoing struggle for control within the profession. The main bone of contention is, according to Aldridge and Evetts (2003), whether a journalistic union should include media proprietors and senior managers. Thus, while the NUJ stands for journalists and their rights, the Chartered Institute is a broader organization representing also senior media managers and owners. But neither of these organizations controls who is going to work as a journalist; in addition, despite their offers of further training, as well as accredited courses, neither of these organizations controls an abstract body of knowledge that is necessary and sufficient for journalistic work. Similarly, in the USA, as Singer (2003) reports, there are over 100 accredited courses in media and journalism, although there is no formal requirement for practicing journalists to be graduates of these courses.

If therefore the criteria for a profession include the possession of formal knowledge, obtained after years of education and training, and the acquisition of membership into an organization that allows and regulates the practicing of a profession, then it is unlikely that journalism can qualify as a profession. On the other hand, journalism has a strict normative framework, a clear code of ethics, as well as an important evaluative dimension, which allows journalists to enjoy a relatively high status and prestige. It seems therefore that journalism is destined to occupy the limbo in-between professions and occupations. But what is most important here is to understand journalism as a dynamic form that experiences changes and shifts, reflected in its internal structure and its external relations to other professions.

Indeed, one of the main contributions of Abbott's perspective was to understand the system of professions as a dynamic system with the function of carving up the domain of labor. While some professions, such as medicine and law, have emerged successful in this competition over jurisdiction, others, for example the clergy, have not. For Abbott, changes into the system of professions are introduced by, among other factors, new technologies, and organizational, as well as political and social changes. These may lead to new professions emerging, or to power struggles between and within existing professions. But these changes can no longer be explained only as struggles over jurisdiction between professions, nor can they be accounted for within the system of professions, especially, since this is a controversial status for journalism. To theorize these developments it may well be that we need a different, broader, kind of theory, that allows us to see and examine journalism not only in terms of its internal structure as a (quasi) profession but also in terms of the ways it is influenced by and in turn itself influences other professions or fields of life. We need, in short, a kind of theory such as the one developed by Pierre Bourdieu.

## Field Theory and Journalism: Conceptual Tools

There is little room here for elaborating on Bourdieu's field theory, which has shown considerable promise for media and journalism studies. There have been some very interesting studies, most notably Benson (1999) and Benson and Neveu (2005), Couldry (2003), Hesmondalgh (2006), see also Chapter 15 in this volume, which show the promise, but also some of the problems, of this perspective for the study of media and journalism. For the purposes of this chapter, the discussion will be limited to the concepts and notions that are of relevance to understanding the dynamics inside journalism as a profession and/or a field.

Very schematically, for Bourdieu (e.g. 1991; Bourdieu, 1993), who follows on Weber's understanding of society as evolving into spheres of increasing specialization, society can be seen as comprising a series of fields, which are defined by their differentiation from each other – this is why field theory is relational theory. Each field has its own resources, logic, and rules by which it abides. Specifically, a field is understood as “a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or ‘capital’” (Thompson, 1991: 14). Society as a whole is dominated by the meta-field of power, which, in the present concrete historical circumstances, is dominated by capitalism and the class and economic relations it engenders. The relative power of other fields is determined by their relation to this field of power.

Each field possesses a certain amount of capital, conferred to it through its historical trajectory as well as through its relation to the field of power. Capital is not only economic. For Bourdieu (1986), there are two other forms of capital: cultural capital and social capital. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge accumulated by people in the course of their lives; cultural capital can be embodied, that is, carried by individuals and displayed in the ways in which they apply or use their knowledge, or objectified, that is, in the form of cultural goods, such as books, training manuals, pictures, and so on. Cultural capital can also exist in an institutionalized state, which refers to the kind of prestige enjoyed by formal qualifications – it is, as Bourdieu (1986) has put it, what differentiates an autodidact from an academic graduate. Social capital refers to the sum of all those people one knows or groups to which one belongs. Another form of capital is the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1987), which refers to the accumulation of symbolic forms of power, such as prestige and status. A crucial characteristic of all forms of capital is transubstantiation; each form can, under certain circumstances, be converted into other kinds of capital: social capital can become economic, cultural capital can become social, and so on. Capital can belong to individual “players” and to the field as a whole.

Thus, fields are structurally positioned at an intermediate level between macro-social structures and micro-social structures. Within each field, actors are positioned in terms of the kind of capital they possess, while the overall capital possessed by a field determines its relation to other fields. Relations within and between fields are also structured in terms of two dimensions: the dimension of autonomy–heteronomy and the dimension of new and old. The dimension of autonomy conveys the degree to which a field is able to set its own laws and to operate independently; the new–old dimension concerns the

social morphology of a field, and introduces a dynamic that takes it to different directions (Benson, 1999; Benson and Neveu, 2005).

How is journalism positioned in all these? Bourdieu has spoken of journalism in at least four publications: *On Television and Journalism* (1998), *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), *The Rules of Art* (1996), and in a chapter in Benson and Neveu (2005) – see also Benson (1999) and Hesmondalgh (2006). In general, journalism is considered part of the broader field of cultural production. Bourdieu understands the field of cultural production as high in cultural and symbolic capital but low in economic capital – this is in direct contrast to the field of power, which is high in economic capital and low in cultural capital. Within the field of cultural production, subfields such as fine art and classical music, which operate on the principle of “art for art’s sake,” are high in cultural and symbolic capital but low in economic. In general the smaller the scale of cultural production the more the cultural and symbolic capital it enjoys. For instance, avant-garde art has the highest cultural capital and highest autonomy within this field, because it is primarily appreciated by the artists’ peers and art connoisseurs rather than the broader public. Journalism, on the other hand, is typically produced for mass audiences, and while enjoying a relatively high economic capital it is low on both symbolic and cultural capital, compared to other forms of cultural production.

When it comes to positioning journalism vis-à-vis other fields and subfields, because of its relatively high economic capital, it is closer to the field of power. But this implies that journalism is less autonomous than other forms of cultural production, since the logic of the field of cultural production is one that prioritizes knowledge and aesthetics over economics. Journalism however reproduces or publicizes knowledge produced elsewhere. It is considered heteronomous because it seeks to appeal to those outside the field, to readers or audiences rather than to its peers. In doing so, it generates economic capital, and it is precisely for this reason that it then imposes its heteronomous values on other subfields of cultural production and other fields more broadly. But within journalism, considerable variation can be observed. Certain forms enjoy higher cultural and symbolic capital than others: for instance, the literary journalism of *The New Yorker* has more cultural and symbolic capital than a tabloid such as *The New York Post*. Again, the rule is the same: the more the cultural capital the less the economic capital.

Journalism remains a dynamic field because as newcomers enter it, they struggle for positions with established “players” within the field. These struggles, which resemble the struggles over jurisdiction among professions discussed by Abbott (1988), introduce new elements in the field, enrich (or diminish) the field’s capital, and force it to reposition itself vis-à-vis other subfields, fields, and the field of power. This is the new versus old dimension, or the social morphology of fields, discussed by Benson and Neveu (2005) as one of the parameters shaping fields.

It is clear that these theoretical concepts – field, capital, autonomy, struggles – may contribute to a better insight into online journalism and the changes that it has introduced into the field of journalism. One of the great contributions of field theory is its ability to understand society and its constituent parts in relational terms. Thus, rather than seeking to understand online journalism in isolation, field theory allows us to conceptualize it in terms of its relation with other (sub)fields, while also understanding its internal morphology and dynamics. Rather than seeking to understand the extent to which it

constitutes a profession, it may be preferable to see how the emergence of a new, technologically driven kind of journalism amplifies, generates, or depletes the amount and kinds of capital circulating within the subfield of journalism. Finally, this kind of analysis allows for an empirically informed study, which can estimate or even measure the amount of capital and the ways in which it is distributed across the various players of the field.

This chapter constitutes an attempt to examine online journalism as a field. However, it is departing from an “orthodox” Bourdieusian field analysis because for Bourdieu, fields are specific and unique structures that occur within concrete historical and geographical circumstances. While we can broadly speak of a field of journalism, the field of journalism in, say, France, is different to that of the USA, although they may share some common characteristics. In the context of this chapter, however, we seek to understand the broad contours of the field of online journalism, making use of empirical findings from a host of different countries. Secondly, most studies on specific fields present very thorough and rigorous data, precise calculations of indicators of capital and other relevant factors (e.g. Champagne and Marchetti, 2005; Duvall, 2005). Here, however, the chapter merely attempts to draw a preliminary sketch and to test the extent to which field theory can be applied to online journalism. Furthermore, it seeks to provide operationalizations of the basic concepts that may guide subsequent investigations.

## **The Field of Online Journalism: An Empirical Sketch**

The starting point of this empirically informed discussion is that fields are primarily defined by the amount and kinds of capital they possess. This section will therefore be divided into sections discussing the various kinds of capital circulating in online journalism, their amounts, distribution, and circulation within the field. The data have been collated mainly through two kinds of sources: relevant literature on online journalism and an original survey with journalists in Greece.

### **Economic capital**

The first issue here is to estimate the amount of economic capital circulating in online journalism. Duvall (2005), in his analysis of economic journalism in France has used a series of indicators to measure this kind of capital, including the form of ownership, financial links to other media, size of audience, and percentage of revenues from advertising. Benson (2006), based on Bourdieu’s argument that production and reception are homologous, that is, they correspond to each other, argues that a look at the audiences and their demographics provides a good indication of the economic capital of individual media outlets. In estimating therefore the economic capital of the field of online journalism we can look first at those using online journalism; second, at recent acquisition data; and third, to examine advertising expenditure/revenues.

In terms of the consumption of online journalism, the US-based Pew Center for People and the Press reports an increase in those using online sources. Thus, about 34% of Americans said that they used the Internet to get their news yesterday (Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2010b). However, these people did not exclusively use

**Table 5.1** Who are online users?

	<i>Online news users</i>	<i>Other internet users<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Total other adults<sup>b</sup></i>
Age (years)			
18–29	29%	16%	9%
30–49	39%	29%	24%
50+	31%	53%	66%
Median age	40	50	58
Education			
Less than a high school degree	6%	10%	24%
High school grad	58%	80%	65%
College grad	36%	11%	10%
Income			
Less than \$30 000	24%	26%	46%
\$30 000–49 000	19%	26%	16%
\$50 000–74 999	15%	13%	7%
\$75 000+	29%	16%	7%

<sup>a</sup>General Internet population;

<sup>b</sup>general population.

Source: Pew Research Center for Excellence in Journalism (2010a)

the Internet for journalism, but rather combined it with other media news outlets, such as television and newspapers. Of the 70 minutes used in consuming the news, about 13 were spent online, compared with 10 minutes reading newspapers, 15 minutes listening to radio news, and 32 minutes watching the news (Pew Center, 2010b). From this point of view, the increased online news consumption appears to have an impact primarily on print journalism. In general, online news consumers tend to be younger, more educated, and to have higher incomes than other Internet users and other adults – see Table 5.1. From the point of view of online journalism’s economic capital, it seems that this subfield has a small, but increasing amount, if we accept the homology between consumption – reception and production.

When it comes to actual income for online journalism, this is primarily through advertising. The picture here is mixed. Although there is an increase of expenditure for online advertising, it is not clear how much online journalism profits from this. It is currently estimated that ad expenditure in the USA has, for the first time, exceeded the one on newspapers with a total of \$25.8 billion for 2010 compared with \$22.8 billion spent on newspaper ads, and it is likely to increase even more by an annual rate of 10% (Schweizer, 2010). But the lion’s share belongs to search, which tops the scale with \$12 billion of ad dollars going to search engines. However, banner ads and videos, which are more likely to be used by online news outlets, amount to \$7.3 billion, a sum that cannot be considered negligible.

Similarly, recent evidence from the European landscape points to a significant growth for online advertising, with display advertising, which includes banner and video ads, showing a substantial revival due to social media and online video, which are increasingly embedded into online news content. According to data provided by the IAB (2011), the

**Table 5.2** What online sources do people use? (%)<sup>a</sup>

	<i>All online users 18+</i>	<i>Age (years) 18–29</i>	<i>Age (years) 30–45</i>	<i>Age (years) 50+</i>
A portal web site like GoogleNews, AOL, or Topix that gathers news from many different sources	56	68	57	45
A web site of a TV news organization such as CNN, Fox, or CBS	46	50	47	40
A web site that specializes in a particular topic like health, politics, or entertainment	38	40	38	35
A web site of a national or local newspaper	38	36	42	36
An individual organization, other than a journalist or news organization that you follow on a social networking site like Facebook	30	44	31	17
A web site of an international news organization such as the BBC or <i>The Guardian</i> , or a foreign language news site	18	19	20	15

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of each group of online news users who use each source on a typical day.

Source: Pew Research Center for Excellence in Journalism (2010a)

online advertising market accelerated at a growth rate of 15.3% in 2010 – outperforming the overall European advertising market, which grew 5.0% in the same period. Total online ad spend was €17.7 billion in 2010, compared with €15.3 billion in 2009. Consequently, the situation points to the circulation of increased amounts of economic capital in the subfield of online journalism.

Recent acquisition data from the USA also show the degree of promise for economic gains entailed in online journalism. Specifically, the recent acquisition of The Huffington Post by AOL for the astonishing sum of \$315 million shows the potential of online news outlets to generate profits. The Huffington Post started by Arianna Huffington in 2005 with an investment of \$1 million (Peters and Kopytoff, 2011) and in the space of a few years became the top news blog, at least according to Technorati. In some ways, the meteoric rise of this online journalism outlet may be used to understand the rise and promise of online journalism for more profit. As newspaper incomes decline, more and more traditional news brands invest in their online outlets in the hope of generating more profit, or at least of recuperating their losses from print. For some, as we will see below, such a move is successful. But on the whole, it seems that the success of a net-native project such as The Huffington Post is the exception rather than the rule.

If we turn to see how resources are distributed within online journalism, it is clear that the lion's share of the users' attention goes to established media. Specifically, Table 5.2

shows that the US readers of online news prefer firstly news aggregators, such as Google News, followed by TV news web sites, while specialist web sites and newspaper sites attract the same percentage of readers. This distribution, which also includes some non-journalistic sources of news, such as ‘friends’ on social media, shows that established media players still have, at least at this point, the upper hand. It will be argued below that this may well be the outcome of their possession of a greater amount of symbolic capital.

The conclusions that can be drawn regarding the economic capital of online journalism can be summed up as follows. The main point here is that online journalism is steadily attracting more economic capital. In some instances, this capital is removed from traditional outlets. However this increase is based more on the potential rather than actual ability of this kind of journalism to return on investment. Furthermore, although online journalism seems to enjoy a relatively young, affluent, and well educated readership – the kind of readership, in fact, that advertisers prefer – it is less clear whether this readership can attract an equivalent advertising revenue compared with print. *The New York Times*’ example of the 10% problem is indicative. Print circulation amounts to about 10% of total audience reach, while online advertising revenue is 10% of total ad revenue – the economic situation is nearly the perfect inverse of what it should be (Karp, 2007). However, the more recent data mentioned earlier indicate that there should be a steady increase in ad revenue.

Overall, the data indicate a growing economic capital for online journalism and at the same time an ambivalent actual economic return. However, given the tendency for the decline of print journalism globally, the investment in online journalism may well keep increasing. Finally, the trend for online advertising expenditure to rise appears to be global, and it is likely that some of this will trickle toward online journalism, thereby enhancing its economic capital.

### Cultural capital

In operationalizing cultural capital, we may refer to its three aspects. As discussed above, cultural capital exists in three guises. Firstly, there is the embodied cultural capital, which refers to the know-how, tacit knowledge, skills, and so on that individual journalists possess. Secondly, there is the objectified cultural capital, which refers to the artifacts and objects produced; in online journalism this presents a challenge because its products are virtual and do not have a physical presence. On the other hand, the design, technical specifications, and other attributes of online journalistic sites may be seen as objectified cultural capital. Finally, there is the institutional cultural capital, which may be seen as the educational credentials of online journalists.

Bourdieu (1986) understands embodied cultural capital as the outcome of one’s socio-cultural background – accent and use of language constitute examples of this embodied kind of capital. When it comes to online journalism and its practitioners, it is difficult to gauge this level of detail. But given the links between this kind of journalism and technology, we may consider technical skills, use, and know-how as part of this embodied cultural capital. It does not follow that because journalists work in an online environment they possess the same or similar technical skills, so possession of this form of cultural capital is an important marker of difference not only among online journalists, but also between online and print/broadcast journalists. It is, however, difficult to



**Table 5.3** Percentage of employers rating new areas as a skills gap.

Video skills – recording and editing	58.4
Writing for search optimization	57.3
Writing for multiplatforms – 24-hour rolling news	55.7
Assembling news bulletins and audio/video packages	52.4
Prioritizing the ways to tell a story (video, text, slideshow, web, etc.)	52.4
User-generated content	49.1
Using web stats to drive news agenda	44.8
Podcasts	40.9
Blogging	40.4
Moderating user comments	37.7
Production values for videos and audio	37.1
Voice coaching	28.9
Remote working	25.1
Preparing for work/employment	17.4
Software program knowledge	15.3

Source: NCTJ (2008) Journalism skills survey (available at: [http://www.skillset.org/uploads/pdf/asset\\_13022.pdf?2](http://www.skillset.org/uploads/pdf/asset_13022.pdf?2))

measure this kind of cultural capital, although we can make some inferences on the basis of the kinds of skills journalists consider indispensable for online journalism.

Table 5.3 shows the findings of a survey conducted on behalf of The National Council for the Training of the Journalists in the UK in 2008. Employers claimed serious skills gaps regarding new areas of journalism.

Table 5.4 shows findings about the perceived ability of journalists to meet emerging skills needed.

The findings demonstrate that professionals can respond satisfactorily to the skillset of journalism, but significant skill gaps as shown in Table 5.3 are documented in the case of online journalism. The difference between skills deemed necessary and skills possessed shows a significant deficit in this kind of embodied cultural capital. To be sure, the field of online journalism requires specialist skills, a knowledge and familiarity with the technology, the various applications and the logic of the Internet. Those journalists who possess these, on top of the more traditional journalistic skills, are those in possession of high amounts of cultural capital.

Institutionalized cultural capital refers to the kind of formal educational credentials that online journalists have. Again, we have a mixed situation. Given that there is no formal requirement to have a degree or a minimum educational qualification, the institutional cultural capital of online journalism is difficult to gauge. On the other hand, individual journalists can be differentiated between those in possession of a university degree, including a degree in journalism or media and communication studies, and those who have not. Our research in Greece shows that most journalists have a university degree or some other educational accreditation (see Table 5.5).

Some journalists have managed to break into the field through apprenticeships – this is not untypical in the field of journalism in, for instance, the UK, although there are

**Table 5.4** How important do you consider the following skills for a journalist today?

	<i>Necessary</i>	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Not important</i>
<b>Traditional journalism</b>				
Office knowledge	73.8	17.5	7.5	1.3
In-depth analysis	61.3	26.3	10	2.5
Access to sources – networking	73.8	22.5	3.8	0
Very good writing skills	77.5	17.5	5	0
News judgment	80	17.5	2.5	0
Find own stories	60	31.3	8.8	0
<b>Online journalism</b>				
Basic programming skills (e.g. html)	16.3	16.3	41.3	26.3
Multimedia skills (video and audio editing, multiplatform delivery)	20	45	33.8	1.3
Use of interactive applications (e.g. podcasts, RSS feeds, interactive guides, crowdsourcing projects)	17.5	23.8	40	18.8
Understanding and use of social media for the production and dissemination of content	33.8	32.5	30	3.8
Blogging	7.5	22.5	40	30
Moderate user-generated content (comments, forums, etc.)	7.5	18.8	55	18.8
Search optimization writing	17.5	38.8	35	8.8
<b>Traditional and online</b>				
Understanding of various types of audience research	22.5	45	25	7.5

Source: Independent survey conducted by Eugenia Siapera and Lia-Paschalia Spyridou in September–October 2008 in collaboration with the Union of Journalists of Macedonia-Thrace (sample, 80 respondents)

**Table 5.5** Education level of journalists (%).

High school diploma	18.8
Institute of Professional Training (2 years)	22.5
Centre of post high school education (3 years)	7.5
BA (4 years)	32.5
MA	16.3
PhD	2.5

Source: Independent survey conducted by Eugenia Siapera and Lia-Paschalia Spyridou in September–October 2008 in collaboration with the Union of Journalists of Macedonia-Thrace (sample, 80 respondents)

journalism degrees accredited by the National Council for the Training of Journalists. The USA also offers journalism degrees accredited by The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications. However, such degrees were not perceived as either necessary or sufficient in order to become an (online) journalist, and that view held strong until recently – at least among journalism practitioners and editors. But a fundamental shift is definitely being documented. On one hand, journalism education as a socializing agent is becoming increasingly powerful in today's media, as a vast majority of newcomers in the profession worldwide come to the job with some kind of training or education in journalism (Deuze, 2006). On the other hand, ICTs and online journalism call for expanded competencies – beyond the traditional skills of news judgment and good writing skills, rendering higher education an important dimension. Therefore, although entry qualifications do not necessarily require formal accreditation and other similar schemes, institutionalized capital is becoming increasingly valuable for this subfield, and this is further confirmed by the findings on the low embodied cultural capital of online journalism.

Finally, objectified cultural capital refers to the actual artifacts and objects produced in and by the field. In online journalism, this objectified cultural capital can only be seen in terms of web sites and the work that has gone into them. Just as print journalism can count the actual newspapers and related publications editions as objectified cultural capital, and broadcast journalism can count footage as part of its cultural capital, online journalism can consider its online output as such a form of capital. Two things may be noted here: the objectified cultural capital of online journalism is at once bigger and more durable than that of other forms of journalism, given the archival and hyperlink attributes of online journalism (see Paulussen, 2004). On the other hand, this kind of capital cannot have a physical existence, making it wholly dependent on the technology of the web, while its digital form allows copying and other forms of use and manipulation by others. In this sense, this kind of objectified cultural capital cannot have the same kind of value as the more tangible and more tightly controlled outputs of other forms of journalism.

In conclusion, embodied cultural capital, operationalized as the set of skills of online journalists, has been found to be relatively low, considering the set of skills deemed necessary by employers. Institutionalized cultural capital, operationalized as accredited and other higher education degrees, as well as training in ICT-related skills, was found to be of increasing value. Finally, objectified cultural capital is considerable, taking into account the attributes of limitless space (facilitating greater production), hypertextuality (allowing for easy transmission and diffusion of content), and multiplatform delivery (increased reproduction of content). On the other hand, this kind of capital is mediated by technology, and as such does not belong to online journalism proper.

### Social capital

If cultural capital refers to what people know, social capital refers to whom people know, to the kinds of social networks they are part of. Specifically, Bourdieu has defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group”

(1986: 248). The issue of how to operationalize social capital is still very much debated in the social sciences (Frane and Roncevic, 2003). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) suggested that social capital be operationalized as the sum of those resources that have emerged out of membership in particular networks. For journalists, such resources may be derived from membership in formal and informal networks: the former may include membership in professional and/or trade organizations, as well as membership of official press corps. Informal networks may include networks of sources and networks of readers, representing and capturing both the production and reception sides of journalism.

When it comes to membership of formal networks, online journalism has been, at least until recently, at a disadvantage. Some journalistic unions, such as for instance the Greek Union of Journalists, do not allow online journalists to become members, while the recently formed online journalist unions do not enjoy the same resources as their older and more established counterparts. In general, unions expect their members to have earned an income through their professional engagement with journalism, and this leads to the exclusion of bloggers and/or citizen journalists, insofar as they do not systematically write and get paid for their journalistic outputs. Within the field of online journalism therefore, it seems that some journalists enjoy less social capital in the form of membership of professional/trade organizations than others. But such membership may be important in ensuring accreditation for journalists who wish to cover certain areas or join specific press corps, such as the White House or the EU Press Corps. Typically, such institutions require evidence of employment in a media organization, such as for instance a letter from the editor-in-chief in an official company letterhead – this is the requirement for accreditation set by the UN in New York. For online media specifically, the UN requires in addition that:

- The web site must belong to a recognized media organization and have a specific, verifiable street address and a telephone number.
- The web site must have at least 60% original news content or commentary or analysis, including coverage of international or UN related issues.
- Media representatives are required to submit two by-lined articles within the past month that was posted on the web site.

Source: <http://www.un.org/en/media/accreditation/request.shtml>

Such requirements create at least two tiers of online journalists: a privileged one with access to primary sources, and a disadvantaged one, who may be doing journalistic work but do not enjoy some of the rights that go with it. On the other hand, this kind of distinction, which here we attribute to possession of social capital through membership of formal organizations, is argued to be increasingly irrelevant today.

Specifically, in his 2009 address to the International Olympics Committee Press Commission, David Schlesinger, Reuters' editor-in-chief, argued that accreditation is becoming less and less important, since most organizations can no longer control access to information (Schlesinger, 2009). The main point is that the rise of social media and the wide, almost catholic access to the new media means that even if journalists do not get the information out there, then others, such as witnesses or participants will. Formal accreditation, which has served as a means of controlling journalists and access to information, may be declining.

The notion of social capital as part of the field of online journalism is however doubly interesting. This is because in the literature on social media, a central debate concerns the extent to which social media actually enhances or diminishes social capital (see, for example, Ellison *et al.*, 2010; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2007). In short, the argument goes that because people spend more time on social media they have less time to spend in actual, face-to-face activities, including participating in membership of various social groups and voluntary organizations, thereby diminishing their overall social capital. It should be noted that the understanding of social capital in this body of work draws mostly on the work of Robert Putnam (2000), in which social capital is gauged through participating in voluntary and civil society groups and associations. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) however found no evidence that social media use is inversely related to social capital, and it may even enhance it (c.f. Wellman *et al.*, 2001).

Indeed, it may well be argued that online journalists can increase and manage efficiently their social networks through social media. To begin with, there is evidence that online journalism entails more desk work and less field work (Pleijter *et al.*, 2002, cited in Deuze, 2003) and this may be taken to imply that online journalists cannot create and sustain networks of sources or contacts. However, social and other forms of new media enable journalists who incorporate them into their work to develop and maintain networks of sources of information, as they allow for continuous contact without the necessity of face-to-face meetings. Thus, online journalists can profit from new technology and contact potential information sources through the new media, while they can also use new technologies to maintain these contacts. At the same time, social media can be used by the (online) journalist to create and maintain a network of readers – this is a significant development, which allows journalists to directly connect with readers without the mediation of a news medium. Thus, through creating a network of Facebook friends, or Twitter followers, (online) journalists can develop their own readership, which in turn can be seen as an important social capital. The networked journalist, thus, understood as the journalist who builds their own network of sources and readers (who may of course overlap), may be seen as generating and managing their own social capital – clearly the larger the networks the more the social capital enjoyed by individual (online) journalists. While there is no research evidence to examine the kinds and amounts of social capital in the form of social media networks, we can speculate that these may well prove to be, in the long run, more important than membership of formal organizations and accreditation. This may form the topic of an interesting future research project.

To round up the discussion of social capital, it may be concluded that, while in some respects online journalism may appear to be at a disadvantage, especially when it comes to membership of formal organizations, its potential to make the most out of new and social media may compensate for this disadvantage. Moreover, social media offer the possibility to generate social capital, increasing the amount of social capital for those journalists who use them.

### Symbolic capital

In conceptual terms, symbolic capital is not a separate form of capital, but rather a misapprehended or misrecognized form of economic, cultural, or social capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

It is the kind of capital that is governed by the logics of knowledge and recognition. This kind of capital is accrued because of the position of its bearer within socially constructed value and other classificatory schemes. In his definition, Calhoun (2002) describes symbolic capital as the resources made available as a result of prestige or recognition.

Operationalizations of symbolic capital are difficult as they mobilize knowledge that is often tacit. However, we can think of symbolic capital in online journalism in at least two ways: firstly, as the accumulation of prizes, honors, and awards that are clearly conferring recognition and prestige. Secondly, journalism contains certain ideals and ethics, which include the values of objectivity, impartiality, fairness, balance, a distinction between opinions and facts, which are enshrined in codes of ethics that journalists are expected to follow. These codes, and professional ethics more broadly, argues Bourdieu, ultimately serve as gatekeeping and exclusionary field strategies, used by individual players to establish and maintain their position, and occasionally to contest other players, and have little to do with deontological principles and morality. From this point of view, Markham (2008) considers media and journalistic ethics as symbolic capital, as they reflect the position of particular journalists in the socially constructed value hierarchy of journalism. Thus, in this sense those journalists perceived by their peers and by readers as “ethical” are those enjoying more status and prestige.

Not surprisingly, when it comes to prizes and awards the amount of symbolic capital belonging to online journalism is relatively small. This is because the establishment of such awards and award bodies took place with other subfields of journalism in mind, namely those of print and broadcast journalism. Thus, until recently, as discussed by Singer (2003), the prestigious Pulitzer prize could not be awarded to an online journalist. Online entries were only accepted if they were part of a print publication. By 2011, however, the Pulitzer Prize Broad revised its rules to include online-only news sites, provided that they publish “at least weekly during the calendar year and that adheres to the highest journalistic principles” (The Pulitzer Prize Plan of Award, 2011). In addition, in their most recent revision, the rules allow for multimedia and not only text-based entries, reflecting the changes brought about by the Internet. In spite of these changes, however, print journalism is still the dominant form with the vast majority of winners being print journalists.

However, there is a new breed of prizes, which concern online media exclusively, such as the Webbies. The Webbies are international and are awarded by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences, which is composed of an executive body “of leading Web experts, business figures, luminaries, visionaries and creative celebrities, and Associate Members who are former Webby Award Winners and Nominees and other Internet professionals” ([www.webbyawards.com/about/](http://www.webbyawards.com/about/)). The Webbies cover several categories (over 100), and are awarded on the basis of excellence. The most relevant categories here include news and politics. It is interesting to note that until 2009 there was a separate “online newspaper” category. In 2011, in the categories of news, nominees included the National Public Radio (NPR) web site, The Huffington Post, *The Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* sites, and the Daily Beast – the Webbie winner was the NPR site. In the category of politics, the winner was the site TruthDig ([www.truthdig.com](http://www.truthdig.com)). In previous years, winners in the news category included *The New York Times* site (2010), and the BBC news web site (2009), while the *Guardian* won online

newspaper of the year 2009. It is clear that despite their international outlook, the Webbies are US and UK oriented and also that nominees, and occasional winners, include established media.

But if cultural and economic resources function as strong field determinants, the “old” and “new” represent the second major structuring dimension (Benson and Neveu, 2005). Bourdieu argues that influxes of new agents into the field can serve either as forces of transformation or conservation. The first phase of online journalism was severely conservative resulting in more shovelware rather than original reporting. Online journalism was almost entirely devoid of any kind of autonomy. Since then, however, online journalism became mainstream, and is currently undergoing a second, more rigorous and vigorous development stage (Nguyen, 2010) in which news organizations and journalists operating online generate their own economic, cultural, and social capital. As such an online logic is gradually being established incorporating the core values and ethics of journalism and at the same time creating new ones, such as immediacy, interactivity, and multiplatform delivery. In this context, traditional players who have migrated online (e.g. *The New York Times*) sustain their symbolic capital, others might even increase it (e.g. the *Guardian*) while also new players enter the field steadily gaining symbolic capital (e.g. The Huffington Post or the Slate Group web sites).

Within the field of online journalism therefore it seems that those enjoying more symbolic capital are the established news media brands, which have migrated online. This is supported not only by the evidence of prizes and awards, but also by the very structure and nature of symbolic capital which privileges the old. Symbolic capital is understood as accumulated prestige – this accumulation requires time, which is why the old is favored over the new. On the other hand, the new may quickly acquire prestige if it invests in the normative and ethical codes that structure the field. Thus, a new site such as the Huffington Post can be seen as prestigious insofar as it can mobilize and use the symbolic capital of known journalistic figures, or prestigious figures from other fields, such as academics and politicians. In addition, it can earn symbolic capital if it emulates and follows the core values of the field, including accurate and factual, objective in-depth reporting – thus, new sites such as TruthDig can accumulate symbolic capital.

Overall, it can be concluded that older, more established journalists and journalistic brands have more symbolic capital, while new contenders can accumulate symbolic capital if they can contribute not only to the journalistic codes of ethics, but also to the logic of the field, and its links with technology.

## Conclusions

This chapter sought to theorize online journalism as a field, using some of the conceptual tools offered by Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory. The discussion began with a consideration of the literature on journalism as a profession. We argued that, although this body of work has offered valuable insights, it faced important limitations, including the difficulty in accounting for the dynamism and change within and across professions. Moreover, even the notable exception of Abbott’s theory of professions as systems had difficulties theorizing the relationship across professions as well as their relationship to

other social structures. Thus, to understand online journalism we turned to Bourdieu's field theory, and the conceptualization of journalism as a subfield of the field of cultural production. Online journalism could then be theorized as a subfield within the subfield of journalism.

The discussion of the field on online journalism considered in a preliminary fashion its four forms of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. The picture that emerged in terms of "assets" is mixed. Online journalism has less economic capital than other print or broadcast journalism, but this capital is rising steadily, while the economic capital of at least print journalism is diminishing. In terms of cultural capital, objectified capital can definitely be considered substantial as online journalism's technological base can amplify the artifacts produced despite their intangible nature. However, this kind of capital is mediated by technology thereby diminishing its overall value, as it does not belong autonomously and exclusively to online journalism. Institutional cultural capital is growing and steadily rendered more important, while embodied cultural capital is still quite limited. Social capital is certainly on the rise; although membership of unions becomes less relevant: social media enable professionals to enhance networking not only with peers and sources, but also directly with audience members. Finally, the symbolic capital of online journalism remains low as legacy brands and journalists dominate. At the moment very few net-only initiatives seem to enjoy high symbolic value.

What is the relationship between this subfield and the one of traditional journalism? This may be seen in terms of struggle over possession and control of capital in all its guises. It should not be forgotten that one kind of capital can be converted to another kind of capital. This is clearly seen in the case of legacy news organizations, which are high in economic and often in symbolic capital. Specifically, the accumulation of symbolic capital tends to proliferate around certain publications or brands or even individuals. Considering that journalism depends on large-scale production, mass audiences, or well-targeted delivery those brands or individuals who manage to successfully convert cultural capital – meaning journalistic excellence – into economic capital – meaning good ratings and advertising revenues – tend to increase their symbolic capital – wide peer-recognition and high reputation levels – and thus to dominate the field. This situation reflects an established symbolic hierarchy within the journalistic field that structures the relationships between the various subfields. Brands and professionals of high economic, cultural, and hence symbolic capital tend to dominate the field exercising substantial power within it. Unsurprisingly, the advent of online journalism was initially discussed with skepticism while online news workers were perceived as second-class professionals (Singer and Tharp, 1999).

However, as online journalism evolves, it generates and accumulates its own capital, slowly but surely establishing its own rules and logic. To the extent that online journalism operates also within the field of technology, this logic will be at least in part dictated by this field. Thus new values, combining or reinventing traditional journalistic values emerge. A future project may study in more detail the logic of the subfield, but we can venture here that such values may include immediacy, networking, and multimedia or multiplatform delivery. The growing amounts of capital circulating in online journalism imply that such values and logic may well begin to dominate the field in the not-so-distant future. Indeed, the findings of recent research, such as Witschge and Nygren's (2009)



findings on the de-professionalization of journalism, may be partly attributed to the appropriation of traditional journalism's capital by the subfield of online journalism. These may constitute avenues for future research alongside more precise measurements of the amounts of capital circulating in the field.

A final issue that needs to be discussed concerns the question of convergence. Given the rise of convergence, understood as the eventual dissolution of the boundaries between different forms of journalism, as well as between the producers and consumers of journalism, can we still speak of a relatively autonomous subfield of online journalism? Indeed, Bourdieu's theory of fields appears to presuppose distinct fields, with more or less set boundaries, with costs of entry and exit, which were ruled by their autonomously set rules and logic. This is certainly not the case in journalism: its boundaries were more permeable from the outset, but made even more so since the rise of online journalism. On the other hand, if we wish to understand better the ways in which this kind of journalism operates, the tensions that are created between the different kinds of journalism but also within online journalism's various practitioners, its dynamism, and future directions, then the conceptual apparatus that Bourdieu has bequeathed is uniquely helpful. We can therefore retain the division into fields and subfields as an analytical one, keeping in mind that "players" move from field to field, gaining or losing capital, changing their habitus or their unique disposition toward life, and in the process changing the very fields into and out of which they move.

To conclude, although the field approach may require further conceptual elaboration when it comes to (online) journalism, it presents a valuable theoretical framework within which to study this subfield and its concrete instantiations in different countries or environments.

## Notes

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Part II  
Politics



# Online Journalism and Civic Life

João Carlos Correia

## Introduction

Is online journalism a new communicative actor endowed with civic potentialities? How can new media, particularly in journalism, strengthen more dynamic forms of civic participation and promotion of deliberation? Has new technology contributed to revitalization of the public sphere or has it become a tool of commerce for an increasingly undemocratic news media, disengaged from public dialogue? (see Fenton, 2010: 4)

This chapter clarifies conceptually the necessary conditions within online journalism for the existence of a public sphere that satisfies the requirements of a strong democracy: public use of reason without coercion, and equality and reciprocity between the participants in the collective debate. It analyzes experiences within online journalism that seek to use ICT to further develop and mobilize deliberative skills and, consequently, citizenship. Also it further seeks to understand the role of new media in the representation of an increasingly complex society, confronted with the insecurity of its long-established structures and with the appearance of enclaves of meaning, related to the eruption of new expressions of citizenship. What will be the role of new media in the representation of new rights and new social movements? Is it possible that technological changes inside the media field will lead to the emergence of new public spheres carrying a democratic will?

## Communication and Models of Democracy

Public discussion and subsequent formation of public opinion is frequently said to be one of the main functions of journalism in democratic societies. Recently, democratic theory scholars have been highlighting the increasingly important role of the media as an arena for public debate, in an age of mass communication and mass politics.

Behind different conceptions of democracy we may find different conceptions of the media's political role. One well-known and almost archetypal example of the intensive discussion on the relationships between journalism and the political system is the Dewey–Lippmann debate. Both Lippmann and Dewey shared a common belief in the essential role of the press in a democracy. Lippmann (1922) envisaged a role for the press as a bridge between the masses and powerful insiders who help to formulate the policies of elected decision-makers, while Dewey (1927) saw journalism's role to enable citizens to participate in the democratic discourse. They also differed on the role of the public in democratic societies. Dewey (1927) saw the public as capable of rational thought and decision-making, while Lippmann (1922) saw the citizens as unable to make good decisions and to participate in an enlightened and rational public deliberation. Familiar echoes of this debate still sound at present in theoretical discussions on the media's political role. There is an extensive literature analyzing the role of press in public life. The classics *Public Opinion* (Lippmann, 1922), *The Public and its Problems* (Dewey, 1927), *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, 1956), and *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, [1962] 1996) are important examples of different studies on the matter.

More recently, Hallin and Mancini (2004) developed a strong empirical analysis of relations between the media system and the political system, while Clifford G. Christians and colleagues, in *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (2009), built a normative approach that connects different roles attributed to the news media (monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative) with four different conceptions of democracy: pluralist liberalism, administrative liberalism, civic republicanism, and direct republicanism (Christians *et al.*, 2009: 97–98).

One of the theories concerned with public communication and the role performed by the media is the deliberative democracy model, which seeks to uncover the component of rational collective discussion among citizens within the political process. Deliberative democracy contrasts sharply with some of the prevailing elitist political theories, which emphasize the individual act of voting as the central institution of democracy.

The elitist theories argue that the choice of any social environment is always a mere conjunction of individual preferences (Arrow, 1963: 2, 6, 103). By perceiving democracy as a mechanism for choosing political leaders in the competition between parties through voting, an elitist model equates political dynamics with the market to some extent. In the elitist model, or at least in some of its formulations, citizens are “mere consumers of governance” (Erikson *et al.*, 2002: 16–17). This model reduces democracy to a mechanism for choosing political representatives who will set the direction of operations and public programs. By contrast, in the deliberative democracy model, the model of discourse that must prevail in the political debate should be one that fits with the political praxis inside the forum. While elitist theories only recognize private interests and try to legitimize the actions of experts and specialists through the aggregation of individual choice in elections, from the perspective of deliberative democracy, public problems require the creation of public forums in that private preferences can be modified in light of the discovery of general interests through argument and justification. Thus the discussion theory behind the deliberative model implies a network of communicative processes, inside and outside of the



parliamentary complex and its deliberative body, that sustains the existence of dialogic arenas where occur the formation of democratic opinion.

## The Meanings of Public Sphere

Under the influence of authors such as Jürgen Habermas, Hanna Arendt, or Dewey, the deliberative model implies the existence of an informal public sphere where (i) all the citizens endowed with reason could participate, as long as motivated by the strength of better argument and (ii) all subjects could be topics of a public and reasonable argumentative discussion. The public sphere is viewed democratically as the creation of procedures whereby those affected by general social norms and collective political decisions can have a say in their formulation.

Accordingly, formal requirements for the existence of this social instance have emerged from a wide range of theories: (i) Meetings should be public; (ii) citizens reflect and decide collectively rather than individually; (iii) all citizens have an equal opportunity to participate; (iv) decisions turn on arguments, not on coercive power; (v) citizens are fully informed; (vi) all alternatives are considered; (vii) deliberation is an ongoing process supported by institutions; and (viii) arguments are based on general principles and appeal to the common good, not exclusively to self-interest (Benhabib, 1992: 88).

Subsequently a functioning public sphere implies the existence of a constellation of communicative spaces that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates, and also the formation of public opinion. Its structural dimension includes media organizations and their political, economic, and legal environment (Dahlgren, 2005: 148–149).

In his earlier conception of the public sphere, Habermas states that the bourgeois public sphere could not have existed without a regularly published and accessible press that has grown and developed thanks to the initial impetus provided by the demands of commercial and financial information.

In later works such as *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas, 1996) the public sphere is seen as a sphere of identification and detection of problems, whose influence should continue to be reflected in the subsequent treatment of the issues that take place within the political system (Habermas, 1996: 359). Thus, deliberative democracy is nourished by an informal opinion that arises inside public spaces. On one hand we have informal and autonomous activity of formation of public opinion. This activity can be carried by citizens' movements, social movements, and so on. On the other hand, we have the institutional and legislative process that culminates in decisions that concern the development of concrete policies and legislative outputs. The public sphere appears to be a sensitive alarm system that increases the pressure exerted by the problems, not merely to identify them and thematize them, but also to problematize and dramatize them convincingly and effectively. In this sense, the public sphere has been analyzed using various metaphors:

- 1 One of the first metaphorical suggestions that we find considers that the public sphere can be envisaged as an extensive network of radars sensitive to social issues. These radars are located within society, sensitive to the point of reacting to pressure from social problems (Habermas, 1996; Gomes, 2008: 82–83).

- 2 The public sphere has also been compared to a resonance box that amplifies the pressure of problems by dramatizing them so they are taken into account and considered by the parliamentary institutions (cf. Habermas, 1996; Gomes, 2008: 82–83).
- 3 Another idea suggested the concept of public sphere as a network suitable to communicate issues and opinions.

Thus the identification of issues in the public sphere (civil rights, feminism) usually follows the same route: (i) certain issues are raised by intellectuals and social activists in the periphery of the political system; (ii) they are then picked up by journals, associations, clubs, forums for citizens, universities, professional organizations, and so on; (iii) the issues crystallize at the heart of social movements and subcultures, and are dramatized in ways that capture media attention; (iv) reaching a wide audience, they enter into the public agenda and ultimately influence policy-making and legislative institutions (Habermas, 1996: 341–342).

The demands of institutional architecture identified by theorists of deliberative democracy imply the existence of instruments and opportunities for the formation and intensification of discursive process. In fact there is no place of exhibition and visibility and at the same time, of discourse, discussion, and debate that can be compared, in terms of volume and importance, to the media system (Gomes, 2008: 118).

Of course, one could argue, as did Habermas (1996) and Dewey (1927), that the “public” should be conceptualized as something more than just a media audience, as a social reality existing as discursive interactional processes. However, in our complex and strongly mediated societies it is increasingly difficult to imagine the actual public sphere and its fundamental dimension of “interaction” without the citizens’ encounters with the media – where occur many of the communicative processes of making sense of and interpreting social and political reality. In the present day we have to accept as a fundamental element of the contemporary public sphere the circulation of media messages in many contexts, from the most structured and larger public forums to the broader micro-contexts of everyday life.

## **Online Journalism: A New Way to Increase Citizenship?**

Despite the recognition of the important role of media in the democratic process, the sociology of communication has raised serious questions concerning the civic potential of media.

- 1 The traditional media were incubated in environments where the regulators for systemic media are predominantly power and money. The media industry by its nature is driven by economic rationality moving away from the civic requirements supported by advocates of deliberative democracy.
- 2 The task of setting the agenda is largely usurped by politicians and journalists from major media. Public opinion is formed largely within the confines of a prior selection of subjects of public attention.
- 3 There is still a strong dependence on primary definers and powerful sources that define ultimately the news agenda by controlling the access to the flow of important

information, building a hierarchy of credibility based on power, legitimacy, and authoritativeness (Phillips, 2010: 88).

- 4 In news discourse and practice, frames and typifications are basic cognitive structures that guide the perception and representation of reality (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). In the domain of journalism theory, the construction of “typifications” is, according to authors such as Tuchman who explicitly use the concept, a kind of crystallization of the experience that grants stability to the perception of social life. “News workers use typifications to transform the idiosyncratic occurrences of the everyday world into raw materials that can be subjected to the routine processing and dissemination of news” (Tuchman, 1978: 50). In the face of each new situation, the actor/journalist will look for similar past events, and so s/he will act in a similar way to before, following the principle that things will remain identical. The critical problem is that typifications are artificial constructs, which may lead reporters to apply stereotypes, easy simplifications, and incorrect labels.

Discussing “news frames,” Reese (2001: 9) suggests that media studies should accentuate ideology, considering the dimension of their relations with society. Thus, there would be a conceptual and evaluative framework that shapes the meaning of an event, making it understandable to the ideological system and setting it implicitly in a number of ways: as legitimate or illegitimate, as moral or immoral, as right or wrong, as patriotic or unpatriotic, as adjusted or not to the community interests, and so on. This does not mean absence of autonomy of news workers, as some theories, such as the propaganda model, suggest: the codes for the use of ideology are provided by the imperatives of professional journalism. However the ideological meaning is defined *a priori* and it can coexist with professional codes. This happened during the Gulf War, when the Bush Senior administration was able to restrict the political debate in the media to the discussion of the option to punish Iraq for its aggression against Kuwait.

Many of these criticisms are leveled at mass media, and the partisans of online journalism present it as an alternative to those undesirable features of mass media. Online journalism can enable a strong interactivity with publics and the generation of a new kind of public discussion. It could overcome the dependence of economic and political systems on mass media, opening the agenda for issues that would never be highlighted in traditional media, be more attentive to alternative sources and, subsequently, to new angles of approach, facilitate public dialogue among citizens, and, finally, avoid the excessive use of typifications and routines from traditional newsrooms.

Within this narrative, new media, particularly the Internet, have given rise to new hopes. Alongside online journalism appeared a set of proposals seeking to overcome some of the pathologies related to the daily practice of traditional journalism, trying to reconcile it with more inclusive social practices and democratic deliberation.

Despite the fragile frontiers between some practices carried out by models of online journalism, we decided to take the risk of attempting to classify particular movements and proposals. Thus, we will refer to (i) citizen journalism and (ii) participatory journalism.

The choice of these two particular movements is due to their strong influence in academic, professional, and industrial contexts. According to Schudson, public journalism (predecessor of citizen journalism) was the best-organized movement within the

history of the American press (Schudson, 1999: 118). Additionally, citizen journalism, which appeared with the second generation of web communities, has proposed dramatic changes in the usual way of dealing with publics. Many authors committed to public journalism (such as Jay Rosen) saw their hopes being fueled by the interactive potentialities of new technologies and have actively contributed to the appearance of citizen journalism as a current that helps online networks to increase and promote public dialogue. Dan Gillmor's *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People for the People* (2004) remains arguably the most influential work to celebrate citizen journalism and was met with extraordinary success among the public, the academy, and many professionals, becoming one of the most influential books on journalism in the first decade of the century. Finally, participatory journalism is reshaping our intellectual, political, and commercial landscape, and is at the core of all discussions on the future of the industry.

Many authors (Riggio, 2007; Lasica, 2003) work with those concepts as synonyms; however, we follow the suggestions that connect participatory journalism with the cooperation of non-professionals in the context of mainstream media and citizen journalism as being more committed to the tradition of civic engagement in the public sphere, following the intuitions of so-called "public journalism."

### From public journalism to citizen journalism

The public journalism movement, generally seen as the antecessor of citizen journalism, emerged around 1990, in print and audiovisual media, from the critical consciousness of academics and journalists awakened by the lack of audience interest in journalistically mediated political information and also by low rates of citizen involvement in democratic processes, as evidenced by declining participation in elections. The conceptualization of "the public" in public journalism literature has not been consistent because public journalism has previously been mostly defined by its practice and not by theoretical formulations (e.g. Friedland, 2003). The movement's success was due, mostly, to the cooperation of organizations that sponsored civic experiences, establishing operating guidelines and preparing seminars, among many other activities that contributed to its consolidation (Haas, 2007: 68).

Public journalism seeks to encourage a more citizen-engaged press that increases the involvement of ordinary people with issues of public concern. Early proponents of public journalism, such as academic Jay Rosen and James Batten from the Knight Ridder Group, argued that newspapers should encourage greater audience involvement in news selection and promote dialogue on public issues.

Nip (2006: 6) states that the goals of public journalism in helping democracy are the following:

- 1 to connect to the community;
- 2 to engage individuals as citizens;
- 3 to help public deliberation in search for solutions.

Today, citizen journalism emerges as the second phase of public journalism strongly related to the advances in online journalism. Significantly, the Civic Journalism Interest

Group of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication that began in 1994 during the formative years of public journalism, has turned to new ways of expressing civic engagement, especially through online journalism, leading to a corresponding change of the group's name to the Civic and Citizen Journalism Interest Group in 2005. So, with the appearance of the Internet most of the experiences of public journalism applied to online journalism. Citizen journalism, participated in by net-citizens and citizen reporters, appears as a second phase of public journalism, thanks to the potentialities allowed by the Internet. The Internet has provided ordinary people with free access to large amounts of information and with the means to share information and facilitate discussions on public interest issues.

According to the arguments of its proponents, citizen journalism has the following advantages:

- Allows access to the production public distribution of messages by many people, which is an obvious comparative advantage to citizen groups who want to organize as publics but suffer the disadvantages of a peripheral location.
- Allows the news coverage of issues that traditional media do not find profitable.
- Authorizes, thanks to its interactive features (including the ability to add comments to articles), a more substantial discussion of current events in a way that traditional media could never allow (Joyce, 2007: 3).

### Participatory journalism

According to Nip (2006: 12) the term "participatory journalism" has some particularities that are distinct from citizen journalism. It was coined inside mainstream journalism, which now accepts the idea of giving news users the chance to express their views about public affairs. In participatory journalism, news users could participate in the newsmaking process in multiple ways, but user contribution is solicited within a frame designed by the professionals inside mainstream context. So participatory journalism generally falls into these broad categories: (i) audience participation at mainstream news media including staff weblogs, which incorporate reader comments, either through e-mails or direct postings; (ii) newsroom-sanctioned weblogs written by outsiders; (iii) discussion forums; (iv) articles written by readers; (v) photos, video, and reports sent in by readers; (vi) news and information web sites that accept works from independent writers and broadcasters, providing original interviews, research, and reporting previously checked and filtered by a professional staff. The famous OhmyNews, which recently closed, was an example of the last.

Some authors also believe in the specific nature of open source journalism. The general concept is that a cooperative of content producers and readers can be more effective in the correction of errors than a limited staff. The term generally means a collaboration between a professional journalist and his/her readers on a story, where readers who have some expertise on the topic are asked to contribute with suggestions, ask questions to provide guidance to the reporter, or even do actual reporting which will be included in the final journalistic product. However, even recognizing some

differences, its practices and methodologies aren't sufficiently codified to refer to a particular model of online journalism.

### The differences between citizen and participatory journalism

Nip (2006: 14) reduces the difference between citizen and participatory journalism to the intervention or absence of professional journalists. So, photos taken of the tsunami in South Asia by tourists and the local people in December 2004 would be citizen journalism if they were published by the people themselves, but would be participatory journalism if the material was handed to a mainstream news organization for publication.

We consider that the significant commonalities and differences of online journalism must lie in their respective contribution to the public sphere and deliberative democracy, and subsequent dialogue among citizens.

Here arise two very different perspectives on what concerns public life: in participatory journalism, participation from audiences and the public are affirmed as a way to correct the limits of traditional professional journalism. In this sense, the underlying ideology supported by the advocates and practitioners of participatory journalism emphasizes the distinction between active and committed users and journalists cloistered in the "ivory tower" of their routine practices and professional standards.

In the case of citizen journalism we state that this is more committed to the detection and discussion of collective problems, developing debate among citizens. So, the distinction isn't only about the interactivity with newsrooms (certainly important but just a part of the problem) but also about the quality of the interaction among citizens. Citizen journalism is no longer just about overcoming the limits of journalistic professionalism but goes further and tries to overcome the limits imposed on citizenship by a certain kind of journalism conditioned by primary definers and powerful sources. Many of the sites that reclaim the label of citizen journalism focus explicitly on issues and angles that they feel the "mainstream" journalists have not yet covered sufficiently, and try to adhere to the principles of public journalism, paying continuing and systematic attention to how well and how credibly they communicate with the public (Lambeth *et al.*, 1998: 17).

## Online Journalism and Deliberation: Limits and Possibilities

Inside online journalism there are different practices and proposals to establish its legitimacy, presenting themselves as attempts to overcome some of the above-mentioned pathologies of commercial mass media, increasing the participation of citizens in the process of agenda building, avoiding dependence on powerful sources and strengthening public dialogue. However, there are also serious criticisms directed at some of these proposals.

One major criticism of participatory journalism is that its supporters rely on a kind of dichotomy between journalists and the public, and consequently fail to take into account other mechanisms of power involved in the newsmaking process. Embedded in the mainstream context, the participation of audiences doesn't mean (at least necessarily) there has been any attempt to increase the quality of citizenship. This movement

appears to neglect the social and political components of power over the media system. Supporters of participatory journalism act as if journalists are the only ones responsible for gatekeeping and agenda setting, and their partial replacement by people without specific training would be a step forward in the democratization process. A substantial part of the ideology formulated around the promotion of this kind of journalism shows a confrontation between “us” (citizens aware of the free and unrestricted communication) and “them” (journalists as obstacles to that freedom, confined to rigid procedures and jealously guarding their position of “privilege” as keepers of information). However, the societal, economical, and political constraints that are involved in the newsmaking process remain hidden. Consequently, many argue that their supporters neither demand nor inspire fundamental changes to the commercial logic of news organizations.

Another major criticism particularly directed to participatory journalism is concerned with the immediacy and speed fetishism boosted by new technologies and the risks that it entails in terms of accuracy. The phrase “publish then filter” is the clearest expression of a series of projects depending on the production and dissemination of information from the voluntary collaboration of ordinary citizens. So, the immediacy of the Internet becomes the cause of major errors when a logic is imposed that speed is more important than the quality of information (Moretzsohn, 2007). News organizations are encouraged by immediacy to release and update stories before the checks demanded by journalistic integrity. Ultimately, these forms of expression may be a step toward the dismissal of specialized procedures and a complete submission to immediacy that turns a blind eye to the procedures of verification, confirmation, and credibility.

Generally, in spite the hopes brought about by the general discourse of online participatory journalism, many authors from the sociology of news production find that it hasn't significantly changed the hegemony of the mass media paradigm, in terms of routines and news values. Content analysis and ethnographic research within online newsrooms have found that many online projects use the same news stories, the same news judgment, operating in similar financial, organizational, and professional constraints (Fenton, 2010: 9). Jane Singer (1997) conducted one of the first observations of the routines in the production of online news, focusing mainly on the attitude of journalists in relation to new media. The journalists surveyed believed that their ethical and professional values were perennial in the new context and were a crucial factor in establishing differences in the proposals marked by a lack of professionalism.

Similar studies carried out in Spain by Masip (2005, quoted in Díaz Noci and Palácios, 2007: 92) and Soriano (2004) on the Internet's impact on traditional media, demonstrated that, although it is present in newsmaking, it has not completely changed the traditional routines. For its part, the research conducted in Brazil by Thais de Mendonça Jorge (2007, quoted in Díaz Noci and Palácios, 2007: 95) shows that online search, verification, and selection of sources is now a standard part of the everyday production routine, but has not changed traditional practices and news values. In Portugal, Zenith (2010: 33–34) compared Portuguese online journals (news/journalistic web sites), creating and applying a table of measurement of the levels of the potentialities offered by online journalism, in particular those considered most important and widely referenced by the extended literature on the matter: hypertextuality, interactivity, and multimediality (see Deuze, 2005; Palácios, 2003: 39–53; Canavilhas, 2008: 53).

The results obtained by Zenith (2010: 46–47) verified that immediacy is the only potential benefit with a significant presence in the table created by the author. Zenith found there to be a very low level of hypertextuality – even considered to be disastrously low, indicating a very embryonic stage of development of specific languages and techniques. Interactivity and personalization indices were also revealed to be low, which confirms the great distance that news web sites still keep between themselves and their visitors and users.

Even in online journalism with civic orientation, that pursues the improvement of public dialogue, searching for alternative ways of dealing with citizens and the political system, one also finds problems that are not yet solved or goals that are not yet achieved.

This was revealed in the significant work undertaken in Spain by David Domingo (2006: 24). The author analyzes the model of online journalism developed in different contexts: the web site of a print medium from a large group (elPeriodico.cat), a public television portal owned by the Generalitat (Government) of Catalonia – CCRTV (3cat24.cat), the web site of a local daily news company (DiarideTarragona.com), and a digital news portal (aMalla.net). The analysis was based on ethnographic observation of online newsrooms and in-depth interviews with reporters and editors.

The research discusses the formation of a critical discourse on traditional journalism, which laments the mix of information and entertainment and the self-referential nature of news production, increasingly distant from the problems of the public (Domingo, 2006, p. 56). It shows how the Internet and its non-hierarchical network were seen (in the context of this critical discourse) as an opportunity for a fundamental transformation of journalism in the sense of a return to rationality-oriented public service.

The study concluded that although interactivity was a keyword in the interviews with online journalists, journalists continued to be seen as producers and users as passive consumers (Domingo, 2006: 506–507). In online newsrooms linked to traditional media, the most oft-quoted news value was immediacy and the main goal was still the publication of stories as soon as possible. However, even more significantly, the analyzed routines in online newsrooms, even in the portal originally and specifically designed for the web, still favor traditional professional criteria as the main reference to produce an assessment of newsworthiness, rather than the preferences of users.

Finally, studies carried out inspired by the media effects theory have not clearly confirmed an increase in pluralism and political participation inside online journalism. The liberal and individualistic approach of uses and gratifications theory seemed well suited to the characteristics of the new environment. Consequently, this earlier theoretical framework was the first to be used when the new medium was introduced into our society (Rafaeli, 1986; Morris and Ogan, 1996). Conversely, it was thought that the agenda-setting hypothesis would be one of the theories that would suffer the hardest blow from the appearance of online journalism. However, it was found that the agenda-setting process was far from becoming irrelevant. In fact, the research carried out by scholars on the agenda-setting hypothesis showed that when people go to the Internet they often look for web pages from traditional media.

For instance, a study by Messner and Distaso (2008) reaffirmed the importance of traditional media in the blogosphere, but also the opposite, namely the growing influence of blogs and news web sites on traditional journalistic accounts. Blogs depend heavily on



traditional media for collecting information. The research verified that of 120 observed bloggers, 73% of them use other mainstream media as sources. In turn, the authors also note a significant increase in the number of times that the *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* have used blogs as news sources, indicating that they are an increasingly influential and credible source. This study also showed that the traditional hypothesis of agenda setting could be more complex, demanding more analysis of the relationships between different media, the audience, and sources.

Surprisingly, the hypothesis of the spiral of silence seems to have had some impact on literature concerned with online journalism. Noelle-Neumann's (1977) theory defines the "spiral of silence" as the process an individual experiences when "he may find that the views he holds are losing ground; the more this appears to be so, the more uncertain he will become of himself, and the less he will be inclined to express his opinion" (44). If individuals perceive that their opinions are in the majority or on the rise, they might be willing to speak out. However, if they judge that their opinions are on the minority side, they become silent and refrain from voicing those opinions out of fear of social isolation (Liu and Fahmy, 2011: 46). The literature indicates that experiencing fear of isolation and perceptions of the opinion climate are two key variables related to this theory. So it is worth testing these variables on online journalism, in digital forums. Basically, the supporters of online journalism believe that online forums limit the fear of social isolation that supports the hypothesis of the spiral of silence. The absence of social cues and the anonymity that one may have in online chatrooms, forums, and commentary boxes attached to web sites and blogs should moderate the effect of the fear of isolation inherent to the effect of the spiral of silence. However, this is not so clear an effect as the more optimistic thought it would be.

On the contrary, some authors found a tendency toward conformity in the fact that people prefer to form groups with those with whom they agree, a phenomenon called homophily in primary groups (Wilhelm, 1999: 161). Cass Sunstein, in Republic.com (2001), expresses his concern about the polarizing effects of the Internet. The Internet, as with other new technologies, dramatically increases the possibilities for people to hear their own voices and to wall themselves off from others (2001: 49). Sunstein argues that people must be exposed to expressions, opinions, and perspectives they would not have chosen. He states that groups of like-minded people are inclined to end up with a more extreme version of their original view after discussing it among themselves.

Dahlberg (2001) attributes the practice of flaming to the disinhibiting effect of digital communication, which motivates individuals to feel free to really express themselves because of the absence of socially identifying references. In flaming cases, anonymity increases the opposite of a pluralist participation: a disinhibition formed by manifestations of verbal abuse that intimidate and discourage the participation of others and, indeed, work as a form of social constraint.

Such discussions can easily be extended to two other types of theories related to media effects: thematization (Luhmann, 2009) and a vast range of theories strongly inspired by Habermasian insights that are grouped according to the concept of deliberation, supporting online journalism as a kind of universal expression of citizenship. The hypothesis of thematization – the idea that the media favor the formation of issues on which to focus attention – is the opposite of the idea of universal participation in the public sphere.

Luhmann, a remarkable author of systems theory, theorizes journalism as a subsystem of the media system (along with the subsystems of entertainment and advertising). Luhmann finds that the most important selection criteria of the media are surprising news, topicality, conflicts, quantitative data, local relevance, scandals, and norm violations.

From a systemic point of view each new event increases entropy and contingency. That is to say, each new piece of information contradicts prior understanding or changes a previous state of affairs. The subsystem of news media incorporates surprising news into the status quo and it reaffirms the norm after its violation. It does so defining the common themes on which to focus attention, assuring the system's stability. So the theory of thematization is consistent with studies that draw attention to the possibilities of online journalism to aggregate and specialize topics, readers, and thus induce the formatting of specific but fragmented forums used by participants and commentators. In this case, it raises the idea of a market dominated by countless versions of the "Daily Me." Such a fragmented news environment with interfaces situated in social networking sites is suspected of having a negative impact on the rational and democratic process (Fenton, 2010: 8–9) The opposite hypothesis is nurtured by those who see in the Internet and online journalism the possibility of forming a more inclusive public sphere, where everything can be discussed and to which all have access.

### **So, What's Civic in Online Journalism?**

There are several reasons to devise alternative ways of communication that emphasize a dynamic relationship with publics and social movements, a relationship that maintains itself open to critical attitude and to interchange of knowledge, opinions, feelings, and arguments by opposition to the hegemonic paradigm of mass communication.

Citizen and participatory journalism have some characteristics that may sustain the exchange of opinion and criticism, the openness to some aesthetic dimensions of news-making often dismissed as infotainment, and the use of new opportunities for contextualization created by multimediality (the simultaneous use of written, audio, and iconic signs by different media at once), hypermediality (the potentiality of remission between different layers), and interactivity (the chance for audience members to participate in the process of newsgathering and newsmaking).

The technological nature of online journalism (in all its multifarious forms) allows the cultivation of experimentalism and innovation in discourse, including hypertextual and multimedia techniques that may constitute the distinguishing feature of alternative forms of culture and representation of political identities.

The nonlinear and associative hypertext format exceeds the limits of the black and white, static, and uni-sensory world, leading to multisensory modes of representation. With hypertext there is an implicit invitation to surf among links, which may be simple references but also other forms of information opening up a whole universe of possibilities. Similarly, online journalism is a combination of multimedia elements and participation of readers in real time, in which notions of relevance and contextualization regarded as relatively rigid may be reconsidered. The multiplication of these possibilities can result in the acceptance of the agonistic dimension of communication as a field of

conflicting claims, with multiple versions, angles, and frameworks of the same events being confronted instantaneously.

Simultaneously it should be understood that audiences can appropriate various media materials in an argumentative and dialogical way (see Gomes, 2008: 152). Sonia Livingstone (1998) identified six routes toward reception studies that focus the role of active reception: cultural studies and Hall's theorization on oppositional decoding; the uses and gratifications model, which emphasized the idea of active audience; critical mass communication research with the concept of a resistant audience; the move to post-structuralism with Umberto Eco underlying the role of the reader; the feminist critique with the emphasis on the marginalized audience; and the ethnographic turn showing the importance of everyday life contexts in the reception of media messages. More recently the role of the audience took a new turn, becoming producer of and also public commentator on the traditional news flux. Alex Bruns (2011) identifies a form of reporting and commenting on the news that acts to filter the news flow and to highlight and debate salient topics of importance to the community. The community of bloggers, citizen journalists, and commentators offer alternative interpretations of the day's events, and critically watch industrial news and other sources providing further related (and often contradictory) information enabling readers to better assess the accuracy of mainstream news stories.

It is not by chance that media criticism and media watching are becoming increasingly strong movements worldwide. Blogs and other forms of intervention linked to citizen journalism often question the mainstream media, asking them about their representations of issues of collective interest. In this sense, online journalism may stand as a way of introducing elements of reflexivity to the industry. Deuze (2002: np) has already called attention to many sites worldwide that practice media criticism directed toward traditional journalism; quoting examples such as *Mediekritik.nu* in Sweden, *Extra!* in the Netherlands, and *onlinejournalismus.de* in Germany, which are still working with the same original goals, that is, discussing content found elsewhere either on the Internet or in traditional media.. This "journalism about journalism" acts to reinvigorate the function of journalism in perpetuating and amplifying public conversation on the criteria and practices of the media system.

Accordingly, there are multiple blogs and web sites that make media coverage a central issue. Media power has become one of the issues that invites attention, interest, and controversy in the public sphere. Not surprisingly, the agenda, the frames, and the editorial guidelines of the mass media are being increasingly criticized, discussed, and challenged in online discussions, on Facebook pages, social media, and blogs, and also by collaborative news media. Cultural studies have found that there is a legitimacy deficit that seems to punctuate examples related to oppositional decoding by audiences, in the sense referred to by Stuart Hall in 1973. In this kind of situation traditional media face a growing distrust from audiences, who begin to read between the lines promoting distinct versions of events, ending in the rejection of the official and hegemonic version, achieving the phenomenon Hall (1973, quoted in Hall, 2002) called oppositional decoding.

This has happened in both Tunisia and Egypt, for example. Obviously, social networks (especially Twitter) were used to call for demonstrations and not to discuss issues.

However, behind social networks, some blogs and web sites criticized the official coverage from governmental media, spreading news that reflected the point of view of revolutionaries. This was the case with the Nawaat web site (largely in French; [www.nawaat.org](http://www.nawaat.org)), which covered the news and uploaded pictures from all over Tunisian cities. As Timothy Garton Ash states in the [guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk) on January 19, 2011: “Professional satellite TV fed off online citizen journalism.” Al-Jazeera heavily relied on blogs, referencing Facebook pages and YouTube in reporting the events, and half the Tunisian television audience watches satellite TV.

The above examples lead us to the theoretical approach of Brian McNair (2008), who talks about the transition from a paradigm of control to a paradigm of chaos. The first paradigm includes a whole range of critical approaches to media culture as a monstrous apparatus that exerts a strong manipulation, while the second one is marked by fragmentation of audiences and channels and by segmentation of messages and platforms. The paradigm of control emphasizes the importance of structure and hierarchy in maintaining an unjust social order. It is based on the idea of economic determinism, where the ruling elites extend their control to the cultural apparatus of media. So it believes strongly in a unilateral formation of a dominant ideology. By contrast, the paradigm of chaos recognizes the desire to control by elites but suggests that the exercise of control is often interrupted by unpredictable eruptions and bifurcations emerging from the impact of political, cultural, economic, and technological developments in the communication process. Accordingly, the new public sphere faces new phenomena such as the increasing volatility of the news agenda, the emergence of frequent critical messages even in the mainstream media system, the multiplication of validity claims arising from conflicting minorities and social movements, the emergence of media with different and contradictory viewpoints, the expansion of alternative forms of expression, the effect of competition within the media, the increased scrutiny of the media itself, and the diversification and decentralization of media production (see McNair, 2008: vi, xiv, 4, 37, 124).

Obviously, one must ask if this paradigm fits in with the classic portrait of a deliberative public sphere, with its trust in communicative rationality and in the strength of better argument, but this is not the place to discuss the strong philosophical debate that emerged around the concepts supported by Jürgen Habermas. At least, one question remains open: Are the concepts of argumentative discussion and rational consensus still appropriate to analyze the public debate, bearing in mind the current conditions of increasing media pluralism and social complexity? Many authors suggest that online journalism is compatible with a plurality of public spheres, crossed by a plurality of rationalities, strategies, and interests.

## **Conclusion**

This increasing fragmentation of cultures and messages in late capitalist societies creates the opportunity to perceive the plurality of rationalities that intersect each other within the media industry. There are the techno-optimists who see online journalism as reinventing democracy, with their utopian vision of a brave new world with everyone connecting to everyone else, and there are the neo-Luddites (techno-pessimists), who

believe that online journalism will downgrade the news to a level of generalized commoditization. Both miss the point. The first approach emphasizes only normative voluntarism, forgetting that online journalism can be used by Nazi and pedophile groups or just by lobbyists and spin doctors who disguise themselves as independent journalists. The second one assumes a kind of economic reductionism that forgets the emergence of phenomena that can hardly be seen as just marketing to attract audiences.

We support an approach that looks to the new communicative environment as a chance to take into account several critical instances of legitimizing the actions and utterances produced by the various powers in the course of an increasingly diverse intervention by social movements within societies characterized by diverse values and visions of life. Thus, cultural pluralism induced, in a contradictory and ambiguous way, by conflicting social actors goes well with the fragmented and pluralist media environment catalyzed by new media and online journalism. These media environments can be an opportunity to support a more direct relationship with everyday life (defense of local identities, promotion of deliberative processes, focus on concrete issues and policies) and can be translated into a more inclusive citizenship.

However, these increasing opportunities aren't a necessary and inevitable outcome resulting from the use of new technologies. The product of online journalism continues to be an ambiguous and contingent result of the convergence of technological factors, organizational and economic constraints, political decisions regarding regulation, and civic commitment by publishers and journalists.

In this sense, old questions will return, as old fashioned as they might appear: What is the mission of journalism? What kind of training do professional journalists need to have in order to simultaneously work with new technologies and new participatory guidelines? How do we design and implement strategies that enrich and diversify the journalistic practices and discourses in order to envision new agendas and new frameworks? Media are confronted with contradictory interests, being themselves compelled to reconcile economic, cultural, professional, ethical, and deontological points of view. The answers to these questions will be the outcome of decisions that are not strictly technological choices. Without an ethical and political discussion, technological euphoria will miss the point. Without taking into consideration the nature and impact of technological changes, ethical and political discourse will be helpless.

Coming from spontaneous counterpublics, we find, in specific circumstances, ways of informal, spontaneous communication that work as a kind of natural element of criticism, but that stay confined to restricted circles without achieving visibility in the media. However, in democracy, the frontiers between those kinds of communication and the public sphere are not so strictly rigid: the pressure from excluded groups may often become politically relevant. Within this complex environment inspired by the opportunities of participation arising from some movements inside online journalism, the chances for excluded agents and new social movements to bring new issues to visibility and collective discussion in order to obtain public recognition are not completely or explicitly denied. In spite of their internal contradictions, new media and online journalism perhaps appear as interstices where counterpublics representing the memories, purposes, and claims from several excluded social agents still continue an ongoing activity in order to obtain some gains inside the hegemonic consensus.

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# De-democratizing the News? New Media and the Structural Practices of Journalism

Natalie Fenton

## Introduction

In the last decade news media have seen many changes. There has been a tremendous growth in the number of news outlets available including the advent of, and rapid increase in free papers, the emergence of 24-hour television news and the popularization of online and mobile platforms. Newspaper circulation and readership levels are at an all-time low. The way news is produced and distributed is faster than ever before and often takes place on several platforms at once. These factors have contributed to what we know today as news, but they are not the whole story. These changes are part of a more complex history of marketization, globalization, deregulation, and technological transformation that has repeated itself in many places around the globe and resulted in both a thrilling story of abundance, as the space for news in the digital age is expanded, and a sorry tale of retraction as the business model for commercial news practice, particularly for newspapers, falls apart. Both stories have purchase in reality. But a critical evaluation of each demands a reconsideration of what we want news for and how it can be delivered in the future. This chapter begins and ends with the quest not just to reconsider what news is now or has been in the past, but what news ought to be and how its potential value to society can be realized.

Of course, as soon as the value of news to society is invoked, the contribution of news to the public sphere and consequently its relationship to a healthy democracy follows suit. Indeed, freedom of the news media is often seen as a key indicator of democratic life; news as the life-blood of a democracy. In this conception of news the value of news journalism is inscribed in its contribution to vital resources for processes of information gathering, deliberation, and action. And in this manner, the relationship between journalism and democracy is frequently understood as causal. The more news we have,

the more democratic our societies are; the less news we have, the less democratic we are, triggering a presumption of an inevitable sequential relationship. But democracy is far more than the quantity of news and many so-called developed democracies have a plethora of news media but a public sphere that is severely impoverished (Aalberg, Aelst, and Curran, 2010). The mythology of naïve pluralism that equates more news with better democracy chimes with a very similar one about the Internet – just because there is an abundance of space online and digital media works at such speed it expands the news we read or hear, opens our minds, enables us to monitor and hold to account the powerful, and to facilitate and maintain deliberation – all factors that are critical to a functioning democracy. However, neither journalism nor the Internet *creates* democracy and democracy does not invent journalism or indeed the Internet. So when we advocate this relationship we should also add a critique of the different types of democracy situated within particular social and political configurations along with the nature of news media situated within each so-called democratic formation before we ask: What more could and should the news media, old and new, do for democracy, and what is beyond their power to do? And when we do that, invariably we find a news media that is flawed and a democracy that is left wanting.

There are very many studies that elucidate the failings of a news media to serve democracy. Habermas (2006) sums up several of them in relation, in particular, to developed neo-liberal democracies when he writes of:

the intrusion of the functional imperatives of the market economy into the “internal logic” of the production and presentation of messages that leads to the covert displacement of one category of communication by another: Issues of political discourse become assimilated into and absorbed by the modes and contents of entertainment. Besides personalization, the dramatization of events, the simplification of complex matters, and the vivid polarization of conflicts promotes civic privatism and a mood of anti-politics.

Habermas, 2006: 27

This is now a common refrain in political communications. The debate often begins with the nature of democracy itself. Within liberal democracies power is gained by winning elections. Winning elections requires persuasion, which means engaging in impression management – what Louw (2005) refers to as “image making, myth making and hype” on behalf of elite political actors. The media, hungry for news fodder, routinely access and privilege elite definitions of reality and are claimed to serve ruling hegemonic interests, legitimize social inequality, and thwart participatory democracy.

There are many other contributory factors to this political malaise. Cottle (2003) claims that commercial television news is primarily a commodity enterprise, run by market-oriented managers who place outflanking the competition above journalistic responsibility and integrity. It is charged with being in the business of entertainment – attempting to pull audiences for commercial not journalistic reasons, setting aside the values of professional journalism in order to indulge in the presentation of gratuitous spectacles and images that create superficiality, while it traffics in trivialities and deals in dubious emotionalism. In other words, mainstream news has systematically undermined the crucial arrangement which is meant to operate between a working democracy and its citizens. This, it is claimed, has contributed forcefully to our political disenchantment.

George Monbiot, a former journalist and now part of the progressive commentariat in the UK, echoes some of these concerns while adding some of his own in relation to local newspapers in the UK:

This is the universal view of the national media: local papers, half of which, on current trends, are in danger of going down in the next five years, are all that stand between us and creeping dictatorship. Like my colleagues, I mourn their death; unlike them I believe it happened decades ago. For many years the local press has been one of Britain's most potent threats to democracy, championing the overdog, misrepresenting democratic choices, defending business, the police and local elites from those who seek to challenge them.

*Guardian*, November 9, 2009

Local newspapers he says entrench the power of local elites and do nothing to hold power to account:

It's true that the vacuity and cowardice of the local papers has been exacerbated by consolidation, profit-seeking, the collapse of advertising revenues and a decline in readership. But even if they weren't subject to these pressures, they would still do more harm than good. The local papers fail to challenge the powerful because the powerful own and fund them. [...] Yes, we need a press that speaks truth to power, that gives voice to the powerless and fights for local democracy. But this ain't it.

*Guardian*, November 9, 2009

In the UK it would seem there is a relationship of sorts between journalism and democracy, but a largely dysfunctional one whose breaking points pivot on issues relating to the concentration of ownership and deregulation, commercialism, and marketization. Journalism, it is worth reminding ourselves, is not only democratizing, it can also be de-democratizing.

And then came the Internet. The Internet, we are told (Garrison, 2000, 2001, 2003; Rivas-Rodriguez, 2003; Gillmor, 2004; Pavlik, 2001), brings new ways of collecting and reporting information into newsrooms. It brings forth a new journalism that is open to novices, lacks established forms of editorial control, can stem from anywhere (not just the newsroom), involves new writing techniques, functions in a network with fragmented audiences, is iterative and delivered at great speed. It reinvigorates democracy through increasing plurality, accessibility, and participation. But the Internet is just a tool and the possibility for new forms of journalism it conjures up must also play out in the same social, political, and economic structures of democracy as the old journalism and traditional news media. Accordingly, the Internet can also be de-democratizing. The contours of this argument are illustrated below by reference to recent research on new media and the news in the UK, undertaken at Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre (Fenton, 2010) and ongoing since 2007.<sup>1</sup>

## **New Media and the News**

This research (Fenton, 2010a; Phillips, Lee-Wright, and Witschge, 2011) now consists of several empirical strands, but began with one of the first large-scale studies in the UK

into new media and journalism. Using interviews, ethnography, and qualitative content analysis to investigate news production processes in a representative sample of news media, the research combined macro-social critique with micro-organizational analysis to gain a complex, critical understanding of the nature of news and news journalism in a digital age. Our central concern in this endeavor was to subject to empirical scrutiny the ways in which new media, news, and journalism contribute to democratic political practice and feed public interest.

We found that the Internet has indeed modified news and journalism, sometimes in positive and productive ways. New voices have found expression in blogs (Couldry, 2010) and alternative news sites operating out of civil society have found space and voice online (Curran and Witschge, 2010); new means of brokering intelligent dialogue across nations have emerged. The Internet has enabled established communities of interest to be more efficient in their circulation of communication and sharing of information with one another (Fenton, 2010b). And as a repository of information and knowledge the Internet is unparalleled. But our findings also reveal that journalism in the digital age challenges utopian visions of the Internet as a brave new world with everyone connected to everyone else, a non-hierarchical network of voices with equal, open, and global access. Rather, this latest “new” world of “new” media has not greatly expanded the news that we read or hear or changed mainstream news values and traditional news formats; neither has it connected a legion of bloggers to a mass audience. Instead, this research points to an industry and a practice in trouble.

Conclusions from this research support the now familiar retort that news media are in crisis. A crisis that emerges from some of the changes outlined above, which have resulted in a decline in advertising revenue combined with increased investment in new media technologies to attract audiences online, alongside cuts in personnel as profit margins have decreased, resulting in a negative impact on journalism (Freedman, 2010). Put simply, in the digital age the space for news has expanded exponentially and the speed at which it has to be delivered is virtually instantaneous, with fewer professional journalists employed to do the job. The depreciation of the current business model, together with increasing commercial pressures, is devaluing the pursuit of news journalism that is in the public interest, impacting in particular on original newsgathering, investigative reporting, foreign, and local news (see below) – none of which can provide the necessary economies of scale to buck the financial down-turn. In a context where the business of news is failing and news as a product is fast losing its market value to advertisers as much advertising migrates online, the market rationale for the provision of news for the public good and in the public interest comes under scrutiny. In other words, recognition and development of the product’s contributory value to democratic society leading to reinvestment in news journalism is superseded by market ambition and the desire to deliver extensive profits to shareholders.

Currently, news that is surviving is, on the whole, suffering the consequences. Our research reveals journalists being thrust into news production more akin to creative cannibalization than the craft of journalism – as they need to fill more space and work at greater speed while also having improved access to stories and sources online – they talk less to their sources, and find themselves captured in desk-bound, cut and paste, administrative journalism (Phillips, 2010) that quite literally recirculates news found elsewhere

online. In a bid to maintain a competitive edge, journalists spend a large amount of time monitoring other media online, the news wires, and user-generated content. Rewriting stories gained through this constant monitoring is the main task of many journalists (especially in online newsrooms). Analysis of the content of mainstream online news further reveals that much of the abundant news online is the same: news organizations often cover stories from the same angles and different news organizations repeatedly present the same information in their stories (Redden and Witschge, 2010). Ready-made fodder from tried and tested sources takes precedence over the sheer difficulty of dealing with the enormity of user-generated content or the overload of online information. Rather than the transformative new world of participatory journalism fueled by countless sources once deprived of a voice in the public sphere, we found a news environment driven by the principles of commercialism wherein news organizations foreground rationalization (by cutting back on journalists) and marketization (through the increasing commodification of news) at the expense of ideal democratic objectives in a way that has led to the homogenization of content (Redden and Witschge, 2010) rather than the increased plurality promised of the digital age.

The digital age has also, of course, brought with it increased possibilities for civil society to campaign and publicize their work (Fenton, 2010b). However, in the rush to be heard, resources (financial and staffing) have become more rather than less important (as claimed by many new media evangelists). Many large and well-resourced civil society associations have been able to respond to a media-saturated environment through a growth in press and public relations offices increasingly staffed by trained professional journalists. The resource-poor, however, find it much more difficult to keep up with changes in technology and the explosion of news space and much harder to stand out amidst the countless voices online that all compete for journalists' attention. Furthermore, the increased pressures on journalists to fill the expanded space for news in record time, combined with the pressures on civil society associations to maximize news coverage, result in many civil society associations feeling compelled to provide material that conforms to pre-established journalistic norms and values, diminishing their ability to advocate on particular causes and issues in their communications (Fenton, 2010b).

In this context, protecting and enhancing a diversity of media content is ever more vital. Even though there is now a plethora of media outlets, and citizens and civil society can publish media content more easily than ever, there still is a significant threat to pluralism given the domination of a limited number of organizations that control the flow of news and the contours of public debate. Citizen media may be growing but it is still overshadowed by the major international news organizations. The large traditional news organizations with a strong market position and extensive and established news production infrastructure have responded to the current climate by investing heavily in online platforms. UK citizens predominantly use online news sites that are run by existing news providers further asserting the already significant dominance of the major players (Ofcom, 2007). Furthermore the organization of web search tends to send more users to the most popular sites in a "winners take all pattern" (Hindman, 2009: 132). Added to this, Ofcom<sup>2</sup> have found that, of the top ten news web sites by unique user, four were run by Internet-based organizations. These were Google News (a news aggregator site that produces none of its own content), Yahoo! News, AOL News, and MSN

News (all sites that rely almost entirely on news agency reports) (House of Lords Select Committee on Communications, 2008). It seems ever likely that the voices on the web will be dominated by the larger more established news providers, rather than any form of citizen media, in a manner that limits possibilities for increased pluralism.

This situation is repeated in varying degrees across the globe. To mention just a few of these studies, Downie and Schudson (2009: 2) note that in the USA:

the economic foundation of the nation's newspapers, long supported by advertising, is collapsing, and newspapers themselves, which have been the country's chief source of independent reporting, are shrinking literally. Fewer journalists are reporting less news in fewer pages.

The 2011 annual report from the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism notes that newspapers are suffering continued revenue declines in the USA with newsrooms now 30% smaller than in 2000. Consequently their aspirations have narrowed and their journalists are stretched thinner. They also express concern that with lower pay, more demands for speed, less training, and more volunteer work there is a general devaluing of the profession (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011).

The Open Society Institute Media Program has investigated the impact of the financial crisis on media and news delivery to citizens in 18 countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. The research analyzed media performance in 2009 compared with the previous three years exploring in particular "the cost-saving measures taken by ... news carriers, and the effects of these measures on output, breadth and depth of coverage, scope of investigative reporting, and opportunities for open public debate" (Open Society Institute, 2010). It reveals that media across the region had lost 30 to 60% of their income and were forced to adopt cost-saving measures, including reduced volume, staff layoffs, reduced investigative reporting, and cuts in international and provincial coverage. They relate the changes to the global financial crisis that brought about severe constraints in news production as well as ownership changes resulting in an overall drop in the quality of news delivered to citizens and as a consequence a news media that has become shallower, more entertainment-centered, increasingly isolationist, more prone to political and business influences, and lacking in investigative bite.

The current collapse of the news economy has been blamed partly on new technology whilst also turning to new technology as its savior. It is true that the need to invest in online platforms has taken investment from human resources and, in particular, investment in journalists (Lee-Wright, 2010). It is also true that the Internet has led to the decoupling of classified advertising from news as it shifts to the likes of Craigslist (in the USA) and Gumtree (in the UK). And, as outlined above, new technology has brought with it new practices of journalism that have changed the very nature of the production of news where "speeding it up and spreading it thin" has become the norm. But new technology is also endowed with the potential to save news, delivering a form of

collaborative journalism more suited to the post-Enlightenment period – it may be paper-less but it will be people-full, participatory, and as a result, more democratic.

But there are serious reservations about whether the Internet on its own can fill this gap. Although online newspapers are growing and their print versions are declining, empirical evidence shows that people use the Internet mostly for entertainment purposes and online they are more likely to seek out only those fragments that are of particular interest to them rather than the pursuit of news and current affairs information more generally (Hilt and Lipschultz, 2004). And although news consumption online is steadily increasing there is very little evidence to support the view that the Internet has been established as a primary source of news except for a very small minority (Castells, 2009: 231). It is also argued that the abundance of choice available online results in less exposure to news and current affairs – just as it may be easier to find it is also easier to avoid (Prior, 2007). Similarly, Patterson (2010) argues that an abundance of news does not necessarily enhance democracy, even if consumption is high, if the nature of the news content serves the interests of the news industry over the public's information needs. Furthermore, it is worth bearing in mind that audiences in the UK are still predominantly focused on offline media with 59% stating a preference for traditional media compared with 13% who rate new media as their medium of choice (KPMG, 2012). And of course, issues of the digital divide are still very much with us with over a quarter of households in England still without an Internet connection direct to their home and 11% of UK households still unable to get broadband at 2 MB (Ofcom, 2009). While recognizing that the Internet is not the democratic panacea that many believe it to be, we should also note that the average UK viewer spent 18 hours per year watching early evening regional news bulletins in 2008, an hour less than in 2003 (Ofcom, 2009).<sup>3</sup> Other research notes that viewing for the main national commercial evening news bulletin (ITV) fell by a huge 38% between 1997 and 2007, with viewing of the main BBC news bulletin falling by 11% (Aalberg, Aelst, and Curran, 2010). Taking all these factors into account it would seem that consumption of news overall in the UK is falling and the Internet is not currently filling the gap.

So, just as the demise of news is not a phenomenon entirely beholden to the introduction of new technology, it is unlikely that its rebirth will be either. The demise of news is, rather, linked directly to the structures of advanced capitalism. This can be illustrated further by a closer look at another element of our research in the Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre that focuses on local news in the UK.<sup>4</sup>

### **Local News and the Democratic Deficit**

Earlier research (Franklin, 1988), a good decade and a half prior to the impact of the Internet, into the influence of local government public relations on local newspapers concluded that 96% of press releases issued by the local authority generated stories in the local press with significant recycling of the same news between newspapers in the same regional newspaper group. Franklin (1988) also points out that press releases were often reproduced wholesale with little evidence of any original journalism. Moreover a newspaper's willingness to engage in what Davies (2008) has called "churnalism" bore a

direct correlation to the size of the newspaper and the number of journalists it employed. Clearly, the concern that news media is failing to deliver a high-quality news service is far from new (Franklin, 2006; Franklin and Murphy, 1998) and is not simply a consequence of the online environment. Rather, it is linked more fundamentally to the business of news and the practices of neo-liberalism – the increasing marketization of news and the ruthless logic of an economic system that demands ever-increasing profit margins and share returns resulting in fewer journalists doing more work, undermining the provision of news in the public interest. As Roy Greenslade notes, the leaders of the big regional press were very much part of this system that depended on ever higher returns:

To do that they kept a close eye on the “costs”, ensuring that the staffing of mechanical jobs involved in newspaper production were pared to the bone. There was little fat to cut by the time ... that revenue began to fall away, as the rivers of gold (aka classified ads) flowed towards Internet sites the papers did not own. Yet the insistent demands of the market meant that profits must be maintained. So who could be cut next? The answer sadly was journalists ... the net result of the cuts was a diminution of journalism.

Roy Greenslade, *Evening Standard*, April 2009

In the worst cases local newspapers are simply being closed down altogether. In the UK the Newspaper Society notes that 101 local papers closed down between January 2008 and August 2009 and this trend has continued. Furthermore, the Advertising Association have forecast that the press advertising market is likely to shrink yet further by between £700 million and £1.6 billion by 2019 with the regional press taking most of the impact (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2009). Television news locally and in the regions and local commercial radio news is also struggling with commercial radio revenues down by 5% in 2008 – a pattern that looks set to continue (Ofcom, 2009). Many commercial local radio stations are reduced to absolute minimal staffing on news desks, one commercial station covered in this research was functioning with only two journalists trying to serve the entire region, feed the web site and edit the programs. Success in local and regional news now appears increasingly to depend on scale. This means more mergers and more takeovers with larger companies serving bigger regions with less and less relevance for local people.

Since the 1990s, following successive relaxation of ownership rules in the Broadcasting Act of 1996 and the 2003 Communications Act, we have seen a rapid consolidation of the newspaper industry in the UK into a handful of regionally based monopolies that dominate the market. The top 20 regional press publishers now account for 87% of all regional and local newspaper titles in the UK, and 97% of the total weekly audited circulation. The key consequence of this process of merger and takeover has been to reduce radically the number of groups publishing local newspapers from 200 in 1992, to 137 by 1998, and 87 in 2010 (Newspaper Society Intelligence unit 1 January 2010, ABC/VFD/Independently audited figures).

In an environment of cost-cutting and profit maximization that leads to economies of scale and the consolidation of newspaper groups that results in reduced resources for newsgathering and a subsequent narrowing of the range and diversity of voices and coverage, the damage to the public sphere is potentially vast. The evidence on the ground



shows that larger companies formed with the express purpose of increasing shareholder returns are highly unlikely to invest in more journalism. Despite consolidation and the economies of scale introduced, commercial local news services have still faced ongoing investment cuts in recent times. Cuts have often been made irrespective of market conditions. In 2006, *The Times* reported that the Trinity Mirror Group, one of the largest owners of local news titles in the UK, had axed 300 jobs in spite of a “buoyant” market.<sup>5</sup> But large organizational structures with significant corporate demands, the very epitome of neo-liberal practice, have now become financial burdens and part of the problem (Picard, 2010).

Yet more liberalization of cross-media ownership rules in local and regional media is likely to exacerbate this issue leading to more mergers and takeovers, larger companies serving bigger areas with fewer journalists, further diminishing the reason people turn to local news in the first place – for local accountability, the scrutiny of power and a sense of local identity and voice (Fenton *et al.*, 2010).

The coalition government in the UK has also placed the market firmly at the core of all local media policy considerations. Having rejected the previous Labour government’s proposals for Independently Funded News Consortia, it is committed to a concept of localization that is centered on commercial growth in local television and online services. This includes a proposal to significantly relax local cross-media ownership rules – an approach that promises to prioritize deregulation over democracy, while emphasizing market value over social value. The Culture Secretary, Jeremy Hunt has stated that “[t]he Government believes in localism and the enormous benefits of fostering local cultural, economic and political identities,” adding that “[w]e are driving forward greater transparency at all levels of public life – and the challenge and scrutiny of local journalists is vital to that... I want a modern regulatory environment which will help nurture a new generation of hungry, ambitious and profitable local media companies” (Hunt, 2010).

But the economies of scale required in order to deliver profitable local news result in the diminution of the very thing people are crying out for: local news that serves their local community. What we are left with is a form of remote localism that has its sights set on the bottom line rather than the news service people want. What is more, the news reading population know this all too well. In our research on the news needs of local communities (Fenton *et al.*, 2010)<sup>6</sup> there was fierce criticism of what was understood as a long-term decline in the quality of local news journalism, which consumers chiefly associated with content convergence and the increasing primacy of commercial values in local news provision. Interviewees professed a strong sense for the loss of local journalism as watchdog:

P1: You think, where’s the quality journalism here where people are going out and getting under people’s skin and getting their info?

P2: It’s lack of interviews as well, it seems, like, interviews, it’s more now, “can you give me a quote?,” rather than actually getting a background of actually who somebody is.

P3: Let’s get the reporters back out into the communities, actually reporting about what is going on.

P4: Yeah, they should have foot patrols.

P5: You know, send them around the schools, send them to community centers, send them into old people's homes, get people's opinions, people's stories.

P6: It's as if the reporters aren't out actually looking for stories, it's as if ... a lot of time it feels like ... and I know for a fact that they do, but they just trawl the internet looking for stories that they can publish, that they can reword and then publish.

Participants, Cowling middle-aged group

Participants also expressed an equally strong desire for the return of “watchdog” journalism that goes with journalists' actual presence in the community and at events. They called for active, visible reporting that speaks to people, recognizes, and listens to the various voices in community – particularly those without authority or power, reinforces standards and thereby holds power to account; for a journalism and news in and from the communities they inhabit.

This research revealed that people feel a genuine loss of independent reporting that provides information, investigation, analysis, and community knowledge in the coverage of local affairs. Independent reporting that revealed not only what local government and private interests are doing, but also the motivation behind their actions. In sum they wanted a journalism that could dig deep and provide people with insight that takes time and resources to reach. This is the watchdog function of the news and it is a function that is still at the heart of what people want from their local news service – reporting that holds truth to power and keeps local authorities, business-, and professional leaders accountable to the legal and moral framework of society.

However, in an environment of mergers and regional consolidation, local news is removed from the local vicinity to out-of-town premises, with journalists who are out of touch with the communities they serve. The local news then ceases to be relevant to local people and something very tangible is lost in the process. The social benefits of local news were recounted time and time again by our participants. When they had lost their local newspaper they felt they had lost far more than news about the area, they had lost a sense of community and belonging that went with it:

Because it [local news] makes the community, doesn't it? It makes it all feel like you belong somewhere, I mean you're part of something.

Participant, Long Eaton elderly group

The lack of a local paper also reflected a poignant sense of vulnerability and powerlessness that contributed in turn to a feeling of isolation and “not being listened to” by local centers of power.

People who read local news wanted independent local newspapers with a physical presence in the locale and journalists who could and would challenge the powerful, investigate wrongdoings, and campaign for social change. The local journalists we spoke to also saw this as their role but were structurally constrained by the contemporary configurations of local news production with fewer and fewer journalists employed to fill more and more space, often detached and disconnected from the area they were supposed to cover.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ, 2009) note that the local newspapers of the *Birmingham Post* and *Birmingham Mail* plus their associated titles had 16 offices ten

years ago and they are now down to four. Five years ago they had approximately 230 journalists, now that has shrunk to around 160. They have also lost all specialist journalists in transport, home affairs, the industrial correspondent, the community affairs editor along with three chief reporters. The courts/crime specialists have more than halved and business specialists have gone from nine to six. This is mirrored in many other places as news desks, sub-editors, and journalists are moved to centralized locations that serve regions rather than locales, often many miles from the communities they are supposed to be speaking to and reporting on. With the increased pressures in the newsroom noted above, journalists now have a limited knowledge of the areas they cover and rarely get out to do local journalism. The clear conclusion is that the democratic potential of news media and the structural practice of local news production and journalism are at odds.

Evidently, the critical relationships between local news and democracy and between journalism and citizenship only work under certain conditions. Currently, on the whole, those conditions do not function for the public interest. The material conditions of contemporary journalism (particularly unprotected, unregulated commercial practice) do not offer optimum space and resources to practice *independent journalism in the public interest*. On the contrary, job insecurity and commercial priorities place increasing limitations on journalists' ability to do the journalism most of them want to do – to question, analyze, and scrutinize. Through prioritization of the pursuit of profit and shareholder returns, news organizations that deliver local news have lost sight of their product value – a value recognized and desired by all of the participants in this study. The commodification of local news with little or no regard for its use value has torn apart the relationship between news and democracy.

## **A New Age of New Journalism?**

Of course, the age of the Internet has given rise to the interactive and participative characteristics of the web that opens up the potential for everyone with the right tools to play the role of a journalist through the sharing of news and information. This impact comes in three main forms. Firstly, civic journalism is increasing; secondly, citizen access to public information and government services is expanding; and thirdly, citizens are more and more able to get direct contact with news sources themselves (Pavlik, 2001; Fenton and Witschge, 2010). Our case studies revealed several examples where citizens had stepped into the fold and set up their own online news service.

Surveying the mediascapes in the localities studied, we identified many non-journalists producing hyper-local content, often in innovative ways. These individuals (or groups of individuals) characterized themselves neither as newsmakers nor as journalists and were insistent that they could not and should not be seen as replacing journalists. Rather, their role is important in two respects: (i) they fill in a gap in the provision of (hyper) local media content; and (ii) they strengthen local democracy.

There is a wide range of content from local organizations (including voluntary organizations, charities, churches) and local people available especially on the Internet. Web sites of various organizations, blogs, e-mail lists, newsletters, Facebook pages, MySpace, Twitter as well as printed leaflets, handouts, information on notice boards, and

so on all provide information and sometimes news that are of local importance. The sources and contents of such information are however fragmented and often difficult to find for local people. As one group pointed out:

P1: It's not that you can't get your voice out there, because you can. I mean never before has it been so easy to get your voice out there. You can get your voice out in a sort of constant babble.

P2: You can, you can blog yourself to death.

P1: Yeah you can, it's just that there's no, it's just a voice.

P3: There's no impact.

P2: Very little impact.

P4: Nobody's listening.

Kings Cross middle-aged group

This informal, ad hoc non-journalist-produced local content is of value when people know where to find it, but it is also intermittent, unpredictable, and particular to the individual producing it. This is brought home (literally) by the case of Tony Fountain who set up a self-financed local news web site in response to the closure of the local newspaper the *Long Eaton Advertiser*. By his own admission "one man in his bedroom" cannot provide a comprehensive and consistent news service. As such he is driven by his own particular interests, who he happens to meet that day, or what he happens to come across in the street. He also spoke of the severe limitations of an online-only service that is drowned out by the abundance of online content more generally. He compensates for this by the production of a printed news-sheet but cannot afford to distribute this very widely or consistently.

Similarly, William Perrin, the founder of kingscrossenvironment.com, a local London news web site, runs the service "simply to make it [Kings Cross] a better place" (Interview, William Perrin). The web site receives between 90 and 120 unique visitors per day. A newsletter goes out to a few hundred subscribers and the site's community videos are also available on YouTube. The web site aims to increase the effectiveness of local activism, relies on contributions from volunteers, and has an archive of about 800 articles on the area. Like many similar web sites, it is self-financed and a model based on advertising income is not desirable or even feasible. "I'm not trying to sell advertising, it doesn't matter that hundreds or thousands of people are looking on my website. What matters to me is that the people who need to know locally are looking at my website" (Interview, local web site owner). These types of initiatives are clearly not emerging business models and do not replace local news but can be a complement to it.

Communities of interest whose reach is not delineated by geography have also had success in developing and distributing news to particular interest groups. *Muslim News* provides news and information for a diverse faith community for free. The news production is embedded in the community and privately funded by the owner/editor. The aim is not only to enable communication inside the community, but also to improve the representation of Muslims in mainstream media. According to the owner and founder, self-financing is the only economic option available to him as he is either ineligible for government programs on grounds of exclusivity to a particular faith group or the source

of funding is linked to inappropriate targeting of anti-terrorism and the paper cannot survive on advertising alone.

All of these media are innovative but they do not represent alternative business models. They are mostly self-financed and rely on the work of volunteers. Volunteers tend to work on issues that are of personal interest to them and they often have difficulty finding the time to do the work required resulting in an inevitable fragmentation of the public sphere. As such these sites are piecemeal, driven by the interests of the few, and often struggling to survive.

So, even if news organizations were to disappear tomorrow, information, investigation, analysis, and community knowledge would not cease to exist. But we would lose something else. Where people had experienced this loss in a relatively small way in this study, through the loss of a local newspaper, they were quite clear that they were worse off as a result. Worse off politically in terms of their public knowledge, and worse off socially in terms of their community understanding. This reminds us that there is not just a need for news but for newsrooms that allow consistent and stable reporting, analysis, and investigation by recognized, trusted, and experienced journalists with an infrastructure that ensures they are both respected and legally protected to scrutinize power effectively.

## Conclusion

This chapter and the research it reports upon argues that the relationship between news and democracy is not a given. News media, and newspapers in particular, are in crisis. The crisis is being managed by closing papers or shedding staff. These cuts are having a devastating effect on the quality of the news and on local news in particular. I have also suggested that there is a contradiction at the very core of the relationship between contemporary news and democracy – a contradiction between the transforming potential of new technologies and the stifling constraints of the free market. Or put another way, a contradiction between the democratic potential of news media and the structural practice of journalism.

Does the news help make democracy work? It can, when journalists are given the freedom (and resources) to do the job most journalists want to do. But freedom in this context does not simply mean freedom from censorship and interference from government so frequently associated with the term “freedom of the press;” it also means *freedom from the constraints and limitations of the market*. This research shows that in neo-liberal democracies the power of the market is just as significant as the power of government. In the UK, there is certainly no rush to regulate for a healthy relationship between news media and democracy, but there is plenty of urgency about the need to deregulate for the benefit of the market. But the market cannot be relied upon to deliver the conditions for deliberative democracy to flourish. Markets do not have democratic intent at their core. When markets fail or come under threat, ethical journalistic practice is swept aside in pursuit of financial stability. A news media that can be relied upon to monitor, hold to account, interrogate power, and facilitate and maintain deliberation is critical to a functioning democracy and even more critical to a failing democracy. Only

when we are able to reimagine a post-corporate, not-for-profit, independent news media freed from the shackles of commercialism that prioritizes the relationship with democracy and exists primarily to aim for this ethical horizon will the true value of news in the digital age be realized.

## Notes

- 1 The research reported on in this chapter has been conducted by the “Spaces of the News” research team that consists of James Curran, Des Freedman, Aeron Davis, Angela Phillips, Peter Lee-Wright, Tamara Witschge, Joanna Redden, and Justin Schlosberg. It was funded by The Leverhulme Trust and the Media Trust.
- 2 Ofcom is the independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries.
- 3 Viewing of the early evening news bulletins in the south west was the highest of the English regions, at 23 hours per year, down by one hour since 2003. Whereas viewers in London watched by far the least, at just ten hours per person, three hours less than in 2003. (Ofcom, 2009: 80)
- 4 The research on local news was led by Natalie Fenton and included Monika Metykova, Justin Schlosberg, and Des Freedman. It is particularly indebted to the hard work and dedication of Monika and Justin.
- 5 The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in their 2009 submission to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee Inquiry noted that in the 12 months prior to their submission Trinity Mirror had axed 1200 jobs.
- 6 This research, funded by the Media Trust, was based on four in-depth, expanded case studies. The case studies were selected to cover areas that contained both different socio-demographic and different news characteristics – an urban metropolitan area with a diverse population served by thriving local and hyper-local news media in the south east; a suburban town that has recently lost its local newspaper to be replaced by an online news service in the east midlands; a rural area in the north with a successful community radio station used to engage disadvantaged and isolated communities; and an area that has emerging digital platforms that embrace the use of social media for sharing information and campaigning in the west midlands. The case studies included an analysis of the community news outlets/platforms and their relationship with mainstream news media through interviews with key protagonists and also with mainstream local news providers. Three focus groups were also held in each of the communities served for each case study (12 in total). The focus groups included up to eight individuals in each and covered the key variables associated with the local community in question taking particular account of age, gender, ethnicity, and social class (the variables that raise most issues associated with either Internet usage and/or news consumption). Further interviews with news policy leaders also informed the research.

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# Crises, Radical Online Journalism, and the State

Lee Salter

The online environment has for a long time been described as a realm of freedom. As far back as the mid-1990s cyber-libertarian John Perry Barlow (1996) declared in his influential “Declaration of independence of cyberspace,” that governments “have no sovereignty where we gather,” that:

We did not invite [governments to the Internet]. You do not know us, nor do you know our world. Do not think that you can build it, as though it were a public construction project. You cannot. It is an act of nature and it grows itself through our collective actions... Your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context do not apply to us. They are based on matter, there is no matter here.

Ten years later Dean *et al.* (2006) argued that the Internet and the networked society it created was bringing about the end of the state, which is unable to function in such an environment. Other writers argued that the “nature” of Internet technologies makes it impossible to regulate users. For example, John Gilmore famously suggested that the technological structure of the Internet makes it impossible to censor because “the internet treats censorship as damage and routes around it.”

In journalistic quarters, the freedom afforded by the Internet to anybody with Internet access and writing skills to become a journalist has been celebrated as an outlet for dissent in authoritarian states, as seen in Reporters Without Borders’ “Enemies of the Internet” list. On the other hand such freedom has been met with much consternation by many traditional journalists for threatening the status of journalism as a practice (see Jones and Salter, 2012, chapter 1).

Celebrations by cyberlibertarians, media theorists, and liberal journalists about the significant increase in communicative freedom afforded by the Internet are well-intentioned. However, such discourses also tend to be blind to the concept, institutional reality, and

power of the state as such. Barlow's claim above, for example, whitewashes the history of the Internet – the Internet *was* a creation of the US state, a public construction project, and it is still, contrary to popular belief, centered in the US state's Department of Commerce. Indeed, the Internet is not a “spontaneous order” – it was developed as a result of conscious political decisions (Abbate, 2000; Barney, 2001; Salter, 2011).

In this chapter we consider the state, the hegemonic order associated with it, and how radical forms of online journalism challenge it. Here, “radical” online journalism is used in the tradition of studies by Downing (2000) wherein it presents an alternative to the institutional forms and discourses of corporate news, insofar as its production is organized non-hierarchically, it covers topics from the lifeworld of ordinary people struggling against institutionalized power, and it usually employs modes of discourse that derive from the interests and languages of ordinary people. In much of the liberal west it is linked to anti-capitalist and anti-state politics, using a variety of media to construct counter-hegemony, an alternative interpretive framework through which the world can be understood. Radical journalism is, as Downing (2000) put it, rebellious. In contrast, corporate news operations are thought to maintain and reinforce the dominant hegemonic order (for a clear explanation of this latter see Allan, 2004: chapters 3 and 4).

In times of crisis the relations between publics, radical journalism, and both the power of the state and the functions of corporate media come into stark perspective. As Habermas puts it, under conditions of crisis the background consensus, or hegemony, is shaken, leaving citizens to question taken-for-granted norms and values (Habermas, 1979: 3) in radical public spheres (Habermas, 1987, 1989, 1996). Whereas the state and associated institutions seek to maintain these norms and values, radicals seek to form “counter-institutions” that challenge the state and capitalism's domination over life and “return ... ‘liberated areas’ to the action co-ordinating medium of reaching understanding,” that is, to give control back to the people (Habermas, 1987: 396). To this end, radical journalism can facilitate criticism of the institutional order as well as providing and facilitating examples of alternative practices. The online environment is said to better facilitate radical journalism as, compared with broadcast and print media, it is cheap, less regulated, and provides for multidirectional communication (Atton, 2004; Atton and Hamilton, 2008; Couldry and Curran, 2003; Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007; Meikle, 2002; Platon and Deuze, 2003; Salter, 2003, 2011; Wall, 2003). At the same time, crises expose the hegemonic and coercive power of the state and associated institutions, which defend themselves under the rationale of maintaining “public order.”

In considering this challenge and response we look at the particularities of consent and coercion in liberal states such as the UK, Australia and the USA, as opposed to the more directly coercive methods of control in authoritarian states. The case studies used here are drawn from the journalistic representations of crises, and distinctions drawn between corporate and radical representations. Much of the research underpinning this chapter is based on the author's own fieldwork in radical online media projects and in social movements. As the research involves examples in which activists are currently being prosecuted, where I do refer to examples drawn from the field work, I have not included details.

## Understanding the Liberal State

Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.

Carl Schmitt

The above quote from Carl Schmitt points to a crucial factor in considering the notions of freedom and autonomy, which, we are frequently reminded, are supposed to underpin journalism in liberal states. Explaining the point, Schmitt tells us, “The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything: it confirms not only its rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception” (Schmitt, 1934/2005: 15). Schmitt’s point, drawn with Weber’s (1946) concept of the state as the association that holds a monopoly of violence in a given territory, is that only under exceptional circumstances, rather than “normal” functioning, is the power of the state made evident. The most obvious example of the “exception” is the invocation of “emergency laws,” such as those enacted in South Africa in the 1980s and in Egypt from the 1950s onward, but also in liberal states, such as in France in the 1960s and in 2005, in Ireland from the 1970s until 1994, and in the UK, where they were last used in 1974. Faced with both natural disaster and political challenge, only the state can declare a state of emergency that suspends normal constitutional limits, civil liberties, and the like. It is in such times that state power can be seen in its rawest form. Outside the exception, one may consider public perception of state power in the context of McLuhan’s (2001) fish – they know nothing of water, since they have no anti-environment to enable them to perceive the world they live in. We are never outside the state, so its depth and scope is often difficult to perceive outside of exceptional circumstances.

Writing some 80 years after Schmitt, Agamben argues that the “exception” became frequent throughout the twentieth century, with increases in surveillance, military and domestic and foreign “intelligence” expenditure, alongside increasingly flagrant human rights abuses, whether in Northern Ireland, Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, Belmarsh prison, or the “black sites” where kidnapped “suspects” are transported outside liberal jurisdictions to be tortured. Indeed, for him the anomie in which the state operates during the exception has become the norm. For Agamben:

The state of exception has today reached its maximum worldwide deployment. The normative aspect of law can thus be obliterated and contradicted with impunity by a governmental violence that – while ignoring international law externally and producing a permanent state of exception internally – nevertheless still claims to be applying the law.

Agamben, 2005: 87

If one considers Jurgen Habermas’s (1976) charge that western liberal states have been facing “legitimation crises” since at least the 1960s, the notion of exceptionalism-as-normal comes into starker perspective. For Habermas, a legitimation crisis exists when states still have the *power* to rule but are unable to boast active support from populations, resulting in dwindling consent. The crises take place in three realms – the economic, the political, and the socio-cultural. The capitalist economic

system has an inbuilt tendency toward a declining rate of profit, which results in periodic crises. The political system faces crises as its inability to control the economic system and the contradictions between labor and capital are exposed, resulting in the withdrawal of mass loyalty. Faced with these inadequacies, socio-cultural crises emerge when faith in the economic and political systems is not maintained, thus resulting in motivational crises among workers and citizens. Together these crises may generate significant challenges to the economic and political order, resulting in the development of complex systems to manage the public, most notably in the form of public relations, a critique of which forms the foundations of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and *The Theory of Communicative Action*. It is, contrary to so many interpretations of Habermas's work, during crises that public spheres are most effective. And it is *radical* public spheres that can act as a motor for political change (Negt and Kluge, 1993), especially in an online environment (Salter, 2011). This is to say, crucially, that *it is as a response to systemic crises that mediated public spheres are produced with sufficient communicative freedom to challenge political and social hegemony.*

Unable to rely on whole-hearted consent of the people, governments perceive a permanent underlying threat to their legitimacy and their authority. This threat is manifested, or at least becomes most notable, in times of explicit crisis, such as during war, recession, constitutional crisis, major scandal, and so on. Furthermore, it is during such crises that systemic contradiction and political hypocrisy becomes most evident, further undermining the legitimacy of the political order. For example, the protests against the US/UK-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 were significantly aimed at apparent contradictions – nuclear armed powers complaining about the development of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq; the fact that the western powers regarded undemocratic, brutally repressive Gulf states, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, as allies in the fight against another undemocratic, brutally repressive Gulf state; the apparent role that oil played in stoking violence, and so on. The complex relations between the corporate media and the state were brought into perspective when the invasion began, even the few corporate media outlets originally opposed to the invasion turned to “support the troops.”

More recently the economic crisis that began in 2007 had the potential to prompt serious political upheaval, as it did in Greece and Spain most notably. The task states faced in retaining if not mass loyalty then at least apathy was enormous. Despite the blame for the crisis initially being laid at the feet of the banking sector (and some rumbles about broader economic problems), blame was soon turned to “public debt” alone. Citizens were told by politicians, economists and other “experts,” and journalists that crisis was not the fault of an economic system facing a crisis of profitability, exposed through increasingly risky investment decisions made by banks. Neither, apparently, was the problem that of an impotent political system unable to manage international capitalism without deepening the crisis. Rather, the problem was that governments had spent “too much” on the people who allow them to govern (rather than even the multitrillion dollar invasions the west had embarked upon in the early twenty-first century). Thus, beyond the economic and political crises, there was the risk of a huge socio-cultural crisis, necessitating careful management.

The delegitimation of the economic system had been an undercurrent for many years, manifesting itself in protests against G8 meetings, World Bank, World Trade Organization meetings, and the like. The realization of the undemocratic nature of such organizations, and their clear objectives of broadening and deepening capitalism, meant that the 2007 collapse of the economic system had the potential to strip the last vestiges of legitimacy from capitalism.

## Corporate Media, Hegemony, and Counter-Hegemony

Under these normal-exceptional circumstances corporate media has a crucial role to play. For instance, in the UK BBC News Online was a key pillar of support for the dominant hegemonic discourse on the “debt crisis,” promoting the Conservative-dominated coalition government’s “Spending Review” uncritically, with no apparent sense of the difference between outright propaganda and providing public information. BBC News Online dedicated a whole section of its web site to guiding citizens through the economic crisis – exclusively defined through capitalist economics – providing only one option for its resolution: cuts to public spending. The site allowed its audience to consider the political options and “interact.” The options were laid out, giving choices of *where* people would like the cuts to “fall.” There was no option not to make cuts, to increase taxes on the rich, or to change the economic system. BBC News Online had chosen to use its interactive features to deepen management of the public by narrowing political choices to a greater degree than even a single political party would do. The notion that the BBC – or any of the corporate media online or otherwise – would undermine what little legitimacy remained in the economic system by positively suggesting any number of alternative economic models appeared to be out of the question.

On one of the few occasions the BBC did allow consideration of a quite reasonable alternative, it was ridiculed by the presenter as “cloud cuckoo” (“The Daily Politics,” BBC2, September 15, 2010). On “The Daily Politics” show Professor Greg Philo of Glasgow University presented a policy his research center found would receive the support of around 75% of the population. He suggested that a one-off tax on the super-rich would raise enough money to pay the entire debt in one go, hurting in the short term a very small number of people who would remain well-off, instead of damaging millions for a generation. The complete dismissal by the presenter was telling.

Had it been down to the corporate media, then perhaps public consciousness of alternatives would have been repressed completely. However, political alternatives did exist. But these alternatives had to rely on their own media, their own networks of communication, and the Internet played no small part in facilitating this. Of crucial import in this respect is the way in which the Internet provided an outlet for ideas, debates, and actions that the corporate media had hardly allowed. To suggest that the journalists working in corporate media had intentionally dismissed alternatives would be to miss the point. Rather it is the structural relations of corporate news to the institutions and ideology of state and capital that restricts its purview, albeit with political objectives tending to guide the overall organizational view.

The dominant message from corporate media was to stay calm, to deliver trillions of dollars of public money in the USA, UK, and elsewhere to the banks that had caused the crisis, and to trust the same political elites whose “liberalization” policies had allowed speculation and *private* debt to spiral out of control. In the early days of the crisis it was right-wing libertarians in the USA, alongside SocialistWorker.co.uk, Libertarian.co.uk, votenobailout.org and TVNewsLies.org that maintained the banks had failed in the free market, and should therefore be allowed to collapse. Despite the odd expert economist, such as Nobel economist Joseph Stiglitz, appearing in the corporate media to call for the market to work as it is supposed, the corporate media message was clear – the banks and stock markets needed to go back to “normal” at any cost to the people. The supposed need to stabilize capitalism was used ideologically to intensify the neo-liberal agenda that had been developing since the 1970s – in the UK and elsewhere the policy was to use the crisis to cut back on public services. As we have seen, the ability to penetrate this dominant discourse was limited in the corporate media.

The media challenge to the dominant discourse emerged in the UK online. One of the first and most important groups to challenge the cuts agenda was False Economy, a campaign group set up by online journalists, community groups, activists, economists, and trade unions who set about challenging the foundation of the public debt explanation for the economic crisis and the solution in cutting public spending. The group’s key actors included blogger Clifford Singer, former Bank of England economist, Duncan Weldon, journalist and owner of the Pickled Politics blog, Sunny Hundal, a number of bloggers from Liberal Conspiracy, and other activists and trade unionists. The web site was used to help citizens understand the scale of the cuts and their impact on a variety of services, illustrating it with video, data, and statistics, analyses by Nobel economists such as Paul Krugman, Joseph Stiglitz, Martin Wolf, and David Blanchflower, and, crucially, by prioritizing the voice of citizens, allowing ordinary people to upload short reports – in the style of vox pops – on the impact of cuts on their lives. The site used an array of social media to communicate its information, via blogs, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, and Facebook. As opposed to BBC News Online’s attempts to coax people into a discourse about where to cut – and the bulk of the corporate media’s attempts to persuade people to accept their “share of the pain” – False Economy used its data to dispel the myth of excessive debt and then – in the tradition of radical media – to inspire readers to take action against what it perceived to be unjust cuts to public services.

Another challenge came from the Robin Hood Tax group. Whilst it had been in existence since before the crisis, the billions of pounds of public money given to the British banking sector had given it new impetus. The group was set up by War on Want in 2001 and has since received the backing of key economists, including Jeffery Sachs, Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Krugman, George Soros, Dani Rodrik, and Warren Buffett. The aim of the group is to raise awareness of the existence of untaxed and minimally taxed international financial transfers, which is not only an untapped source of public income but also contributes to international economic instability. As with False Economy, the Robin Hood Tax group has utilized the full array of social media and online technologies to report alternative information on the economic situation, providing data and statistics usually

associated with financial news providers, but in an easily digestible form. The group utilized Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, Flickr, and other social media to communicate this information.

Perhaps the most visible and active group to raise awareness of alternative information and alternative economic discourses was the UK Uncut movement. UK Uncut not only challenged the economic data on the need for cuts to public spending, but very consciously challenged government rhetoric echoed by so much of the corporate media – they paid particular attention to the way in which authoritarian and quasi-fascistic concepts of citizenship and political choices have been championed by government representatives and allies in the corporate media – such as “we are all in it together” and that “there is no alternative” to cuts. Interestingly UK Uncut emerged directly out of a Twitter account, rather than the other way round. Its first action was to close down a Vodafone shop on Oxford Street in London in October 2010, aiming to raise awareness of that company’s tax avoidance in the UK at a time when the government was arguing that there was no public money to support government spending. Other significant targets included shops belonging to Sir Philip Green’s Arcadia group, for which there was particular ire given that Green and his company were avoiding paying taxes while he was charged with reviewing government spending. In contrast to the other movements, whilst UK Uncut was providing crucial information that largely escaped the corporate media, it straddled the divide between awareness-raising and direct action. To this end, its online communicative resources were employed to inform but also to coordinate actions. The actions coordinated through UK Uncut took place frequently in towns and cities across the UK, often successfully shutting down shops, turning banks into libraries and medical centers, occupying offices, and so on.

### **Maintaining Order: A Tale of Two Rebellions**

The formation of counter-hegemony is not a simple process, for it exists in relation to the dominant hegemony sustained by state power. But this exercise of power differs from state to state. Whereas authoritarian states may impose strong restrictions on journalism and media structures to mitigate their threat, liberal states are apparently reluctant to do so. Indeed, whereas authoritarian states are concerned with the maintenance of “state security” and rely on a plethora of rules, regulations, and coercive laws for this purpose, liberal states are interested in “public order” and are apparently more permissive. Whilst there are more provisions for freedom in liberal states, such provisions are rather ambiguous. In a sense, the very freedoms on which liberalism is based can be used as a control mechanism.

Journalists are restricted in liberal states both indirectly through the routines and institutional relations of news organizations, but also legally, through laws around contempt of court, libel, anti-terrorism legislation, and the like (for an account of the array of legal restrictions on journalists, see Jones and Salter, 2012, chapter 9). But it is “public order” that presents a key restriction, not just due to its elasticity as a legal concept, but also due to its hegemonic status within the state and in news discourses.

The “public” is produced by and through the state (and associated institutions) through its management of the mediascape, the education system, national events, and so on. “Order” is particular to a given set of institutional and legal arrangements, serving particular interests. This is to say that there is nothing inherently good about keeping “public order,” and that to suggest it is worth maintaining as such implies a belief in the legitimacy and basic justice of that order. The police and corporate media – *on and offline* – take it as given that it is important to maintain public order, and thereby necessarily imply the legitimacy of that order, its laws, and institutional arrangements.

The political nature of the concept of public order can be read from its initial use in justifying the establishment of the police. The “threat” posed by working-class people to the state in the nineteenth century was not expressed in class terms, but, as with all law, in terms of the national interest. The “threat” was therefore not faced by a particular class or system, but to the “nation,” which stands above any particularity. The threat of working-class people took the form of protest, organization, association, and riot. As Robert Reiner puts it:

Up to the early nineteenth century, riotous protest was an accepted and mutually understood means by which the politically unrepresented masses communicated grievances to the ruling elite: “collective bargaining by riot.” But with the spread of industrial capitalism, riot came to be regarded as ... as fundamental threat to the social and political order.

Reiner, 1998: 37

As the class basis of the state faced the challenge of the extended franchise, so the “social and political order” had – at least ideologically – to include the interests of all “the public” or “the nation.” The “masses” were hegemonically aligned with the interests of capital and the state. The police had hitherto been regarded with suspicion, as agents of the state, by working-class people, to such an extent that when in 1833 a policeman was stabbed to death whilst policing a protest by the National Union of the Working Class, the jury, celebrated at the time as “heroic” returned a verdict of “justifiable homicide” (Reiner, 1998: 41).

The means of maintaining “public order” give us an insight into the ambiguity of control. For example, order was initially maintained by the police through coercion from the inception of police forces in the mid-nineteenth century up to the 1930s in the UK. As Waddington (1998) shows, the twentieth century saw the strategy of the police prioritize *consent over coercion*. Thereby police began to see themselves as professionally arbitrating disputes, facilitating protests, and policing demonstrations fairly, even-handedly, and without prejudice. Police opinion on political issues would not affect their professional capacity to perform. They came to see themselves as performing a crucial role of *upholding* the democratic right to protest, at times facilitating protests that governments had tried to ban.

However, this non-confrontational, facilitative strategy is not wholly driven by a commitment to democratic principles. Rather, it has a pragmatic purpose, it is a better way of maintaining “public order” (Waddington, 1998). For the British police, *facilitating* protest by offering assistance in route-planning, negotiating with local authorities, allowing minor criminal infractions, keeping a friendly face and a low profile,



gives them the opportunity to guide and manage them. The purpose of this is to ensure that protests are as minimally disruptive to “public order” as possible. It is the very process of allowing and facilitating protests that renders them impotent; they are disciplined through consent. It is by facilitating the freedom to protest that their effectiveness is curtailed.

The appeal to public order by politicians, police, and journalists is difficult to deny without taking a radically oppositional stance, that is, without counter-hegemony. Indeed it is the disruptiveness and disorderliness of protest and direct action (in the west at least) that frames reporting on them. The academic research on the mediation of protests has shown this to carry in reporting across space and time (Barker, 1997; Chan and Lee, 1984; Halloran *et al.*, 1970; McLeod, 1995; McLeod and Detenber, 1999; Murdoch, 1984; Neiger and Zanderberg, 2004).

There has been some evidence that protesters are increasingly able to influence news reporting of their actions (Anderson, 2003; Cottle, 2003, 2008; Davies, 2003), especially by the use of online technologies (Pickerill, 2003), as we have seen with the anti-cuts movements, but ultimately, the state and corporate “information subsidies” (Davies, 2000) given to financially constrained corporate news organizations allow sources with greater financial resources and institutional affinity to better influence the news agenda (Davies, 2000a, 2000b).

Accordingly, with a politically and economic system only interested in system maintenance and a media system interested only when actions spill over into violence, violence becomes a crucial vehicle for criticism, ideas, and change. However, given the hegemony built up around the concept of public order as McLeod and Detenber (1999: 6) explain: “the incidence of violence at a protest attracts media coverage, but often results in news stories that focus on conflicts with the police, obfuscating the issues raised by the protesters.” Indeed, dominant sources lead the agenda.

As Mawby (2010: 1073) found in his research, even when allowing for complex relations and contesting definers, “The asymmetric police–media relationship ... endures and has become more pronounced in terms of police dominance of the relationship.” McLeod (1995) shows that even when there are subtle differences in the reporting in different outlets, the overall impression of audiences of the general frame of protesting remains – protesters are a threat to be managed by police. Indeed:

At times of national crisis (for example wars of large-scale industrial action), the concerted application of all types of resource results in a virtual monopoly of official sources.

Davies, 2000b: 54

All this we can see as a historical trend. In 1932, as hunger marchers arriving in London were cavalry-charged by the police, British Paramount News explained the reason for the assault was that “the hooligan element was getting out of hand.” When citizens rose up against Thatcher’s regressive Poll Tax in 1990 on the back of a decade of state violence against citizens, corporate media were almost unanimous in their assertion that the violence of the “Poll Tax Riots” was exclusively the fault of a small group among demonstrators intent on “wanton destruction.” After the May Day 2000 anti-capitalist protests in London, UK, the supposedly “liberal” *Independent* newspaper (all

articles from May 3, 2000) amplified Tony Blair's call for "Families to name May Day rioters." The *Daily Mail* told of "An outrage that demeans Britain," also amplifying Blair's call for "thugs" families to name and shame them as parents tell of their "sickening missile ordeal." The *Mirror* and other newspapers published photographs of dissidents wanted by the police, along with a police number for informants to call. The main actions of that day were planting vegetables in Parliament Square and smashing up a McDonalds.

When in 2009 riot police assaulted and killed a passer-by at an anti-capitalist demonstration in London, the *Mirror* (April 2, 2009) described it as "Riot Mob Death" and explained how "as police officers tried in vain to revive the man they were pelted with bottles by a screaming mob." In December 2010 British police attacked school children, student protesters, and trade unionists with a cavalry charge of at least 18 horses in London's Parliament square, after which they illegally detained thousands of protesters for several hours in a "kettle." The *Daily Mail* explained that "youthful idealism ends in an orgy of mindless vandalism." On the day that police battered a student to the point that he had to undergo emergency brain surgery, the *Mail* explained that the most "horrificing development of a genuinely shocking evening" was people banging on the window of and throwing a little paint at a car containing Prince Charles and Camilla (December 11, 2010). And in response to a wheelchair-bound blogger who suffers from cerebral palsy being dragged out of his wheelchair by police and dumped on the pavement, Ben Brown, the BBC journalist interviewing him, attempted to justify this particular act of brutality by saying "there's a suggestion that you were rolling toward the police in your wheelchair. Is that true?" (BBC 8 O'Clock News, December 13, 2010).

In contrast to the reporting of the protests in Britain, the "Arab Spring" of 2011, which saw revolutions take place (successfully or not) in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Syria, was welcomed. The revolutions witnessed the power of online media to carve out spaces in even the most authoritarian regimes. Activists used blogs, alternative news web sites, Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones, and a whole array of online tools to report their struggle and the response of the state. Of note, the protesters were celebrated across the western corporate media, or at least some of them were. Reuters, *The Washington Post*, the BBC, *The New York Times*, Current TV, in fact almost the entire corporate media celebrated these rebellions, and especially their use of online social media. Regarding Libya, *The New York Times* (2011) told of "Colonel Qaddafi's supporters, who were using the state-run news media, and Libyan protesters, who were turning to social media and the foreign news media, to win over hearts and minds, inside and outside Libya." In relation to Egypt the BBC (2011) noted that "Social media has played a crucial role in the unrest in Egypt, with many of the protests organised through Facebook. The Egyptian government reacted quickly by blocking social media sites but this act of censorship was spectacularly unsuccessful."

In contrast to corporate coverage, in many of the online spaces great attention was given to the less "favorable" (to British "national interests" – particularly Bahrain and Saudi Arabia) protests and rebellions. Many of those engaged in the British and European protests associated themselves with protesters in the Arab Spring, amplifying

their communicative power. Indeed, whilst Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen were less visible in corporate news reporting, they were celebrated causes among Western activists, who distributed images of repression, police brutality, army intervention, eye-witness reports from mobile phones, cameras and camcorders via social media, blogs, and web sites.

Against corporate coverage, one of the key messages on blogs and some of the more radical online publications was that much of the power of the protests in places like Egypt came from trade unions and socialist activists, who had been agitating for years. Despite involvement of workers in strikes, occupations, and demonstrations, their role was largely ignored in corporate news, leaving it for the web sites of the Coalition of Resistance, Counterfire, Socialist Workers' Party, and innumerable blogs to carry the February 19 Statement of Independent Trade Unionists in Egypt. Indeed the only information on the enormous involvement of the workers' movement came from blogs such as [arabawy.org](http://arabawy.org), [egyptworkersolidarity.org](http://egyptworkersolidarity.org), and *The Arabist*. Alternative news reports erased the picture of peaceful protesters gathering in city squares to ask for subtle changes, replacing it with one of protesters storming and raiding police barracks and using the guns against the police in an armed revolution. The violent aspects of revolution were naturally downplayed when the Libyan army's (or "Gadaffi's army" as the BBC call it) attacks on rebels were described as attacks on "civilian areas," but in contrast it seems that the rebels were using the same "clean" weapons that the western powers were said to be using in Iraq and Afghanistan. Given the intensity of the challenge to "public order" presented by the protesters around the Arab world, it is perhaps unsurprising that one of the strategies used by those states was to disrupt the online communication flows (usually with little effect given the international solidarity).

Where routinized corporate journalism tends to reproduce the dominant narratives of state institutions, framed around a concern for "public order," it is radical journalists, especially online, who challenge the facts, the narratives, and the dominant discursive structuring of such events. Whereas the former seek system maintenance, the latter tend to seek change. Indeed, those writing as radical journalists are often grounded in movements and activist circles, and thereby take on an advocacy role.<sup>1</sup>

## **Producing Alternative Spaces**

The celebration of the role of online social media in "good" rebellions in the Arab world did not extend in such positive form to the west, though online media were used similarly in the Arab world and the west to report on conditions on the ground *and* to spur people into action in the tradition of radical media (Curran and Seaton, 2007: 2–37; Downing, 2000; Atton, 2001). As such, radical media projects place people and movements rather than capital and the state at the center of reporting, thus forming counter-hegemonic networks. Indymedia (or rather the distributed network of autonomous Independent Media Centers) drew on the traditions of subjective, or perspectival, journalism as an antidote to the false neutrality of corporate media. Indymedia challenged the dominant model of protest reporting by allowing protesters to be not just key sources

but also the key reporters. In contrast, the concern of corporate journalists for “public order” exposes their alignment with the state and its monopoly not only of violence but also of legitimate political activity. Indeed, at every turn it is the presumption of the legitimacy of the state that frames the othering of political opponents. The framing of these two elements is mutually reinforcing.

Although Indymedia has come to be recognized as one of the most important online spaces for reporting from these lifeworld struggles, there has been a range of sites through which such radical activist reporting takes place, from the Zapatista’s use of newsgroups and e-mail lists in the 1990s, through the likes of Urban 75 and GreenNet, to today’s plethora of blogs and collaborative web sites. In circumstances where there is a direct and active conflict with a state, radical activist news spaces become crucial, as there is little hope of corporate media understanding the situation from the position of the activists.

In this respect, as spaces for “citizen journalism” develop online, the centrality of detached, professional journalism is challenged. Indeed, the motto of Indymedia, “everyone is a witness, everyone is a journalist,” speaks to this challenge. Yet at the same time that we may celebrate the claim that everyone is a journalist from the perspective of citizens, it does not yet hold from the perspective of the state. Indeed, even the most liberal states have been reluctant to extend journalistic protections to journalists unattached to corporate organizations, especially radical journalists who practice exclusively online and are associated with activism.

Accordingly, there are many tales of radical projects facing direct repression in liberal states, though they are rarely reported as repression of journalism. Indeed, one of the reasons for this is that radical journalists tend not to adhere to the cosy relationship between corporate media and the state. Such relations are strong in authoritarian states, which may utilize directly political laws, banning political parties, newspapers, and actions outright. In Malaysia, for example, journalists are expected to adhere to the principles of Rukunegara (the basis of the Malaysian state), which includes contributing to nation-building and upholding the standards of “social morality.” In Singapore, Internet cafes may be held responsible for material uploaded or read in them, and libel is politicized. This has allowed its political leaders to fight and win libel cases against Bloomberg’s web site, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (owned by Dow Jones), the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *International Herald Tribune*. Individual bloggers have also fallen victim to Singapore’s strict rules on defamation. For example, US blogger Gopalan Nair was arrested and tried for insulting a judge. Another blogger, Jiahao Chen, this time a Singaporean living in the USA, was forced to close his blog and apologize when a Singaporean government agency merely threatened legal action. The coercion used by the Chinese and Iranian governments is better known. Authoritarian states have a greater tendency to lock up online journalists than do liberal states. So, for example, in 2010 Hossein Derakhshan was jailed in Iran for nearly 20 years for insulting Islam and religious figures; Sakhi Rigi was jailed in Iran in 2011 on national security grounds; in 2011 Kaung Myat Hlaing was jailed in Burma for 10 years on explosives charges; also in 2011 Tal al-Mallouhi was jailed in Syria for five years for divulging information to a foreign state; also in 2011, four years after the first blogger was jailed in Egypt,

Maikel Nabil was jailed for insulting the military; as a response to their involvement in the rebellion, the Bahrainian state imprisoned bloggers Abduljalil Al-Singace for life and Ali Abdulemam for 15 years on terrorist charges.

Whereas authoritarian states readily engage in direct repression against such “threats,” in liberal states the likelihood of a self-proclaimed journalist being jailed is rather slight, though there are notorious examples, such as the video-blogger Josh Wolf, who was jailed in the USA for failing to provide the police with video footage he had taken of a demonstration in California, and dissident Austin Sherman, editor of *Raisethefist.com* who was jailed for a year in 2003 for linking to a web site that contained instructions on bomb-making. Sherman was “encouraged” to plead guilty in the knowledge that the US PATRIOT Act allowed for a 20-year sentence for “terrorism enhancement.” In 2011 the UK site, FIT (Forward Intelligence Team) Watch, sought to draw attention to abuses of police power and to provide evidence that state security in the UK was far more advanced than many had understood. The police ordered the host to take down the web site. In the run-up to the 2011 Royal Wedding in the UK around 50 left-wing political Facebook pages were removed by Facebook. Rumours abounded that Facebook had decided to engage in political censorship at the behest of the police, though it is likely that they were taken down on the basis of technicalities – that they had used the wrong form of account. However as British police had raided a dozen social centers in the same period, and as Facebook had notoriously taken down anti-Zionist information pages, it did seem suspicious to many observers.

In 2005 the UK’s Bristol Indymedia was raided, a journalist arrested and equipment seized a year after UK Indymedia’s main server was seized in an international security clampdown involving state actors from Italy, Switzerland, the USA, and the UK (see Salter, 2009). In 2009 Kent (UK) police raided another Indymedia, again confiscating equipment. Appeals by Indymedia participants to journalistic privilege under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, were initially rejected, largely on the grounds that they do not work within the bounds of (politically) “acceptable” communication (see Salter, 2009, and Jones and Salter, 2012, chapter 9 for more examples of state challenges to radical media projects).

When the state does use its coercive powers, Agamben’s concerns are brought into relief. The powers liberal states have awarded themselves since 2001 have threatened the capacity of both corporate and radical journalists to collect and disseminate information. The US’s PATRIOT Act and Homeland Security Act, the UK’s 2006 Terrorism Act, and Australia’s 2005 Anti Terrorism Act have all served to prevent information entering the public domain if the state deems it problematic. For instance *The Australian* (2006) reported that in 2005 alone, Australian courts issued 1000 “suppression orders” attempting to prevent pertinent information getting into the public sphere. Under the Act, a person may be guilty of “seditious intent” by bringing the Sovereign into hatred or contempt, or by urging disaffection toward the Constitution, the Government, or Parliament. The law also forbids anyone to promote hostility that would threaten the peace of Australia.

The US Electronic Privacy and Information Center points out that the US PATRIOT Act (which was used to imprison Sherman Austin) allows security services

to have general search warrants, that is, warrants which don't specify an individual or a site to search, that persons and establishments can be searched without being informed, that no search warrant is necessary to spy on a person's Internet activities, and that a person need not be made aware of the evidence used against them (Braman, 2006: 135).

In the UK, free speech campaign group, Article 19 (2006), has continuously expressed "grave concerns" over the impact of UK terrorism legislation on freedom of expression, specifically citing concerns over "the broad definition of terrorism," "the use of anti-terror laws to stifle legitimate social and political protest," and "prohibitions" on the "encouragement," "other inducement" or "glorification" of terrorism. In its submission to the International Commission of Jurists' panel on Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights, Article 19 expressed concern that "together as well as individually, these vaguely phrased prohibitions criminalise the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression and have a real chilling effect on debate on matters of public interest" (2006: 1). For Article 19, the vague terms used in the Act, such as "encouragement," "inducement" "indirect encouragement or other inducement," "glorification," and "justification" prevent public discussions that attempt to understand the motivation of violent actors, and may criminalize criticisms "of the liberal western way of life" (2006: 7). They remind us that "freedom of expression protects not only views that are favourably received; but precisely those that are controversial, shocking or offensive. The press and others have a right to air such views; and the public as a whole has a right to hear them" (2006: 7).

Even dissident sites that had escaped the jurisdiction of a state, such as Wikileaks, were not free from coercion. Although once the Wikileaks site had moved to Sweden there was nothing the US state could do, its corporate allies ensured that they helped in areas that the US state could not legally operate. In this instance PayPal, Visa, and Mastercard stopped processing donations, Amazon withdrew its hosting service, and even Apple withdrew an app that mediated Wikileaks.

Journalists in liberal states may be the target of arrest and prosecution, though rarely for journalistic activity. Rather, when journalists are embedded in radical movements, they may be arrested in respect of one sphere of activity (protest), which curtails activity in another. Indeed, there have been a number of cases known to this author where blogger-activists and other media workers who are also activists have had their houses raided upon arrest, and their computer, video, and photographic equipment confiscated and searched. If we compare arrests in, say, the Arab Spring, many of the "journalists" arrested were activists too, yet their arrests are reported in western corporate media as the arrests of "journalists." Analogues in liberal states are arrested for criminal activities and public order offences.

With increased accessibility to the means of production and distribution of journalism, the propensity for journalism to be attacked is increased. Whereas traditional journalists can be "trusted" by the state to conform to the norms of "reasonable" expression (and indeed the whole concept of press freedom applies only when it acts "responsibly" in respect of the political order) in liberal states, such trust cannot be assumed online. It is thus that radical journalists, or at least their copy, may fall foul of laws on incitement to crime, terrorism, contempt, and so on.

## **The Liberal Paradox: Media Freedom as Constraint**

Although there is a plethora of examples of radical web sites being taken down by the political authorities in liberal states, such direct coercive action remains unusual. The motivations for this approach are not, however, primarily about freedom for the sake of freedom. Rather, they are motivated in large part by the dual need to secure consent to the institutional order, and to monitor threats to it.

If we consider the threat of mediated free speech in the same way that we understand how the police deal with the threat of protest and direct action, we can better understand the function of free speech in the online environment. The threat of the Internet is that it allows anyone to become a “journalist” whilst making it difficult for the state to identify them. However, as with political action, the permissiveness of liberal states in fact allows for greater surveillance. This is to say communicative freedom online encourages people to communicate what they would not dare communicate in an authoritarian regime. Whilst this undoubtedly constitutes freedom in a concrete sense, it still exists in relation to the sovereign power that a state can always lay claim to in the final analysis.

As noted, radical journalists construct footage, reports, comment, and analysis drawn from the protests themselves, resulting in a frame that is all but impossible for a corporate news organization to produce. As a result we see a form of embedding from the “other” side. Crucially, in the UK much of the radical reporting shone a light on the use of “special” police units (such as the Territorial Support Group and Forward Intelligence Teams in the UK – corporate journalists tend to refer to such police units outside the west as “state security services”), police brutality, agents provocateurs, and of course the reaction of dissidents against this. Activists and especially students were able to produce reports from protests that mixed protest footage with television news, framing them in speeches by politicians to highlight the perceived injustice of policies, hypocrisy of politicians, and state coercion against active dissent. Some activist “embeds” such as Marc Vallée have built important careers out of their radical journalism, and the significance of their *sousveillance* (surveillance from below) has massively expanded the “other” perspective in protest reporting. Bakir (2010) has very clearly argued the journalistic value of *sousveillance*, arguing it to be a new form of Web 2.0 journalism, holding the state to account in a way that corporate journalists have failed to. However, its value must always be considered in terms of the context of state power.

The most immediate effect of *sousveillance* journalism, radical media projects, and citizen- and “user-generated” journalism more generally is the provision of a wealth of intelligence information that Big Brother could only have dreamt of. Videos uploaded to YouTube, Vimeo, photographs on Flickr and Facebook, web sites and blogs, and the variety of events and actions that activists (not to mention concerned citizens) subscribe to are more often than not available for all to see, including the police. Whereas the corporate news media still play an important state security role in distributing photographs of political dissidents (or “thugs” in the language of the corporate media) with the aim of encouraging citizens to denounce them, they are hardly necessary with the growth of radical reporting. Even explicitly counter-state technologies such as Sukey (which was designed to help protesters report police movements to avoid containment or illegal

“kettling”) have ambiguous potential – they help protesters but are also used by the police. In this sense, radical online reporting enhances the pan-optic powers of the state.

The paradoxical consequence of this is that state security forces are more easily able to identify dissidents in liberal states than they are in authoritarian states, due to the perception (and partial reality) of communicative and political freedom in the former. Radical reporters are all too often complicit in their own entrapment. After dissidents organized by UK Uncut occupied London’s exclusive Fortnum and Mason department store to protest its avoidance of tax, hundreds were rounded up and prosecuted. Evidence from sousveillance footage distributed through social media played no small part in the crackdown here and against the broader student and anti-cuts movement. Whilst more astute activist-journalists would pixelate faces of protesters, publishing only photographs that were safe, the new “citizen journalists,” often with some faith remaining in the ideology of liberalism presumed their freedom to publish would not entail aiding a state crackdown.

As noted, it is the exception, not the norm, for police to knowingly raid and arrest journalists of any description. Perhaps one of the key problems of new forms of online journalism is that their newness is unknown to the police. I have written elsewhere (Jones and Salter, 2012, chapter 9) about the problem of recognition faced by radical and online journalists. When anyone can be a journalist, anyone may claim shield laws to protect them from state interference in their journalistic activities. A further problem arises in this respect. As so many citizens are now also journalists, they occupy a number of roles. The journalist role for many online and citizen journalists is a subsidiary one. They occupy their “day-jobs,” their paid roles first. As such it is typical in liberal states that such persons may be dissuaded from engaging areas of controversy in their journalism due to the impact it may have on their main role. This pernicious form of control is what I refer to here as “distributed” censorship. As distinct from authoritarian states, liberal states do not practice hierarchical, centralized, state-centered censorship. Rather, they rely on institutions distributed around civil society – from employers to educational institutions – to discipline those who work within them. It is thus that would-be journalists and, more commonly, sources working with journalists are coerced into self-censorship. This may take the form of the internalization of institutional values; or the form of fear, whereby speaking out may risk one’s job security or career prospects; or repressive legal provisions, such as the Official Secrets Act (UK). Examples range from disciplinary action being taken against workers for blogging about their employers to footballers being served with legal notices for Tweeting about their clubs – the legal sanctions include bringing an organization into disrepute and gross misconduct.

A clear example of this form of repression can be seen in the US state’s response to Wikileaks. A key report “Wikileaks.org – An online reference to foreign intelligence services, insurgents, or terrorist groups?,” published under the auspices of the US Department of Defense (DoD) Intelligence Analysis Program provides an important insight into “online” censorship in liberal states. The report was drafted to assess “the counterintelligence threat posed to the US Army by the Wikileaks.org website.” The concern over Wikileaks is clear from the outset, for it “represents a potential force protection, counterintelligence, operational security (OPSEC), and information security (INFOSEC) threat to the US Army.”



Rather than focus on the messenger, the DoD sought to deal with this threat by stubbing out the source of the “threat,” suggesting that “The identification, exposure, termination of employment, criminal prosecution, legal action against current or former insiders, leakers, or whistleblowers could potentially damage or destroy this center of gravity and deter others considering similar actions from using the Wikileaks.org website.”

Crucially, the document identified a broad range of surreptitious threats to Wikileaks. “Efforts by some domestic and foreign personnel to discredit the Wikileaks.org website include allegations that it allows uncorroborated information to be posted, serves as an instrument of propaganda, and is a front organization for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)” (Department of Defense, 2008). The response to the leaking of the Iraq War Diaries saw Bradley Manning, a 22-year-old US soldier, arrested and held without charge in a military prison, where he faced appalling conditions, including 23 hours a day in a small cell, which he spent in complete isolation. Manning faces 50 years in prison if he is found guilty. This is what the DoD means by deterrence.

The Wikileaks case tells a great deal about liberal conceptions of media freedom. While Wikileaks was targeting poorer states, it was celebrated in corporate news. *The Washington Post* (January 15, 2007), for example, told its readers, “You’re a government worker in China, and you’ve just gotten a memo showing the true face of the regime. Without any independent media around, how do you share what you have without landing in jail or worse?” *The Post*’s excitement seemed to have been prompted by the idea that Wikileaks “targets regimes in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East... It’s significant that their emphasis seems to be on relatively closed societies rather than the US or Europe, that have a rather robust media sector.” When its attention turned to the “true face” of the US regime, the tone of coverage naturally changed. Indeed, it was to its shame that the supposedly independent Reporters Without Borders (RWB) condemned Wikileaks in an open letter for the “incredible irresponsibility you showed when posting your article (on the Afghan War Diaries).” RWB had considered the leak to present a threat to US and NATO soldiers. There has yet to be a case of RWB condemning any corporate news organization for endangering Iraqi, Taliban, Al Qaeda, IRA, FARC, Iranian, or any other “enemy” personnel, nor for endangering the lives of the western dissidents whose capture and incarceration is aided by news media.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that the online environment provides enormous opportunities for greater media freedom. The low cost, communicative capacities, scale and scope, packet switching technologies, and distributed nature of online journalism has the potential to revolutionize journalism, and the evidence so far has pointed to the realization of this potential. However, we ought not to lose sight of countervailing forces. Nor must we forget that each political system has boundaries, whether visible or not. When these boundaries are traversed, the strength of those countervailing pressures becomes evident. Whilst online citizen- (and activist-) journalists have played a hugely important role in reporting from actions, they are not insulated from state power, either as transmitters

of surveillance or as targets of more directly coercive power. The challenge to online journalists is how to maintain counter-hegemony at a time of crisis, and certainly how to report without exposing activists to repression.

## Note

- 1 It is important not to misunderstand this role in terms of its relation to corporate media. In this respect, radical is often juxtaposed to corporate journalism in terms of dichotomies. Radical is subjective and active. Corporate is objective and passive. However, it is more fruitful to consider corporate journalism as subjective to the dominant institutional order and that it actively supports that order through its condemnation of challenges to it.

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# Forms of Online Journalism and Politics

Eugenia Siapera

## Introduction

The revolutionary impact of the Internet on journalism and its relationship to the political process has yet to be fully understood. Works such as Deuze (2003) have provided an initial typology and assessment of the forms of journalism encountered online. Parameters such as interactivity and multimediality, as well as dialogical and participatory features have been used to describe the new kinds of journalism that have emerged in online environments. These works, however, have focused primarily on the impact of the Internet on journalism and journalistic cultures, overlooking the wider implications for political and public life. Taking these on board, the current chapter focuses on the changes in journalism and their links to the political process.

In empirical terms, this chapter has identified seven different forms of online journalism and discusses them through specific examples. These new forms include: (i) the celebrated civic or participatory journalism, exemplified by Indymedia; (ii) j-blogs, blogs featuring journalistic output, exemplified by TruthOut; (iii) news aggregators, delivering customized news stories on demand, exemplified by Google News; (iv) online versions of mainstream news media, exemplified by The Guardian Online; (v) multimedia or visual journalism, exemplified by Vimeo; (vi) open source journalism exemplified by Wikileaks; and (vii) social media journalism, exemplified by Twitter. Each of these journalistic forms emphasizes different aspects of the news and establishes a different relationship with the public sphere, the informal aspects of the political process, and with formal political institutions.

More broadly, this chapter seeks to contribute both to discussions of the different kinds or forms of online journalism as well as to discussions regarding the political role of journalism and shifts therein from a concrete and empirically informed point of view.

The main argument pursued here is that online journalism is becoming increasingly complex and varied in its forms, requiring a more in-depth and nuanced approach to assessing its role(s). At the same time, an assessment of the political impact or role of journalism requires a clarification of the kind of ideal or normative political model that underlies such critiques. Thus, this chapter will begin with a discussion of the different normative roles of journalism, continue with an analysis and discussion of the various new forms of online journalism, and conclude with an assessment of the contemporaneous existence of different forms of journalism and different normative approaches to its role.

## **Normative Approaches to Democracy and Journalism**

Most normative approaches to journalism refer vaguely to democracy without specifying its type. However, there are different understandings of what democracy is or should be about, and such different approaches to democratic politics posit different normative assumptions regarding journalism. Specifically, although James Carey argues that “journalism is another name for democracy” (Carey, 1997: 332 in Schudson, 2008: 11), Schudson argues that their relationship is more complex. A casual observation reveals that journalism can and does exist in different contexts – for instance in, Iran, China, or Myanmar – but is made to serve different functions, ranging from sustenance of the regime to misinformation and propaganda. But even within democratic states, different normative approaches to what democracy should be expect and require different things from journalism. These may not be mutually exclusive but they tend to emphasize different aspects. This section will examine both mainstream and radical conceptions of democracy and will outline their different requirements for journalism. The point of this discussion is to understand not only the multiplicity of normative understandings of journalism, but also the ways in which these may feed into and guide different forms of journalistic practice.

Liberal representative democracy is the model typically underpinning normative accounts of journalism and the political process. Within the context of liberal representative democracies, journalism’s primary function is to inform citizens on developments in areas of common interest. For such democracies, journalism’s role is essential for their proper functioning – to use a well-known quote from Thomas Jefferson, “Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government” (1789: np). Insofar as this kind of polity is liberal, it does not hold that journalism should dictate opinion, but rather provide the means by which people can form their own opinions. An extension of this basic informative function of journalism within this model includes its role as watchdog as well as analytical journalism. These ideas, discussed famously by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) as the libertarian and social responsibility theories of the press, rely on the premise that humans are rational beings with the ability to make decisions, hence the role of journalism as information provider. At the same time, in order to get this information, journalism may need to dig deep and investigate into the affairs of governments and other power political actors, hence the role of journalism as watchdog. Moreover,

given the complex political and informational environment of modern societies, information is not enough to enable opinion formation – hence the role of journalism as provider of interpretation and analysis. To these, McNair (2008) adds advocacy, the pursuit of partisan and clear political objectives by journalism, as another normative function. In liberal representative democracies, journalism can and should advocate for and support political positions insofar as it makes a clear distinction between facts and opinions: “Comment is free, but facts are sacred” as Charles Prestwich Scott, the *Guardian* editor, commented in 1921. This famous quote is also indicative of the tensions within journalism and the prioritization of objective, or at least “fair” and accurate, reporting of information as a necessary condition of journalism. Finally, because of its position, journalism is mediating between politicians and the public, while precisely because of these normative requirements and structural position, journalism and its discourses tend to be considered as expert and professional (see Katz, 1989). To sum up, in liberal representative democracies, journalism’s structural position is that of a mediator, while its functions are to inform, to guard, to analyze, and to advocate, with information emerging as the necessary condition for journalism. To be able to fulfil these normative expectations, journalism should be independent from governments and able to operate in a free environment. Its contents should reflect the main journalistic values of accuracy and fairness, while readers are understood as rational beings, able and willing to make rational decisions on the basis of appropriate information. Readers are positioned at the receiving or consumption end of journalism.

There is little doubt of the deeply entrenched nature of these normative functions of journalism. Equally, few would argue against these as necessary tasks for journalism. In other models of democracy, however, which hold different ideas about governance and its relationship to the citizenry, different aspects take over. In radical conceptions of democracy, journalism may be required to prioritize and pursue other functions. Focusing on radical democratic models, these functions may also include information and the like, but other elements take priority, because such models rest on different assumptions of the political, of the political subject and the object of politics. Radical democratic politics can be understood as the types of politics that are continuously reconceptualizing and realizing equality and liberty (Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007). Three main approaches to radical democratic politics can be identified, namely the deliberative, agonistic, and autonomist strands.

In deliberative democracy, the political process is seen as a continuous involvement rather than the occasional involvement through elections required by representative democracy. In this strand, the emphasis is the legitimation of policies and political decisions through citizen involvement in consultations and deliberations over such policies. For theorists such as Fishkin (2009) the objective of deliberative democracy is to widen participation so as to enable all citizens to have a say in political decisions. For an inclusive and fair society, all citizens must be engaged in thinking and discussing policies and politics, with the aim of reaching an understanding in the sense of harmonizing their opinions (Habermas, 1996). Within this context, the requirement for journalism is not merely to provide citizens with information on the basis of which to form isolated opinions, but rather the media must:

understand themselves as the mandatary of an enlightened public whose willingness to learn and capacity for criticism they at once presuppose, demand and reinforce; like the judiciary, they ought to be receptive to the public's concerns and proposals, take up these issues and contributions impartially, augment criticisms, and confront the political process with articulate demands for legitimation.

Habermas, 1996: 378

From this point of view, the role of journalism is to complement and support the public sphere, by accurately reflecting and publicizing its contents.

But while the emphasis in deliberative models is on deliberation and eventual consensus, agonistic democracy prioritizes the elements of dissent and struggle. More specifically, agonistic democracy foregrounds the antagonistic nature of the social (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) and understands power as an "empty space" (Lefort, 1986), which is filled up by the group that is more successful in setting up a hegemony and claiming this seat of power. Democratic politics is an attempt to instigate a "chain of equivalences," that is, to form alliances between different communities and identities and to form a hegemony. This notion of hegemony refers to Gramsci's argument of a dominant set of ideas, concepts, norms, values, and so on, which rule the cultural and political domain, and which justify and sustain the status quo. This goes beyond Marx's view that the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class – rather, ruling ideas enable the ruling class to dominate. For Laclau and Mouffe, all politics is hegemonic, that is, seeks to impose a set of ideas and values, but which can never be totally successful in being unquestionably endorsed by all. Within this context, the role of journalism is to keep open the space within which different social groups struggle for hegemony. Journalism should "contribute to the creation of an agonistic public space in which there is the possibility for dissensus to be expressed or different alternatives to be put forward" (Mouffe, 2006: 12), while it should understand itself as a "gate-opener" "interested in providing the options, arguments and perspectives" rather than a "gatekeeper" (Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006: 13). Journalism should allow for alternative viewpoints to be openly expressed – a diverse journalism that enables antagonistic democratic politics to operate in an open public space.

In the third strand of radical democratic politics, autonomism, the emphasis is on struggles between labor and capital, but these concepts are radically different to the ones theorized by Marx. Labor is understood as encompassing all forms of life-identity, and is theorized as the multitude. Capital is understood as a universalizing but decentered world-market regime, and is theorized as the Empire (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; see Dyer-Witheford, 2007). These new developments do not signal the end of the proletariat but the explosion of class struggle in all domains of life. Politics concerns no longer only labor power but more broadly biopower, whose life-energies capital mobilizes not just in work, but in consumption, education, as media-audiences and medical subjects. It is this creative, multiplicitous subject whose constitutive power Empire simultaneously requires, requisitions, and represses. (Dyer-Witheford, 2007: 199). Democracy can no longer be evaluated in the liberal manner of limits to equality or in the socialist manner as a limit to freedom but rather, it must be understood as radicalization without reserve of both freedom and equality (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 220). The multitude's power to initiate and create



is construed as constituent power: without this creative power, Empire cannot function. But it must not allow this to take over, otherwise it will undermine and defeat its authority, its constituted, already formed power – hence, it must repress it. Labor and capital, multitude and empire are caught in a struggle, and for radical autonomism, there must be only one winner. Journalism within these struggles ought not to remain “objective” but to become partisan, to play an active role in bridging the various insurgencies and counter-movements. It should enable and facilitate horizontal communication between insurgencies – “linking, connecting and communicating between sectors of the multitude” (Dyer-Witheford, 2007: 202). In this sense, journalism is not the disinterested provider of information as in liberal democracy, nor the amplifier and enabler of public opinion formation, as in deliberative democracy, nor finally, does it occupy the structural position of safeguarding the openness of the communicative space: rather its role is to support the multitude in its struggles, to actively communicate and connect the various strands eventually leading to radical political change.

### Normative expectations, harsh realities?

How does journalism fare in the real world? How close is it to meeting any of these normative requirements? How does the Internet fit into the picture? In a relevant study, Patterson (2007) found that, although the overall quantity of Internet news and news sites may be increased, 43% of online news contains verbatim reproductions of reports prepared by major news agencies, such as AP and Reuters. This increased quantity of news is seen as the result of commercial pressures – the multiplication of sites or platforms for news did not translate into better or more quality journalism. The actual contents appear to be personalized, dramatized, simplified, and often polarized, reminiscent of Sunstein’s (2001) critique of the “Daily Me” notion of a hyper-personalized journalism that ends up in extreme fragmentation of the public sphere. At the same time, the much celebrated citizen journalism appears to be full of opinion and often vitriol, fragmented commentaries but no sustained analysis or investigation. Furthermore, online anonymity raises concerns of verification, accountability, and accuracy – blogs give rise to unverified gossip and the same goes for video and audio material posted online. Some of these general concerns are supported by empirical findings.

More specifically, despite some initial optimism regarding journalism, found in works by Bardoel (1996), Deuze (2003), Hall (2001), and Pavlik (1999), it turns out that after all the Internet is bad for journalism. More recent empirical findings by Natalie Fenton and her colleagues (2010) reveal that the Internet is stifling journalism for the public good and public debate. For instance, Davis (2010) shows that online journalists operate with a view to achieve rationalization and marketization rather than democratic ideals. Phillips (2010) found that journalists are under constant time pressures and need to fill space, thereby “cannibalizing” contents from wherever they can find them. Redden and Witschge (2010) found that online news is actually quite homogenous, while the new media are seen as a technical fix to problems of cost and efficiency. More broadly, Phillips, Coudry, and Freedman (2010) report that job insecurity and commercial priorities do

not allow journalists to think or operate in terms of journalistic ethics. On the basis of the above, Fenton and her colleagues rightly argue that journalism can no longer fulfil its normative role as an information provider or watchdog.

However, this critique focuses primarily on mainstream journalistic practices, in which journalism operates within a normative framework influenced by the liberal democratic approach. The issue here is that firstly, the cultures of journalistic production examined by Fenton and her colleagues, as well as the journalistic output studied, were mainstream, typically looking at offline journalism that has migrated online. But the problems with this kind of mainstream journalism have been ongoing and did not start with the Internet. Secondly, the normative yardstick used is a liberal one, infused with some deliberative ideas: journalism's function is to monitor, to hold to account, and to facilitate and maintain deliberation. It is not that journalism should not be assessed on the basis of these functions. However, on the one hand there are other functions that may be used and on the other, journalism's inability to live up to these expectations is not limited to online journalism – indeed, the hyperantagonistic environment within which journalism operates and its problematic relationship to the market have been identified and discussed by thinkers such as Habermas (1989) and Bourdieu (1999). Thirdly, the focus on journalism tends to overlook developments in politics and the political process itself, the public sphere, or the public space more broadly, the economic context within which it operates, as well as the broader culture that has emerged in recent years. In the last 20 years or so massive shifts have occurred, including the collapse of ideological divides and the rise of neo-liberalism, as well as the shift from industrial to informational capitalism (Castells, 2000). These developments may introduce changes to both the normative expectations as well as the reality of journalistic practice.

It is not clear where the critique and assessment of online journalism should go from here. However, one possibility is to identify and examine the new forms of journalism that have evolved online: if journalism is indeed changing, then we must look at the ways in which it is changing in terms of the forms assumed by journalism online, as these on the one hand circumscribe contents, while on the other rely on different production practices, and engage readers in different ways. Moreover, in thinking of the political role of online journalisms, the assessment must look at both their relationship to governments and politicians and to the public. Then, in critically thinking of journalism we must keep in mind the various (and conflicting) normative requirements corresponding to different kinds of democratic politics. In this manner, we can appreciate the dynamic nature of journalism as “an integral communicative form of modernity” operating in a tension between emancipatory and governmental tendencies (Craig, 2006). The next section will discuss the ways in which we can approach these new forms of journalism.

## **New Forms of Journalism**

How may we define form and what is its relation to journalism? In this context, form is understood as referring to the various elements that are included in journalistic web sites and to the different ways in which they are arranged together. This understanding

and the discussion of form relies on readings from the field of art. Form differs from genre in that the latter refers to a repetition and similarity at the level of contents, while the former operates at the structural level. For example, in film theory “westerns” and “thrillers” are genres, while feature films and animations are examples of different forms. The importance of form lies in its mediation of contents, whose overall significance and interpretation may be seen as depending on the form (Adorno, 1997). The relationship between form and content in art is, according to Adorno, a dialectical one, which determines the artwork’s overall meaning. For Adorno, to understand a work of art we need to understand its internal dialectic between form and content and to contextualize these in the socio-historical context within which the artwork is situated. If we think of journalism, as well as art, as two kinds of cultural production (c.f. Bourdieu, 1996), then we might usefully employ these ideas to understand journalism. Thus, an examination of the various forms of journalism enabled or encountered in the new media, may lead to a more targeted and specific assessment as well as to more in-depth insights as to the role(s) that journalism is playing in the current socio-historical and political juncture.

However, accepting the significance of analyzing the new forms of journalism does not resolve the methodological problem of how to identify them. If by form we refer to the structural properties of specific journalistic works, and given the above definition of form, then we can discern different journalistic forms on the basis of how they produce, arrange, and combine the various elements that are part of journalism. While there is no claim to the exhaustiveness of these forms, we have been able to discern at least seven different forms, which include or prioritize different elements, and which arrange them in different ways, thereby affecting contents as well as the whole experience of journalism. These forms differ in one or more of the following terms: the producers and modes of production, the actual news, and the relationship with readers/citizens. It should however be noted that the distinction between form and content is an analytical one, as it is impossible to find form without contents and contents without form. Thus, the analysis seeks to isolate the formal elements that characterize particular types of journalism but cannot examine and assess these types outside their specific instantiations, which include their contents.

On this basis, we have identified the following seven forms and analyzed them through their specific instantiations: (i) Participatory journalism, exemplified by Indymedia; (ii) j-blogs, blogs featuring journalistic output, exemplified by TruthOut; (iii) multimedia or visual journalism, exemplified by Vimeo; (iv) news aggregators, delivering customized news stories on demand, exemplified by Google News; (v) online versions of mainstream news media, exemplified by Guardian Online; (vi) open or crowdsourced journalism, exemplified by Wikileaks; and (vii) social media journalism, exemplified by Twitter.

The empirical analysis proceeds via firstly analyzing the structure of the front page in terms of categories and features; secondly, in terms of how the audiences are addressed and engaged; and thirdly, in terms of the self-definition and self-description of each form in their “about” pages, including the ways in which this output is produced. This analysis establishes the various forms and the differences between them, while it also allows an initial assessment of these journalisms. In other words, the

analysis of forms will allow the drawing of some conclusions regarding the political role of these different forms, and their position vis-à-vis the formal political establishment and processes as well as the more informal politics of everyday life. The various forms are discussed below.

### Participatory or civic journalism

This is the most celebrated new form of journalism, one which is thought to radically change journalism. In Dan Gillmor's (2004) well-known words, if journalism was previously a lecture it is now a conversation or seminar. The originality of this form of journalism is that it allows the active participation of readers. This is formally evidenced in providing the means by which citizens can post their own news articles, photos, opinions, and so on. In this kind of journalism, readers are or can potentially become journalists themselves. Secondly, the news is organized on the basis of importance to those running the site rather than conforming to standardized news values (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). Thirdly, precisely because of the reliance of this journalistic form on readers rather than journalists, its stance vis-à-vis the political process is not the "objective" or at least detached one found in other, more mainstream forms of professional journalism. These three elements, namely the involved and overtly partisan stance toward the political process, the ranking of news on the basis of their significance to the readers and/or site objectives and aims, and the direct participation of readers in the journalistic process, constitute this, a distinct form of journalism.

To exemplify these features and to understand the specificity of this form, the focus here is on one example, that of the well-known Indymedia journalism. Focusing on the main Indymedia site, [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org), the analysis has looked at the main categories that arrange the various news items and articles in distinct ways, and examined the new relationships this form of journalism introduces. Specifically, the main categories of the site include: (i) a features archive with global news themes, mostly on protests, run-ins with police or authorities, and so on; (ii) a newswire with current global news themes; (iii) a publishing form, which allows readers to post articles; (iv) links to the various Indymedia sites; and (v) the possibility to translate the contents and categories in different languages. The site also features a web radio, RSS feeds, and video projects, where users can watch videos compiled by citizens/Indymedia contributors from across the world. It should be noted, however, that this site is the main interface of Indymedia, which operates a number of sites in various parts of the world. As such, news, opinions, and articles are to be found on those sites; these sites in turn have a distinctly local character, focusing on their own locales. Thus, the main site is not really used, but points users to the various other sites in the various countries that participate in the Indymedia project. This justifies the existence of some dead links and the out-of-date news items.

The centrality of the role of readers in this form is clear. The site relies on reader participation, through open publishing links and an invitation to contribute. This in turn leads to an integration of the reader in journalism, and a dissolution of the boundaries

between production and consumption of journalism. At the same time, the multilingualism and global themes found in the Indymedia site show lack of rootedness and a broader cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, there is almost no discussion or deliberation: the site mostly publishes articles and (some) comments – it is not a public forum for deliberation.

The “About” section of the site tells readers that Indymedia is concerned with “the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth. We work out of a love and inspiration for people who continue to work for a better world, despite corporate media’s distortions and unwillingness to cover the efforts to free humanity.” It is clear that Indymedia has an explicit non-profit, radical, emancipatory agenda. It operates with some liberal frames of journalism, such as accuracy and truth, but with an explicit progressive political agenda – its goal is not balanced and objective, but “passionate” and “radical” journalism. This kind of journalism is voluntary, not paid-for, requiring and relying on reader involvement. Readers are therefore invited to participate, considered as sources of information and analysis, and integrated into the site. In this respect, they are not isolated through special categories, for example “readers’ comments,” nor is there any division between those writing (“journalists”) and those reading the site. Open publishing in some instances (e.g. in Indymedia Athens) depends on the site administration’s approval. In other localized sites (e.g. Indymedia London) moderation is delegated to readers, who can report problems with published articles or comments.

Overall, the site operates with an understanding of the normative functions of journalism that approximates that of autonomist radical democracy: this kind of journalism prioritizes information that offers connections to protest movements, insurgencies, and like-minded people from across the world. Its position vis-à-vis the formal political process is one of ignoring institutional politics or seeing it as grounds for protest. It seeks to undermine traditional authority and to radicalize the political process. This is done mostly through actively seeking the participation of readers and through actively connecting groups from across the world. It is also performed through actively calling for protests and activism as part of a radical emancipatory agenda.

As journalism, this is not only alternative in the sense that it publishes different kinds of news, but in the more radical sense that it serves a different purpose. More broadly, it reconfigures the politics–journalism relationship: no longer is journalism a mediator for public opinion, or a watchdog of the political process, but it is more a kind of political activism (c.f. Will, 2006 in Atton and Hamilton, 2008), a reclaiming of radical political journalism as seen in the early radical press. The focus is on mobilizing, organizing, and disseminating useful information, while readers are seen as an integral part of the process. But this is not the only kind of journalism on the Internet.

### J-blogging

Journalistic blogging emulates the form taken by civic or participatory journalism, in that it makes use of readers’ contributions and comments while also its inclusion and arrangement of news items is according to the blog’s priorities and interests. On the

other hand it differs from participatory or civic journalism in two respects: firstly, blogging as such is not journalism in that it does not usually produce news but repeats and comments on it – that occasionally some news stories are broken by blogs is the exception that proves the rule. Secondly, j-blogging, which may produce news and hence qualify as journalism, differs from civic journalism in that it is typically produced by journalists or people who understand themselves as media workers. For instance, the most well-known and highest ranking j-blog, The Huffington Post, is produced by a host of journalists, some regular contributors, and some invited journalists. In short, this form of journalism is similar to participatory journalism, but differs in that the contributors are not citizens, but journalists.

In looking into this form more closely, the analysis will focus on TruthOut, a US-based journalistic blog run collectively by a group of journalists and professional writers. In terms of categories, the site contains features, opinion articles, news, and issues – all these covering a broad range of themes. TruthOut seeks to strike a balance between investigative reports, news, some republished from other sources, analysis, and opinion. The articles are also categorized under various issues, including environment, labor, women's issues, health, education, and voters' rights, displaying the wide range of interests covered by the site. In addition, there is also a multimedia section featuring video reports and interviews – all these are produced by TruthOut – while there are links to TruthOut on Facebook, Digg, and Twitter. Finally, the site displays headlines from other blogs and/or new media outlets.

Readers of TruthOut are allowed to post comments on articles, which are moderated, and also to submit articles for publication. However, these must meet the requirements set by TruthOut, such as well-written, supported, and substantiated articles thereby reproducing some journalistic values. Readers are also invited to become members by donating to TruthOut. From this point of view, readers are positioned in an intermediate space: they can contribute contents to TruthOut insofar as their contribution resembles journalism, or they can be traditional readers, contributing their money to support and keep reading TruthOut.

Finally, TruthOut understands itself as an online publication “committed to the investigative reporting, thoughtful analysis and insightful commentary that holds power accountable and fuels democracy.” It is non-profit, entirely dependent on donations. It is operated by a team of permanent editorial members and a group of contributing writers. Overall, this site operates on the basis of a liberal understanding of journalism as concerned with accurate fact reporting, fulfilling its watchdog function, and upholding democratic ideals of accountability and transparency. In these terms, j-blogging as exemplified by TruthOut primarily assumes the mediating position of journalism, placing itself in-between politicians and the citizenry, seeking to hold the former accountable and to expose any wrong-doing. Its position vis-à-vis informal politics is typically that of providing them with the necessary facts and arguments to allow them to formulate an informed opinion.

This is liberal journalism at its best, retaining autonomy (and credibility) through protecting itself from the market and writing critical but substantiated articles on topics that have an impact on people's lives. It is not concerned with “objectivity” as much as with bringing about social justice, but through the traditional journalistic

route of helping form and mobilize public opinion. The political role of this kind of journalism is close to the liberal and early Habermasian normative ideals of legitimation of political decisions through public opinion. However, to the extent that it does not provide a forum or enable more active participation from its readers, it repeats and re-enacts a division between politics–journalism–citizenry. It cannot be considered participatory, or deliberative, or, finally, radical but it constitutes nevertheless a new form of journalism that relies on resurrecting the classic journalistic standards of accuracy, analysis, and informed commentary that hark back to the early days of the (bourgeois) public sphere.

### Video journalism

Video journalism is a new form of journalism that uses and combines the principles of broadcast journalism with those of the participatory forms discussed above. It is produced by both professional journalists as well by citizens themselves. The news is primarily encoded through a visual language, and it is not text-based. As such the priority is on reportage rather than opinion, although the visuals can be used as a commentary on current affairs. The readers are addressed as audiences, that is, primarily as spectators, engaged through their senses rather than through their intellect.

To examine this form of journalism the analysis focuses on Vimeo, a video-sharing community. While Vimeo, like YouTube, is more a platform than a site, it enables participants to contribute and classify their videos firstly in terms of categories, which include different themes, such as activism and non-profits, environment, art, experimental, and so on – organized around contents. It also allows users to form groups, which are communities formed around certain interests. Further, users can construct their own channels, webcasting their own work. There is also the possibility to create high definition videos by creators along with commentary, while contributors can generate their own projects, or produce/solicit videos on certain themes.

In general, there is an emphasis on creativity and imagination. This form of journalism is based on the use of visual material to make points on topics of concern. It contains a wide range of topics, mostly found under the citizen journalism category, which are submitted by a very wide range of sources from across the world. In addition, Vimeo journalism adopts a cosmopolitan outlook, not focusing on certain localities but supporting contributions from across the world. Other elements include educational/training videos for journalists, and artistic social film-making. It is clear that this kind of journalism seeks to relate the world through visual means. In terms of its production, it is neither professional in the strict sense of the term nor amateur or volunteer based – in fact it combines both professional and citizen journalism, but perhaps it is better understood as creative journalism.

Indeed, in its self-definition, Vimeo states that it is “created by film-makers and video creators who wanted to share their creative work” and that it provides a platform for “the sharing and show-casing of videos made with a concern for creativity and high aesthetic values.” It is a for-profit company, relying on advertising and premium services for income. Vimeo is operated by a set of film and video makers as well as developers and technical experts. When it comes to its audiences, these double as contributors – Vimeo

is entirely based on audience contributions. Audience/users are integrated into the site and can upload and categorize their videos in terms of contents, groups, projects, or channels. The role of Vimeo is to support and help tag and categorize the various videos. In general, creativity, visual innovation, and artistic flair are the main elements of Vimeo, which functions as journalism only insofar as it engages topical themes using visuals. This kind of creative visual journalism does not operate within any of the normative frames of journalism, such as providing information, a forum for deliberation, a space for antagonistic political visions, or links and connections to protest movements or insurgencies – it seems to prioritize visual and sensual elements – but not, it should be noted, in a sensational manner, as it forbids violence and other extreme portrayals.

Given its links to, but also detachment from, journalistic norms, this form of journalism may be seen as functioning in ways similar to that of art. Adorno (1997) saw art as operating both from within and outside of society, in order to comment, criticize, and help apprehend the world in radical new ways. Just as art, for Adorno, operates through a dialectic between content and form, so this kind of visual, creative journalism operates by imposing a new form (the visual one) on journalistic contents. The result is that audiences are engaged in the themes presented. While Vimeo videos are produced by users, these users should be thought of as auteurs in the sense that they are talented individuals, trained in recording, editing, and directing moving images. From this point of view, this journalism has an element of exclusion: not everyone can join in the creation of it, making creativity the barrier to entry (rather than money, access, etc.). Audiences, insofar as they are only watching and not making videos, retain the characteristics of audiences in the sense of sitting and watching. Those that double as both creators and audiences are positioned as critics or peers. Of all new forms of journalism perhaps this is the most radical in that it introduces an altogether new function for journalism, which engages not the intellect or rationality of citizens but their senses and aesthetic apprehension of the world. As such, it enables a more comprehensive critique of the political process, both formal and informal.

### News aggregators

This form of journalism refers to the aggregation of news from different news outlets, which are ordered and offered in a meta-site such as Google or Yahoo. The production process differs in that in fact the site reproduces rather than produces the news. The contents are those of standard, mainstream journalism, but are offered in a specific customizable manner to audiences/readers.

In examining this form more closely, the focus is on Google News. The main categories are difficult to discern as the site allows for customization. It mostly includes top stories, ranked on the basis of popularity (i.e. found in a lot of other news media) and recency (when they were published, the more recent goes on top). Users can customize the site on the basis of specialized news, for example, entertainment, sport, politics, and so on, and/or in terms of location, for example, news occurring in Greece or the USA, in terms of the main news outlets they are interested in, for example, CNN, Fox News, BBC News, and so on. It should be clearly noted that none of the news items are produced by Google – they are collected by a host of media and aggregated by Google.



The emphasis here is on providing (aggregating) a multiplicity of news, culled from a wide range of (mainstream) sources. There is a wide range of topics, which can be altered according to customer/user demands. Thus, although Google News may offer news on politics or the economy, users may choose to view only sport or entertainment news. Can this be considered journalism? To the extent that it reproduces the news it is journalism, but to the extent that it is not based on any original reporting it is merely a kind of parasitic journalism, feeding off original journalism.

However, Google News understands itself as providing a service to news readers that allows for a more personalized take on the news, based on a theme or topic. It views itself as objective in the sense that it provides several journalistic sources on a topic or news story, while it also makes use of a computer-based sorting system that disregards political ideology (see the “About” section of Google News). Audiences are clearly seen here as customers, as individuals in the (liberal) sense of having certain individual preferences and choices. This is clearly a customer-based take on journalism as service provision, a depoliticized understanding that pretends to service the customers even as they strip them of any potential contribution.

There is little doubt that the lack of originality as well as the understanding of citizens–readers as customers is at odds with all kinds of normative frames. Redden and Witschge’s (2010) critique of the homogeneity of news certainly appears warranted here. The ultimate function of this kind of journalism is to depoliticize and personalize journalism thereby stripping it from its political role. Its position vis-à-vis the political process is one in which the latter is seen as a personal choice, to be decided by individuals. It fragments the public space even as it acts as an aggregator. Its view of journalism as service provision and politics as personal choice appears to be politically compatible with neo-liberalism and its emphasis on the market on the one hand and on the individual as cut off from society on the other. If we accept that democracy is more than the aggregate of individual preferences, this kind of journalism is detrimental to the democratic process.

### Mainstream online journalism

This refers to the traditional form of journalism that for the most part has merely shifted its platform from print to online. It is produced by professional publishers, editors, and journalists, who are getting paid for their work. The news is produced by either in-house reporters or bought from news agencies, and ordered on the basis of the well-known news values. Readers are primarily positioned in a passive manner, reading the news. However, the online version of mainstream journalism has introduced a few changes in this form as well. These are found in the news contents and readers: news contents are considerably expanded while readers are allowed to comment on news stories.

We can examine this form more closely through the example of Guardian Online, the British newspaper that has one of the most commanding online news sites. This site has more categories by far than any of the other forms, including: news, sport, comment, culture, business, money, lifestyle, travel, education, and so on. Furthermore, each category has several subcategories, easing navigation, and guiding readers. For example, the category “news” includes the following subcategories: home, world, development, USA, politics, education, media, and so on. The site also has rolling breaking news at the

top, an integrated media player, and most popular/most read news items. But Guardian Online is more than a news site: it offers some commercial activity as well, ranging from dating and job classifieds, to offering products such as furniture, clothes, and so on. It further offers mobile services, whereby paying customers receive news on their mobile, while the site hosts advertisements. Finally, the site has integrated tools that allow readers to, for instance, find an energy supplier or a broadband service. In general, the emphasis here is on providing a range of services to readers, of which news is the main, but not the only, one. It offers articles on a wide range of topics, mostly written by *Guardian* journalists, although some may come from news agencies. It constitutes a typical example of liberal journalism, providing information, and some analysis and comment, but along with commercial services for readers.

Guardian Online has an elaborate code of conduct that covers both professional practices and personal conduct, and which adheres to the code developed by the Press Complaints Committee. It is run by the Scott Trust, which enables it to retain a degree of independence from the pressures of the market and political interference. The values of the Trust are summarized in the 1921 speech by C.P. Scott, the then editor of *The Manchester Guardian*, and include three famous assertions: “Comment is free but facts are sacred” reflecting a concern with accuracy; “the voice of opponents no less than that of friends has a right to be heard,” reflecting a concern with fairness, balance and objectivity; and journalism has “a moral as well as a material existence,” reflecting the dual position of journalism as both public service and commercial enterprise – the *Guardian*, and Guardian Online, clearly prioritize the former.

Readers are addressed as interested and knowledgeable individuals, who seek accurate information on a wide range of topics. In addition, readers are offered the opportunity to comment on some articles, mainly those that offer analysis and opinion. In short, Guardian Online operates within a liberal understanding of journalism, prioritizing accuracy and fairness, seeking to “zealously enforce the principles of civil and religious Liberty” (Taylor, 1821: np), while also promoting freedom of the press and liberal journalism across the world.

Thus, Guardian Online operates within a mainstream liberal frame of journalism, and seems to be doing a good job adhering to liberal principles. As such, its position toward the political process is one in which journalism is mediating between politicians and the public, seeking to retain its independence and to safeguard this mediating role. Toward the public, this form of journalism retains the classic position of offering them a (public) service, but not really involving them in the process of producing journalism. Although allowed to post comments, and although sometimes the comments sections may be more engaging and interesting than the articles themselves, the readers’ position is that of primarily consuming journalism. While this kind of journalism serves liberal representative democracy well, it does not question its premises. Rather, it reproduces the main liberal principles and reinforces the operation and role of journalism within a capitalist order. Finally, this form of journalism reproduces the offline model, and while integrating some new media features, it does not really significantly alter offline journalism – from this point of view, this kind of journalism may not be considered a new form as such, but rather the successful migration of journalism to the Internet.

## Open or crowdsourced journalism

The term crowdsourcing was coined by Jeff Howe, in an article in *Wired* magazine in 2006. Howe understands crowdsourcing as the application of open source principles to fields beyond software (see: <http://crowdsourcing.typepad.com/>). In journalism, this idea has also been discussed by Axel Bruns, who has coined the term *produsage*, to refer to the production of contents by users. But crowdsourcing goes beyond this: it issues an open call to all who may know something about a given issue or event, and asks them to share it. On this basis, the production of journalism is radically altered, because it is no longer undertaken by one or even a team of trained or citizen journalists – rather, production of journalism is distributed across several locations and people, each making a distinct contribution to the emerging news story, even if in the end it is compiled and presented by a single person. The news stories emerging from this kind of production tend to include a lot of data, and to be investigative. Readers are typically placed in the position of both users/readers as well as contributors and co-authors of news stories. To examine this new form more closely, the analysis focuses on Wikileaks.

Wikileaks has a very simple interface, including few if any categories, which include requests to donate, as well as to submit material. It further includes an archive from 2002 to 2010, and a series of editorials, comprising mostly the views and opinions of its celebrity founder Julian Assange. The main part of the site includes links to, and brief summaries of, the files and information leaked through Wikileaks. These notoriously include the Guantanamo Bay files, some 800 classified prisoner dossiers, the 250 000 cables from US Embassies, and the Iraq and Afghanistan War files. These files can be accessed and downloaded from the Wikileaks site, as well as from mirror sites and through torrent, the P2P file-sharing protocol. These files are in their “raw” and unprocessed form, just thousands and thousands of pages of information that need to be sifted through and highlighted in order to be made clearer. At the same time, Wikileaks has its own journalists, who provide summary versions and highlights of the main information contained in the files.

The number and complexity of the leaked files implies that readers of Wikileaks may not be everyday citizens, who have hardly the time and inclination to sift through and understand these documents, but rather professional journalists, and other interested parties (e.g. diplomats, political activists, human rights specialists, and so on). These more specialized readers then read and compile this information into a news story. The news stories that have emerged through Wikipedia then reflect the specialism and interest of their authors: thus, professional journalists who have accessed the files have offered journalistic accounts, focusing on the personalized, sensational, elite, and so on, aspects of the files; human rights and other activists have looked for and examined any human rights violations, any legal liabilities; diplomats have sought the implications for foreign policy, security issues and the like. Readers are then primarily experts who use the leaked archives as their primary source. At the same time, however, Wikileaks has issued open calls for contributors, who may have access to information that the public may have an interest in. Such whistleblowers may contact Wikileaks and offer information in ways that will not compromise them. Two kinds of readers are therefore primarily addressed

by Wikileaks: experts, who are able to compile and interpret the raw information leaked, and whistleblowers, who have access to important and secret information.

It is clear that Wikileaks operates within a cyberlibertarian frame, which holds that information should be free (see Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007). In its “About” section, Wikileaks states that it seeks to uphold in practice Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which refers to “the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” Part of its mission is to “keep governments open,” holding them accountable for their actions. Wikileaks depends entirely on donations, and has been at the center of a controversial decision by Visa and Mastercard to block donations to Wikileaks. The legal problems, celebrity style of its leader, and the notoriety it has achieved, often combine to obscure the origins of Wikileaks in the hacking and cyberlibertarian culture. This culture, described by Castells (2001) as one of the four cultures of the Internet, is characterized by an ethos of freedom but also creativity and innovation.

This kind of hacking culture is positioned in-between university (“techno-elitist culture” for Castells), and entrepreneurial cultures, borrowing elements from both. If we combine this culture and its ethic of freedom, innovation, and creativity, but also peer support, with journalism, the new journalistic form that emerges radicalizes journalism in its production, which is now distributed across many sources; in its contents which are now (re)written by experts, journalists, and bloggers; and in its readers/audiences, who are not only everyday citizens but also peers (experts and journalists). This new form can then be understood as a radicalized form of mainstream-liberal journalism, in that it retains its main function, that of holding governments accountable, but takes it to the next level. Open source journalism can therefore be understood as a kind of continuous investigative journalism in the tradition of the journalism of Watergate, and its protagonists, the “Deep Throat” (the government whistleblower), Bob Woodward, and Carl Bernstein (the *Washington Post* journalists). In political terms, the contribution of this new form is unique in extending the power and reach of the media and publicity, and through these in holding governments accountable. It is not a coincidence that some sources have attributed the Arab Spring, and especially the uprising in Tunisia, to Wikileaks’ information on the corruption of the Ben Ali regime (Malinowski, 2011). Notwithstanding the problems of such arguments, the wider issue here is that open source journalism emerges as a new defender of the public and offers a new lease of life to journalism as the Fourth Estate on a global scale. While this new form is not necessarily leading to “regime changes” in liberal representative democracies, it nevertheless confronts them with their abuses of power, forcing them to become more transparent and accountable.

### Social media journalism

A final form of journalism examined here refers to the ways in which social media are combined with journalism and produce a new kind of social media journalism. In terms of production, this form of journalism is collectively produced by both professional and amateur journalists, in a distributed manner similar to open source journalism. Its contents are primarily characterized by a personalized take on events and

are ranked in terms of personal interest rather than their news value. Readers are not only active producers in this form of journalism, but they are also understood as “friends” or “followers,” that is, as forming networks clustering around specific issues or keywords and/or persons.

This form will be examined here through Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)). Twitter, which is understood as a micro-blogging site or platform for user-generated content, allows users to post short messages of a maximum 140 characters. Its contents are entirely produced by users, who see a rolling line of new tweets as they come in. Tweets are ranked on the basis of their recency and/or on the basis of keywords, or hashtags (#). Users can “follow” other users, who can then see their tweets in their “timeline.” Users can also customize their “timelines” by creating lists (e.g. of tweets by friends, or news tweets and so on). A significant aspect of Twitter is that tweets by users can be ordered on the basis of their contents, as users can provide hashtags, that is, keywords preceded by a hashtag (#). A vast proportion of Twitter activity is personal and cannot really qualify as journalism. However, journalists or interested citizens can, and do, use Twitter in a journalistic manner, posting short messages about events as they unfold, or also summaries of news and urls where one can read more. The brevity of contents means that tweeters must come up with an interesting tweet or/and with ways of getting to the point of the issue or event – in some ways, tweets resemble headlines which must summarize the news and entice readers to read it.

Twitter readers are both producing and reading tweets, in a pattern that we have seen repeatedly in all forms of online journalism. However, unlike most other new forms, Twitter (and other social media) users form loose networks around certain persons or organizations with an account, who they “follow.” Thus, @Reuters has over 1 million followers, and @GeorgeMonbiot, a respected commentator and Guardian contributor has about 25 000 followers while Ann Curry, Today’s journalist, is followed by 1.1 million tweeters. This ordering of readers in networks is significant in that readers are not the isolated individuals implied in liberalism, nor do they form closely knit communities; rather, their loose clustering around certain accounts indicates a new form of organizing and participation in the public sphere on the basis of common interests, appreciation of individual commentators or journalists, or perceived importance and credibility of given news organizations. It also offers individual journalists the possibility to operate and build up a reputation beyond the news organization that employs them.

Assessing Twitter’s relationship to the political process is more complex. On the one hand, the immediacy of information allows and enables political action, while the possibility of citizen contribution widens participation. Indeed, the role played by social media in the recent uprisings in the Middle East and north Africa revolved precisely around these features: immediate information, direct participation, and widespread diffusion, all of which allow for mobilization and political action (see Shirky, 2011). On the other hand, the brevity of the messages, their idiosyncratic and personalized contents, as well as the emphasis on immediacy, are at odds with the requirements for factual analysis and accuracy. This, in turn, undermines the ability of social media journalism to appeal to citizens’ intellects and/or to enable deliberation over issues. Rather, the political contribution of this form of journalism is to enable and coordinate political action.

**Table 9.1** Summary of forms of online journalism

<i>Forms of journalism</i>	<i>Production</i>	<i>Contents</i>	<i>Readers</i>	<i>Politics and political function</i>
Participatory journalism (Indymedia)	Citizen-based	Involved, themes chosen on the basis of their political significance	Participate directly	Activist politics relying on enabling communication between insurgencies
J-blogging (TruthOut)	Professional but often depending on donations and advertising	Original reporting and/or opinion articles, guided by journalistic values	Involvement at two levels: commenting and/or contributing some contents, and donating	Liberal: watchdog and analysis
Video journalism (Vimeo)	Pro-am production	Visual, creative apprehensions of the world	Peers and/or spectators	Critique
News Aggregators (Google News)	Aggregation of news gathered by other news organizations – parasitic	Mainstream, typical journalism but ordered and classified on the basis of algorithms	Seen as customers' main contribution: the customization of contents	Depoliticization
Mainstream online journalism (Guardian Online)	Professional – produced and financed by news organizations	Mainstream contents, along with some interactive and multimedia features	Readers at most allowed to comment on news stories	Liberal: information provision
Open source journalism (Wikileaks)	Production distributed between sources, professional journalists and other experts	Raw information with some processing and highlights	Readers: experts and journalists, also potential whistleblowers	Radicalization of watchdog role
Social media journalism (Twitter)	Distributed pro-am production	Short, personalized messages, ordered through hashtags	Users participate directly	Political activism enabled through immediate information provision

## Conclusion

Table 9.1 summarizes the forms of online journalism identified here, along with their political role or function. It is clear that different forms operate in different ways and relate differently to the political process. The insurgent journalism of participatory journalism exemplified by Indymedia couldn't be more different to the depoliticized journalism of news aggregators, such as Google News; the radical new journalism of open source journalism of Wikileaks takes the watchdog function of journalism to the next level, while the video journalism found on Vimeo introduces a new function for journalism, that of critique through the senses. The two more mainstream forms, j-blogging and the journalism of Guardian online, are the ones that uphold the liberal functions of journalism as watchdog and information provider.

In general, it can be seen that different normative frames connect to journalism in different ways, creating different and often conflicting demands. Critiques of online journalism tend to overlook the multiple forms of journalism that owe their existence to the new media. An analysis of these new forms showed the different ways in which they understand their role, and their relationship to the political process on the one hand and citizens on the other. Journalism must be considered as a dynamic communicative form that changes and adapts to new environments. Most of the forms examined here have adapted to the new communicative environment, but when assessed in normative terms cannot be seen as equivalent. The liberal forms (TruthOut and Guardian Online) appear to essentially preserve the main values of liberal representative democracy, while the more radical forms (Indymedia, Wikileaks, Twitter, and Vimeo) introduce new tensions between readers, journalists, and the political process, essentially feeding journalism's dynamism. The work of news aggregators such as Google News can be said to be negative in that it has a parasitic relationship with, and depoliticizes, journalism.

As a conclusion, and notwithstanding the criticisms on the lack of diversity in online news contents, the important development is the proliferation of a series of new forms of journalism that operate antagonistically or synergistically with existing forms. The outcome of this for the political process is not yet clear, but if we follow agonistic democracy's concerns with openness of the public space for antagonisms to be expressed, then the multiplication of journalistic forms must be seen as a positive development.

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Part III  
Production



# Bridging the Gap: Toward a Typology of Cross-media News Production Processes

Ivar John Erdal

## Introduction

Few modern media organizations publish on only one platform. As Deuze (2007) argues, “A structure of convergent multimedia news organizations has been emerging since the mid-1990s, with companies all over the world opting for at least some form of cross-media cooperation or synergy between formerly separated staffers, newsrooms, and departments” (Deuze, 2007: 148).

As different media platforms use different sets of sign systems (writing, images, audio, video), these processes require some form of translation or adaptation. Earlier studies have approached this field from either an organizational (Boczkowski, 2004; Dailey, Demo and Spillman, 2005; Dupagne and Garrison, 2006; Krumsvik, 2009; Doyle, 2010; Dwyer, 2010) or rhetorical angle (Fagerjord, 2003; Erdal, 2008, 2009b). This chapter aims at synthesizing different approaches to the practices of cross-media news production, outlining a typology of different forms of content travel between media platforms.

This is done through analyses of cross-media news production processes on the level of the single news story. It is necessary to address both organizational strategies for dealing with convergence, and how journalists relate to these strategies in their daily work – as well as the ways in which single news items are made for and published on different media platforms, as the cooperation between radio, television, and the web increases.

The core concept used to describe these processes is *cross-media*. This concept describes communication or production where two or more media platforms are involved in an integrated way. The chapter argues that in order to be more precise for theoretical and analytical purposes we have to consider the distinction between cross-media *communication* – the textual perspective, and cross-media *production processes* – the work perspective.

The contribution of this chapter is an outline of a model that aims to supplement or nuance existing models of convergence journalism and enable a more detailed analysis of cross-media production processes. The importance of this proposed model is to both identify the different aspects of cross-media journalism, and at the same time account for the ways in which they are linked together.

## Existing Research

From around the mid-1990s, production processes have emerged as a major point of interest in studies of news organizations (Helland, 1995; Sand and Helland, 1998; Cottle and Ashton, 1999; Ytreberg, 1999; Küng-Shankleman, 2000; Boczkowski, 2004; Schultz, 2006; Ursell, 2001; Hemmingway, 2004, 2008).

The core research objects here are the *practices* surrounding technological developments within established media companies. The major point of interest in this body of research is how new technologies challenge the work practices of media organizations and workers, and the media products that are the outcome of these practices.

Recently, a body of research has emerged that looks at media organizations, and especially news journalism, in the wake of digitization, focusing on convergence developments. This relates to what Moe and Syvertsen (2007: 158) identify as part of the “third phase” of media institution research, “focusing on the impact of digitalization in a broad sense,” where “researchers no longer see the NRK [Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation] singularly as a broadcasting institution, but rather as a *cross-media institution*” (Moe and Syvertsen, 2007: 159, original italics).

In this body of research into convergence journalism, two particular themes stand out: a technologically oriented branch is occupied with analyzing the role of new (digital) technology in news work; another, more organizationally oriented branch concerns itself more with identifying “stumbling blocks” to convergence.

Inspired by Cottle and Ashton’s (1999) influential study of the role of new technology in broadcast news, Pavlik (2001) argues that changing technology affects journalism in several ways. With respect to how journalists do their work, he emphasizes the increased use of online tools for research, as well as the negative implications of multi skilling (Pavlik, 2001: 231). The content of the news is affected in terms of increased speed of the news flow. The structure or organization of the newsroom is changing toward flatter hierarchies and combined newsrooms (Pavlik, 2001: 234).

Analyzing the development of online newspapers in the USA, Boczkowski (2004) concludes that “materiality matters in online newsrooms ... technical considerations affect who gets to tell the story, what kinds of stories are told, how they are told, and to what public they are addressed” (Boczkowski, 2004: 177). In other words, the technology of news production needs to be studied in order to understand what goes on in the newsroom. Boczkowski and Ferris (2005) likewise emphasize the role of technology in news work and the processes that shape media convergence – concluding with a coexistence of increased convergence in production processes and continued divergence in media products.

Marjoribanks (2003) has looked at developments in the organization of media work in the newsrooms of News Corporation. He found that the implementation of

new production technology had a significant impact on the relationship between managers and news workers, especially a shift toward more flexible and multiskilled journalists.

His findings have much in common with the work of Mark Deuze (2004, 2007, 2008), who has done numerous studies of the changing nature of journalism in the digital age. Giving much attention to the perspective of the news workers, he has analyzed the relationship between new technology, labor conditions, and professional journalistic cultures – coining the phrase “liquid media work” to describe the nature of modern journalism. Deuze (2007) argues that technology must not be seen as a “neutral agent,” in relation to news journalism, as “hardware and software tend to amplify existing ways of doing things, are used to supplement rather than radically change whatever people were already doing, and take a long time to sediment into the working culture of a news organization” (Deuze, 2007: 155).

Thus, the uses of technology are as important as the technology itself. This perspective is shared by Huang and colleagues (2004). In a case study of the *Tampa Tribune* they focus on whether convergence has had negative consequences for the quality of journalism. Looking at the overall news output, they conclude that this has not happened (Huang *et al.*, 2004: 86).

Media products are also the interest of Karlsson (2010), who explores new approaches for studying interactivity and immediacy in news stories online. Most importantly, he develops a strategy for “freezing” the perpetual flow of online news, in order to perform systematic content analysis.

Newsroom technologies in use are also the object of study for Hemmingway (2008). Using Actor Network Theory to study the production of regional television news, she focuses on how to understand media as practice, looking at “the internal routines, self-reflexive practices, technological arrangements and the unstable, constantly changing practical constraints that actually govern news production” (Hemmingway, 2008: 9). This approach leads to a view of human and machine actors as equal parts of a network, whereby the routines of newsmaking can be recognized as *technologically embedded* (Hemmingway, 2008: 14).

Another major theme in the recent work on convergence news journalism is “stumbling blocks” to convergence (Silcock and Keith, 2006; Singer, 2004; Dupagne and Garrison, 2006; Klinenberg, 2005). What are the factors that hinder cross-media journalism? Indeed, Quinn (2005) argues for a “fundamental dichotomy” inherent in convergence journalism, where the business view of convergence as a tool for increased productivity and marketing does not match the journalistic view of convergence as a tool for doing better journalism.

While Huang *et al.* (2006) examine media professionals’ “concerns of working across media platforms,” Klinenberg (2005: 49) examines how editors and reporters tackle the time constraints and market pressure of convergence journalism. Silcock and Keith (2006) study the practice of convergence in print–television partnerships. They focus on how journalists define convergence, and discuss language- and culture-based challenges of convergence journalism. Referring to Dailey, Demo and Spillman’s (2005) “continuum,” Silcock and Keith argue that convergence partnerships can be described as either “open” or “closed” (2006: 623).

Using the theoretical framework of the diffusions of innovations theory, Singer (2004) argues that cultural clashes block convergence, as “cultural differences have led some journalists to minimize their involvement in convergence efforts” (Singer, 2004: 16). Through case studies in four US media organizations, she finds that journalists see clear career advantages with convergence. At the same time she identifies a number of challenges to this development, especially differences in cultural and technological approaches – culture clashes – to news work in different parts of the organizations.

Dupagne and Garrison (2006) study changes in newsroom culture at the *Tampa News Center*. They found that journalists spent more time on multimedia storytelling, and had increased awareness of the other platforms. The “winner” is television news, benefiting from the depth of resources of the newspaper to which they did not have access when the two operations were not cooperating and were housed in separate locations.

Others have tried to find out whether or not convergence has jeopardized the quality of news journalism (Huang *et al.*, 2004, 2006; Pavlik, 2004; Ursell, 2001). A lot of journalists are skeptical about cross-media journalism, as they perceive production for more than one platform either forces them to be spread too thinly, or increases their workload without compensation (Klinenberg, 2005; Dupagne and Garrison, 2006; Huang *et al.*, 2006).

There is clearly a substantial body of research on the processes of convergence in media organizations, and, albeit fewer, on the products of these processes – the news-story level of analysis. However, there are very few studies that aim to take both perspectives into account. This chapter is therefore trying to bridge the gap, so to speak, between the organizational and the textual perspective. This is done in the following by proposing a model for the relationship between news work and news texts. The main question in the frame of this chapter is how we can analyze the relationship between changes in journalistic practice and developments in/of different news products.

The premise of this chapter is that the very term convergence is quite a challenge when analyzing media practices and media products. For one thing, convergence comes in a variety of forms. Fagerjord and Storsul (2007: 20) distinguish between six forms of media convergence: convergence of networks, terminals, services, rhetorics, markets, and regulatory regimes. As Kolodzy notes, “convergence journalism is happening in a variety of newsrooms, in a variety of manners. No one form of convergence journalism has risen to be the best template for doing convergence” (Kolodzy, 2006: 10).

Aiming to clarify the different meanings of convergence in an editorial context, Gordon (2003) provides a definition that is useful for analyzing the variety of processes and products in contemporary news journalism. He describes five aspects of convergence: ownership, tactics (cross promotion and sharing content across platforms), structure (organizational and functional changes), information gathering (for several platforms), and presentation (Gordon, 2003: 61).

Definitions of convergence in a journalistic context, or “convergence journalism,” have a tendency to strive toward an ideal of “full convergence,” where “the key people, the multimedia editors, assess each news event on its merits and assign the most appropriate staff for the story” (Quinn, 2005: 32), or “hybrid teams of journalists ... work together to plan, report, and produce a story, deciding along the way which parts of the story are told most effectively in print, broadcast, and digital forms” (Dailey, Demo and Spillman, 2005: 5).



Seeing this ideal of “full convergence” as the ultimate goal for every media organization is problematic, as it imposes a top-down perspective on convergence journalism. Domingo (2005) has pointed out a tendency toward technological determinism in research on online journalism, where the main topic is how journalism fails to take full advantage of the possibilities of the Internet. Likewise, Singer (2004: 17) concludes that “while many journalists have problems with the current practice of convergence, far fewer have problems with the idea or principle itself.”

This chapter adopts a more pragmatic definition, in line with Deuze (2004), who defines convergence journalism as “(increasing) cooperation and collaboration between formerly distinct media newsrooms” (Deuze, 2004: 140).

## Methodology

This chapter is based on existing research on the field, as well as my own research on convergence news journalism at the Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK (Erdal, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). The latter consists of two case studies of news organizations. The cases studied are two newsrooms at the NRK: the central newsroom at Marienlyst and the regional office Østlandssendingen, both located in Oslo. News production at the NRK has increased significantly over the last ten years, now covering four radio channels (one of which is 24-hour news radio), three television channels, teletext, web, and mobile media.

The chapter is grounded in a combination of qualitative methods for gathering and analyzing data, incorporating field observation, qualitative interviews, and textual analysis. The field observation consisted of a total of four weeks in February and March 2006, two weeks in each newsroom. The textual analysis emphasized two textual levels: that of the media platform, and that of the individual news story. A news story is here understood as, for example, a fire, or the discovery of bacteria in shopping mall playrooms. Thus, combined with observation and interview data, the textual analysis focused on the roles and relationships between the media platforms in the grander scheme of news coverage, and on how a particular news story was made for each media platform.

## Cross-media as Theoretical and Analytical Concept

The premise of this chapter is that multiplatform news production involves a range of intertwining forms of cooperation and reproduction. These processes make use of more or less standardized practices for easy reproduction of content from one medium to another. I will argue, based on the case studies at the NRK, that convergence journalism can be visualized as containing a vertical and horizontal axis.

The *vertical axis* represents the production process from start to finish, and is linked to the established concept of multitasking (Bromley, 1997; Cottle and Ashton, 1999). A multitasked reporter performs several functions in the making of a news story, for example, interviewing, shooting video, taking photos, writing up the story, editing audio, and video. Journalists and academics alike often describe these “backpack journalists” (Stone, 2002; Gordon, 2003) or “Inspector Gadgets” (Quinn, 2005: 31)

with the pervasive proverb “jack of all trades, master of none” (Singer, 2004; Tanner and Duhe, 2005; Huang *et al.*, 2006). The main argument is that by “being spread too thin” (Cottle and Ashton, 1999: 34), the multiskilled journalist is not really very good at anything. Ten years later, these arguments against convergence journalism are still common, even if this line of reasoning now is met with stronger and more articulate counter-arguments (Erdal, 2009a).

The *horizontal axis* of convergence journalism is, on the other hand, made up by the different media platforms on which a news story can be realized: print, radio, television, web, and mobile media. It is likewise often associated with the “master of none” label. I call this the *cross-media axis* of convergence journalism, and will in the remainder of this chapter examine it more closely.

First it is useful to take a closer look at how we proceed from media to “cross-media.” The concept concerns communication where two or more media platforms are involved *in an integrated way*. Other terms that have a similar signification are “transmedia” (Jenkins, 2006) and “intermediality” (Rajewsky, 2002). Cross-media is often confused with *multiplatform* (production or publishing). However, to be precise, the concepts of cross-media and multiplatform must be distinguished from each other. Thomasen (2007) sees cross-media as an extension of multiplatform. Multiplatform indicates the use of more than one media platform within the same “communicative situation,” but with no communicative relations or references between them. He argues that cross-media represents an extension of this, where these relations or references are present in the communication (Thomasen, 2007: 43). The essence is thus whether the different media platforms “talk to each other.” If a media concept uses television and web in a way that makes it impossible to remove one of them without severely altering the product, it can be described as a cross-media concept or text.

My point is that, in order to be more precise for theoretical and analytical purposes, we have to distinguish between cross-media *communication*, and cross-media *production processes*. If a news story published on both television and web involves cooperation between television and web reporters, either on the research stage or through content sharing, we can talk about a cross-media production process.

Cross-media can thus be seen both from an external (the audience) and an internal (the organization) perspective (Petersen and Rasmussen, 2007: 58). Internal cross-media describes production processes within a media organization that involve more than one platform, and involves different modes of organization and cooperation. External cross-media describes the communication toward the audience, or the text, with emphasis on cross promotion (Dailey, Demo, and Spillman, 2005), intertextuality (Rajewsky, 2002; Petersen, 2007a, 2009), and repurposing of content. From this point of view, cross-media has many similarities to intertextuality, but is a broader concept, as intertextuality is but one aspect of external cross-media.

A highly influential model of convergence in journalism is Dailey, Demo, and Spillman’s (2005) “convergence continuum.” Created to describe convergence partnerships between separate organizations, it is also useful for analyzing different platforms within the same organization. Aiming at creating a “common instrument for measuring convergence efforts” (Dailey, Demo, and Spillman, 2005: 2), the model describes convergence journalism as a dynamic scale with five overlapping stages.

These stages range from low to high levels of integration: Placed at the left end of the continuum is the level “cross-promotion” between different media outlets or platforms. On this level the amount of cooperation and interaction among different parts of the organization or different platforms is low. Media outlets “promote the content of their partners through the use of words or visual elements” and do not work together to produce content (Dailey, Demo, and Spillman, 2005).

The next level, “cloning,” consists of one platform republishing the content of another with little or no editing. Sharing occurs only after the content has been produced, no cooperation happens in the newsgathering process.

“Coopetition” is the level where platforms both cooperate and compete. Different media outlets promote each other and share content, but a long history of competition and differences in journalistic culture limits the level of cooperation. As Dailey, Demo, and Spillman (2005: 4) put it: “a newspaper reporter might appear as an expert or commentator on a television station’s newscast ... but the two staffs are careful not to divulge any information that might be exclusive to their news products.”

Level four on the continuum is called “content sharing.” Here different platforms or media outlets regularly share information and content, rewriting news stories to suit the special requirements of their media outlet. However, each (part of the) organization produce the majority of their own news content by themselves.

Finally, at the level of “full convergence” cooperation takes place both in the newsgathering and publishing/broadcasting process, and “hybrid teams of journalists from the partnering organizations work together to plan, report and produce a story, deciding along the way which parts of the story are told most effectively in print, broadcast, and digital forms” (Dailey, Demo, and Spillman, 2005: 5). An organization’s place on the model is not static. It can change, also according to the nature of the news.

This model has been very influential for research on convergence journalism. However, I will argue that it has some shortcomings for analyzing cross-media journalism. While the model is fruitful for analyzing the *organization* of media production, it does not in my opinion sufficiently describe the production process, that is, the different ways that content travels across media platforms in the making of the news. The main reason for this is that the model does not distinguish between the internal and external dimensions of cross-media, or between communication and production. In order to understand the complexity of cross-media production processes, we need to supplement this model with a model that also describes convergence journalism from the perspective of the single news story.

One influential contribution to the understanding of the textual perspective of convergence journalism comes from Boczkowski (2004). He suggests three forms of content creation in offline and online newspaper constellations: repurposing, recombination, and recreation (2004: 51). Boczkowski’s term “repurposing” refers to the practice of taking content created for a print newspaper, and publishing it on the web without any significant changes. He also links this term to that of “shovelware:” “print stories reproduced on web pages” (Boczkowski, 2004: 55). The term “recombination” describes newsroom practices that take print content and supplement it with new content or new functionality for online publication, “customizing” it for the web. This term also covers online journalism that utilizes the seemingly unlimited publishing space of the web (Boczkowski,

2004: 57). “Recreation” on the other hand, refers to content made exclusively for online publication (Boczkowski, 2004: 59).

This is both a concise and useful model for understanding the relationship between the rather similar news outlets of a newspaper and its online companion. When studying cross-media journalism as both process and product, however, I will argue that we need a more nuanced set of concepts, elaborating on Boczkowski’s concept of “recombination.”

While the categories “repurposing” and “recreation” as described above are relatively straightforward in a cross-media context, the category “recombination” seems to be too much of a “black box.” We need a model that goes into more detail about what happens when content travels across different media platforms in the cross-media newsroom.

Dailey, Demo, and Spillman’s convergence continuum model has been criticized for its linearity, assuming that all media organizations eventually (and inevitably) will move toward the highest stages, achieving full convergence (Deuze, 2004: 140). In the continuation of this line of argument is the inherent normativity of the continuum, where the movement from lower to higher levels of convergence is something that media organizations should aim for. Further, and perhaps more important, the stages described in the model are successive. In order for a media organization to proceed to a particular level it has to have obtained the characteristics of all lower levels as “at the content sharing level, the distrust demonstrated in the cooptation level has diminished” (Dailey, Demo, and Spillman, 2005: 7). This implies that each step has overcome the shortcomings, or convergence “stumbling blocks,” of the former.

In my study of two newsrooms at the Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK (Erdal, 2008, 2009a) I found that the “cooptation” of step three coexists with the “content sharing” found on step four. Further, the “cloning” of step two, where one platform republishes the content of another with little or no editing, is an integral part of the cross-media reproduction process at the web desk at all times (see also Erdal, 2008, 2009a). Sometimes, “hybrid teams” from different platforms cooperate in producing the news. Dailey, Demo, and Spillman (2005) claim that an organization’s place on the model can change, according to the nature of the news. I will rather argue that cross-media production, if seen over a period of time, incorporates all these steps.

Therefore, rather than describe a convergence model as a ladder or stairway to convergence heaven, or an “instrument for measuring convergence efforts” (Dailey, Demo, and Spillman, 2005: 2), it can be more useful to think of it in terms of a set of choices of convergence approaches. My work indicates that in a given newsroom, the different stages or models of multiplatform production described by Dailey, Demo, and Spillman (2005) coexist, if not all at the same time. Further, each stage or model of cross-media journalism involves a set of shared reproductive techniques (Erdal, 2009b).

I will propose a model of cross-media production processes seeking to synthesize and supplement existing models as described above, in order to enable a more detailed analysis of convergence journalism practices. The model consists of four different *forms of cross-media practice*: multiplatform journalism, hard-drive journalism, intra-platform coordination, and intra-platform production.

*Multiplatform journalism*: This category involves one reporter or a team of reporters producing the same story for two or more platforms. An illustrative example took place during my research at the NRK central newsroom. It involves the announcement by the

two largest Norwegian oil companies, Statoil and Shell, of a joint venture into CO<sub>2</sub> cleansing. The story is scheduled to be announced at a large press conference at 10 am. The story breaks on the radio morning news at 6 am as a short notice read by the anchor. The early publishing of the story by NRK radio is due to an alert economy reporter. At 6.30, which is considered prime time for breaking news, a short report by the same economy reporter is broadcast. It is published on the web at 6.48 am, and broadcast in the television bulletins between 7 am and 9 am.

The stories are all put together by the same reporter, and are almost identical on all three platforms. The similarity across platforms is linked to the verbal nature of the story, and the wording is the same on radio, television, and in print on the web. The soundtrack of the television version is the same as the radio version, illustrated by video footage showing the companies' headquarters and offshore oil installations. From then on, however, the coverage of the story is separated into different platforms. Radio and television have their own separate teams at the conference, making different stories for publication in the afternoon and evening broadcasts.

*Hard-drive journalism:* This category describes a form of journalism where a single reporter creates a new version of an already existing news report for a different platform. This is a fairly common practice in the NRK newsroom. A typical example is the publication of a story about women and heart disease. It is first broadcast in the main television newscast in the evening as one of the top stories. The report contains interviews with two female doctors, a patient, and the minister for health, combined with sync footage from a hospital. The story is not covered by radio news, and first appears on the web immediately after the televised newscast is over. The web article is a web version of the television report, written by a web reporter. The article has the form of a summary illustrated with still images captured from the television interviews, and contains a link to the full television report.

*Intra-platform coordination:* This represents a form of journalistic practice where reporters or editors from different platforms share information, and coordinate their efforts in covering a particular news story, typically during editorial meetings or more informally. An example of this form is the coverage of a group of people from an environmental organization who boarded a working vessel in the fjord outside the Norwegian capital Oslo in order to stop the dumping of soil into the fjord.

The story is first published on the web at 7.20 am, based on news agency material. A new article is published at 10 am, reporting that the environmentalists have aborted the mission. The story is written by the radio bulletin reporter and contains a link to the first story and an audio link to a telephone interview conducted by the radio reporter. The article also contains a link to background information, and is illustrated with a photo taken by the television crew. On radio, the story leads in the 8 am newscast. The same story is broadcast in the bulletin at 10 am, but updated with a short studio comment saying that the environmentalists have aborted the mission after police intervention. The story is broadcast on the evening television news at 6.40 pm. First comes video footage of the environmentalists leaving the vessel and removing their banners. Their leader comments to the camera as they go, and then gives a more formal interview. This form of cross-media cooperation involves extensive communication and sharing of content between the desks of different platforms.

	<b>Depending</b> on bilateral platform coordination	<b>Not depending</b> on bilateral platform coordination
<b>Depending</b> on accessing information and content in shared digital production systems	Intra-platform production	Hard-drive journalism
<b>Not depending</b> on accessing information and content in shared digital production systems	Intra-platform coordination	Multiplatform journalism

**Figure 10.1** Outline of a model of cross-media production processes

*Intra-platform production:* This is a more complex form of cross-media journalism, and requires reporters from different platforms to cooperate extensively in covering a particular news story, sharing content and raw material. This category is often found in the covering of larger events. An example of this form of cross-media involved the coverage of the culmination of an infamous Norwegian trial. The “Nokas trial” was a notorious Norwegian trial during 2005 and 2006, involving robbery and manslaughter. The trial was given a prominent place in the media during its unfolding, and reached its climax with the live reading of the verdict on March 10, 2006. The NRK covered this as a planned and orchestrated news event, where each platform had designated functions. Television was the primary content provider, and the other platforms relied on material from the television production as a basis for their own coverage. The event is analyzed in more detail in Erdal (2009b).

It is important to note that these categories are not exhaustive, as I am sure others will have different categories that either supplement or refine the model. What unites and divides these four categories is, firstly, that they are either dependent on bilateral coordination between different desks or platforms, or not. Secondly, that they are either dependent on accessing information, raw material, and finished news reports from the shared digital production systems (ENPS, Digas, Quantel), or not. This can be illustrated by a simple matrix (see Figure 10.1).

## Conclusion

This chapter started out by claiming that there is a need to supplement existing models of convergence journalism in order to understand the complexity of cross-media production processes. Further I have argued that it is crucial to address both organizational strategies for dealing with convergence *and* how journalists relate to these strategies in their daily work – as well as the ways in which single news items are made for and published on different media platforms, as the cooperation between radio, television, and the web increases.

I have argued that while influential models like Dailey, Demo, and Spillman’s (2005) *convergence continuum* are very good for analyzing the *organization* of media production,

they do not sufficiently describe the production *process* as such. An example of a model that goes further in that direction is found in Boczkowski (2004), outlining three forms of content creation in offline and online newspaper constellations: repurposing, recombination, and recreation (2004: 51). While this is both a concise and useful model for understanding the relationship between the rather similar news outlets of a newspaper and its online companion, I have argued that when studying cross-media journalism as both process and product, we need a more nuanced set of concepts, elaborating on Boczkowski's concept of "recombination."

Cross-media production involves a number of intertwining forms of cooperation and reproduction between reporters and other news professionals from different platforms within a media organization, or between partnering organizations. We need a consistent vocabulary for describing content travel between not only print and web but also radio, television, and web. Based on fieldwork in two newsrooms at the Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK (Erdal, 2008, 2009), I have therefore proposed an outline of a model that goes into more detail in describing cross-media production processes, than what is found in existing models of convergence journalism. The model consists of four different *forms of cross-media practice*: multiplatform journalism, hard-drive journalism, intra-platform coordination and intra-platform production, as illustrated in Figure 10.1.

This model does not aspire toward normativity in assuming that cross-media production should strive toward "higher" levels of convergence. Nor does it claim to be a model incorporating all aspects of organization, production, and product that constitute convergence journalism. The model aims to supplement existing models in the specific area of *cross-media production processes*, in order to enable a more detailed analysis of convergence journalism practices.

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# Technology and the Transformation of News Work: Are Labor Conditions in (Online) Journalism Changing?

Steve Paulussen

In 2009, a group of Flemish (northern Belgian) journalists and media scholars wrote an open letter to the then minister of media to express their concerns about the crisis of the press.<sup>1</sup> They warned about the “continuing market logic” within the media sector and its negative implications for the working conditions of journalists and the quality of the news produced by them. The authors referred in their letter to a scientific study on burnout in journalism, which revealed that one fifth of the population of professional journalists in Flanders (21.4%) has increased risk of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment in the workplace (Teugels, Van Hoof, and De Witte, 2009). According to the study, the most likely causes of burnout in journalism are a combination of high work pressure with factors such as a skewed work–life balance, a lack of feedback from superiors, and a lack of variation in the job.

The findings of the Belgian study are similar to the results of recent research from the USA, indicating that the risk of burnout among newspaper journalists is on the rise (Reinardy, 2011). Young copy editors working at small newspapers appear to be especially at risk of burnout. Comments from journalists intending to leave the profession suggest that an increase in tasks and responsibilities, coupled with a reduction of resources, is affecting journalists’ professional autonomy, causing more stress and less job satisfaction. Notably, a 2005 report by the US National Center for Disease Control, cited by Reinardy (2011: 34), ranked journalism seventh in a top 10 of most stressful jobs.

Survey research in different countries confirms that job satisfaction among news workers is negatively influenced by unfavorable working conditions in the newsroom (Weaver *et al.*, 2007; Nygren, 2011; Raeymaeckers, Paulussen, and De Keyser, 2012). Although job satisfaction among professional journalists is high in general, reasons for dissatisfaction are primarily related to discontent with salary, workload, job insecurity,

and perceived lack of promotion prospects. It is therefore worth paying attention to the economic impact on journalistic labor, especially since recent developments in newsrooms continue to go in the direction of doing more with less – more content with fewer staff, more (and more varied) tasks in less time, more flexibility for less pay, and so on (Deuze, 2007; Cushion, 2007; García Avilés *et al.*, 2004).

This chapter looks at how working conditions for journalists are changing in the context of ongoing digitization and commercialization of the media. Special attention is paid to online journalists. First, I take a broader view of the role of technology, and more particularly digital discourse, in the transformation of work in capitalist societies. Second, I try to identify and describe some of the key trends in the organization of labor in journalism on the basis of a review of academic literature on news work. To support my arguments with empirical data, I will primarily use results from a 2008 sociological survey of all professional journalists in Flanders.<sup>2</sup> Finally, and in conclusion, I reflect on the further implications of these trends for the quality of news and the future of professional journalism.

## New Capitalism, Technology, and Journalism

Understanding the economic and technological impact on the organization of news work requires a broader consideration of labor market trends in general. In *Media Work*, Mark Deuze (2007) convincingly shows how journalistic labor is subject to wider changes in the organization of work in the creative industries. Inspired by Zygmunt Bauman's notion of "liquid modernity," he concludes that we are witnessing an evolution of media work becoming liquid. He observes a blurring of once clear-cut boundaries, not only in general terms between work and leisure time or professional and private life, but also within media organizations: between management and employees and between producers and "the people formerly known as the audience." In this changing environment, the position of the individual media professional becomes far more uncertain, which leads Deuze to suggest that career paths in media will increasingly be characterized in terms of casual and contingent employment, a high demand for flexibility, and a convergence of previously distinct tasks and responsibilities (Deuze, 2007, 2009; Deuze and Fortunati, 2010).

It can easily be argued that media work thus seems to be subject to trends observed in different sectors of the contemporary labor market. A growing body of literature on the organization of labor in capitalist societies indeed suggests that "all work, including that of journalists, is increasingly subject to casualization, freelancing and other non-permanent contractual arrangements, flexibility and insecurity" (Örnebring, 2010: 59). Relevant in this respect is Richard Sennett's work on "the culture of the new capitalism" and its impact on work ethics and human relationships in the workplace (Sennett, 1998, 2006). A central element in the "new capitalism" is the individualization of labor. As the demands and responsibilities are shifting from the employer or the company to the individual employees, the managerial control over the workforce grows. In an environment where individuals are increasingly being assessed on their personal attributes such as their flexibility, entrepreneurship, and

adaptability (or the capacity to cope with change and uncertainty), social solidarity between workers tends to erode. An indication of this is the decline in memberships of trade unions, a tendency that is also apparent in journalism (Nygren, 2011; Beam and Meeks, 2011).

The role of technology in this “new capitalism” cannot be ignored. New digital technologies are often perceived as the main driver behind economic and organizational transitions in the workplace. Media scholar Henrik Örnebring (2010) notes also that journalists are tempted to view technology as a primary cause of organizational and professional changes in the newsroom. Several studies indeed suggest that journalists frequently view “technology and technological development as inevitable, impersonal forces, that directly cause many of the changes taking place within journalism” (Örnebring, 2010: 58). The focus on technology as a driving factor of change may be logically explained by the fact that the immediate, direct effects of the implementation of a new technology in the newsroom are often more visible and tangible than the effects of other developments such as commercialization. Yet one has to be cautious of such technological determinism.

In recent critiques of new capitalism, authors like Kevin Doogan (2009) and Eran Fisher (2010) draw attention to the ideological dimension of technology and digital discourse. The latter author provides a convincing account of how technology discourse in today’s post-Fordist society “legitimizes ... the withdrawal of the state from markets, the globalization of the economy, the dehierarchization and decentralization of businesses, and the flexibilization of production and the labor process” (Fisher, 2010: 3). The ultimate outcome of digital discourse is the creation of a sense of inevitability around changes taking place within the economy and the labor market – there seems to be no escaping it (see also Sennett, 1998, 2006). Consequently, within this dominant discourse on technology and new capitalism, the “real” transformative capacity of technology tends to be overstated. Using international statistical evidence, Doogan (2009) challenges some widespread claims about, among other things, the employment effects of new technologies, the practice of outsourcing, and the supposed growth of non-standard work contracts. The risk of overstating the matter is that it may lead to a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy when employees start to “disempower themselves by imagining the worst” (Lee-Wright, Philips, and Witschge, 2011: 25). Or, as the author puts it in the conclusion of his book: “sympathetic commentators should recognize the risk of self-inflicted weaknesses created by the overstatement of capital mobility, job instability and powerlessness” (Doogan, 2009: 214).

The studies that are briefly discussed here suggest at least two things. One thing is that a theoretical focus on the discursive ideological role rather than the material role of technology may prove to be more fruitful for understanding the “real” social and economic implications of digitalization. The second suggestion is that it is useful to confront theoretical arguments with empirical evidence, not to discount the trends observed by many authors, but to put them into perspective. It goes beyond the purpose of this chapter to provide a critical analysis of the digital discourse on the reorganization of journalistic labor, but regarding the second point, I will combine theoretical insights from literature with empirical evidence in order to avoid overstatement.

## The Transformation of News Work

The media industry has been hit hard by the global economic recession of the past few years. High numbers of job losses were reported across Europe and the USA. The figures brought together by Lee-Wright, Philips, and Witschge (2011) in their recent book *Changing Journalism* speak for themselves:

The Business Insider website estimate of total industry job losses in the UK and Ireland between December 2008 and April 2009 was 8800... In the USA, between September 2008 and September 2009, it is reported that the print sector lost more than 24500 jobs, while the broadcast sector estimated over 8300 posts... The European Centre for Journalism ... reports similar losses across Europe, from c. 1000 in Germany to 1500 in Spain in the first six months of 2008...

Lee-Wright, Philips, and Witschge, 2011: 22

Although accelerated by the recession, this precarious employment situation is also the result of structural organizational changes in the media, driven by a market logic that aims to reduce costs while increasing productivity and maximizing profit (Altmeyden, 2008). Today's economic pressures on the media, in combination with the abovementioned digital discourse that promotes the flexibilization and individualization of labor, give reason to believe that working conditions within the journalistic profession are likely to deteriorate rather than improve. But how precarious are these working conditions already? What are the major trends affecting the nature of journalistic labor? And are professional journalists left without any power to counteract or escape the situation?

What becomes clear when searching for studies on news work, is that while a wealth of literature is available on journalistic practices, routines, workflows, ethics, and roles, the concept of labor has largely been ignored in the field of journalism studies (Örnebring, 2010). However, while still small, the body of research on employment and labor conditions in journalism is growing (see, for instance, recent edited volumes by Lowrey and Gade, 2011; Franklin and Mensing, 2011; Deuze, 2010; Weaver and Willnat, 2012).

As already suggested above, the available studies by and large paint a gloomy picture of journalistic labor. In this chapter, I argue that at least four trends can be identified. Firstly, research suggests a growth of atypical, non-standard employment within the profession of journalism. Secondly, there is a growing demand for functional flexibility and multiskilling as organizational structures and responsibilities in newsrooms become more fluid. Thirdly, and partly as a consequence of this functional flexibility, journalists are facing the challenges of an ever-increasing workload, which requires more temporal flexibility from the workforce. Fourthly and finally, journalism scholars observe that more and more editors, and especially online editors, find themselves bound to their desks, as resources for field work tend to dry up. In the following pages, I elaborate on each of these trends.

### Atypical, contingent employment

When it comes to the changing nature of news work, reference is often made to a 2006 report by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) with the support of the International Labour Office (ILO) (Walters, Warren, and Dobbie, 2006). The study,

based on a global survey of IFJ affiliates in 38 countries, emphasizes the growth of atypical work relationships in the media industry. In spite of the fact that the report offers almost no hard data, such as employment rates, average salary estimates, or the number of non-standard contracts, the findings of the study are important because they reflect major concerns and sentiments within the profession about the precarious employment and unfavorable labor conditions in journalism. For the authors of the study, “atypical work” refers to “types of employment that are not permanent and/or full-time” and it can thus be described in terms of freelance work, temporary contracts, and part-time employment (Walters, Warren, and Dobbie, 2006: 6).

### *Freelance work*

“Portfolio work,” better known as freelancing, has been common in the profession of journalism for many decades. Yet, despite differences between countries as well as between media sub-sectors, the share of freelancers has significantly increased since the 1980s. Today, freelancers make up one third of the workforce in the Netherlands, and similar figures can be found across Europe and Australia (Deuze, 2009: 83).

In Flanders, almost three out of ten professional journalists in 2008 (27%) work on a freelance basis (Raeymaeckers, Paulussen, and De Keyser, 2012). Not all of them are victims of precarious employment, though. In 2008, only one quarter of the Flemish journalists who indicated freelance work as their main occupation said they were “forced by necessity” to opt for this work status. This means that the majority of the self-employed population voluntarily chose to become freelancers. Their choices are mainly motivated by the wish to experience more freedom and autonomy in their professional lives – two thirds of them (68%) said this factor influenced their decision to go freelance – or the wish to gain more control over their work–life balance (28%). Moreover, one out of five freelancers (21%) said financial reasons played a role in their decision to opt for self-employment.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding that freelance work carries benefits both for employers and employees, one should bear in mind that counter to this “positive” pole of self-expression, independence and control,” there is “a ‘negative’ pole of fragmentation and uncertainty” (Platman, 2004: 592). Concerns are raised that most of the growth in freelance work in the media is situated at this negative pole. Portfolio careers are traditionally associated with veteran journalists, but we now see that the average age of freelancers seems to be decreasing. The younger freelancers are, the more likely they are to experience the negative consequences in terms of job insecurity, a lack of promotion prospects, and low wages (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010). With regards to the latter point, the low remuneration for freelancing is particularly noticeable in local online journalism, where correspondents experience competition from volunteer citizen journalists (Paulussen, Geens, and Vandenbrande, 2011: 11).

### *Temporary contracts and part-time employment*

There is a general perception within the profession that careers in the news industry often begin with unpaid internships, low paid assignments, and short-term contracts (Walters, Warren, and Dobbie, 2006; Thornton, 2011). This suggests, again, that permanent, full-time contracts are becoming a rarity in journalism, especially for the

young aspirants to the profession. According to Deuze and Fortunati (2010: 111), “some reporters are still permanently employed, but most others only parachute in for a period of time to work on a certain aspect of a project.” However, while a lot of anecdotal material can be found to support such a statement, the statistical evidence so far is, at least in Belgium, less convincing. According to the 2008 journalist survey in Flanders, more than three-quarters of the professional journalists at that time worked for one employer on a permanent job contract. Also, job stability was still relatively high in 2008 and remained unchanged compared with 2003. In both years, the average number of different employers journalists (both employed and freelance) had worked for in the course of their career was 3.1; if we exclude freelancers the average number of former employers was 2.2 in 2008. In the same five-year period, the percentage of part-time workers within the profession decreased from 13% in 2003 to 10% in 2008 (Raeymaeckers, Paulussen, and De Keyser, 2012). It can therefore be concluded that, at least as far as Flanders is concerned, the assumption that journalists increasingly “move in and out of projects and temporary labor arrangements” (Deuze and Fortunati, 2010: 111) seems to be overstated. Of course, this is not to say that news work is not changing, as we will see below.

### Functional flexibility and multiskilling

Flexibility is perhaps the most used term in descriptions of the changing working conditions in journalism. Four out of ten professional journalists in Flanders said that their flexible attitude played a role in their recruitment (Raeymaeckers, Paulussen, and De Keyser, 2012). According to Deuze (2009: 85), due to managerial efforts to expand their control over the workforce, contemporary news work is increasingly characterized by a high degree of “functional flexibility,” which requires multiskilled professionals capable of performing “many different tasks throughout the organization.” The meaning of the notion of “multiskilling” in this phrase goes beyond the technical skill requirements related to multimedia journalism, and also refers to people’s capacity to cope with job enlargement and to adapt to the blurring organizational and occupational boundaries in convergent newsrooms.

### *Multimedia journalism*

Like flexibility, convergence is arguably another overused term, and the image of the “multimedia journalist” creating content for newspapers, magazines, television, radio, web sites, blogs, and social media may be a cliché. Yet there is little doubt that tomorrow’s journalists, regardless of whether they work in print, broadcast, or online media, have to be familiar with different types of media. This is partly due to the fact that, contrary to what was often believed in the early days of the Internet (e.g. Deuze and Paulussen, 2002), professional online journalism has not evolved into a “breed apart.” Because of the weakness of business models for online news, most mainstream media in the first decade of the twenty-first century adopted a strategy of synergy. Online operations had to be integrated into the print or broadcast newsroom. To this end, most media companies changed the organizational structures of their newsrooms so that journalists now can produce content for and across multiple platforms, thus making

online journalism something that print and broadcast journalists do on top of their daily activities (see also Singer, 2011: 218–219). In other words, every journalist becomes an *online* journalist. This suggestion is supported by the data of the Flemish journalist survey indicating that almost eight out of ten journalists who were said to work for online media had as their main occupation print or broadcast journalism; only 22% of the online journalists viewed the Internet as their main medium (Raeymaeckers, Paulussen, and De Keyser, 2012).

It is safe to say that a growing number of journalists have to produce content in multiple media formats – text, audio, photos, and video – for multiple distribution platforms, ranging from print, television, or radio over the organization’s web site and mobile news services to blogs and social media. It must be stressed that journalists do not “multitask” all of the time and many journalists still focus on or “specialize” in a single medium (Lee-Wright, Philips, and Witschge, 2011: 79; Raeymaeckers, Paulussen, and De Keyser, 2012), but the shift from a monomedia to a multimedia news culture is clear.

In this context of convergent newsrooms, the importance of multiskilling seems obvious. In 2008, two-thirds of Flemish professional journalists believed in the potential further growth of multimedia journalism – merely 13% disagreed with this statement, and the other 20% was undecided. Multimedia skills – defined as the ability to work for print, radio, television, and the Internet – were deemed (very) important by eight out of ten respondents. Moreover, 77% of them said that the ability to cope with new technologies is (very) important in contemporary journalism, while nine out of ten recognized the importance of online research skills (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010). These findings are consistent with previous studies on online journalism in other countries that have stressed the importance of technological skills for journalists (García Avilés *et al.*, 2004; Deuze, Neuberger, and Paulussen, 2004; Machill and Beiler, 2009).

### *Job enlargement*

The skills required for multimedia journalism are not merely technical, however. Mastery of journalistic basic skills for newsgathering, selection, and storytelling remains crucial, even though some authors suggest that even these skills will no longer suffice to survive in the changing news environment (Beam and Meeks, 2011: 235–236). Survival in the news industry will not only depend on the individual journalist’s professional and technological skills, but also on his or her capacity to deal with the consequences of the newsroom management’s demand for “functional flexibility.” It is argued by media scholars and professionals alike that the fundamental ways in which news is being redefined demand a more entrepreneurial mindset; a high degree of adaptability and creativity is needed to handle the wide range of tasks and responsibilities of the job (Beam and Meeks, 2011; Jarvis, 2009; Gillmor, 2010).

The growing importance of journalists’ ability to manage and coordinate news work is reflected in labor division and job descriptions in contemporary newsrooms (see also Baisnée and Marchetti, 2006). This seems to be the case especially for new newsroom positions that have been created since the emergence of the web. Early



studies on online journalism already found web editors describing their job in terms of “content management” (Quandt *et al.*, 2006: 177). More recently, in an attempt to respond to the challenges of user-generated content and social media, many media organizations created the function of a “community manager,” whose role it is to oversee, coordinate, and stimulate user participation in the different stages of the process of news production. This typically includes tasks such as “encouraging user contributions, moderating or otherwise managing those contributions, resolving contributors’ problems, and engaging other journalists in appreciating and interacting with users” (Singer *et al.*, 2011: 204). Aside from the “community manager,” other new functions that exist in most of today’s online newsrooms include those of the “comment moderator,” who is responsible for monitoring and filtering user reactions on the organization’s web site, and the “chat moderator,” who regularly organizes live chats with users on the web site. Notably, most media companies do not seem eager to hire new staff to fill these new functions. Instead, in-house solutions are being sought by shifting jobs internally or by expanding the job descriptions of online journalists (Singer *et al.*, 2011: 65–70).

Journalists in convergent newsrooms thus take on more tasks and responsibilities than they used to do when they were working for a single medium. Eight out of ten Flemish professional journalists (79%) in 2008 agreed with the statement that their occupational duties had expanded in the last few years (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010). To illustrate the significance of job enlargement in journalism, Beam and Meeks report on data from the 2007 American Journalist panel study revealing that many reporters are spending much more time on “a series of tasks that didn’t exist in newsrooms until the Web became a common tool for distributing news” (Beam and Meeks, 2011: 233). New tasks that have been added to the job of journalists relate to the creation and editing of content specifically for the web. They include covering breaking news stories for the web site, writing blogs, capturing audio and video, creating podcasts, participating in live chat sessions, and taking photos. Again, it must be emphasized that these new tasks, and the responsibilities and skills they require, do not replace old ones:

The key word for all these tasks, in fact, is *additional*. New storytelling platforms, new tools and formats, new collaborations, and new responsibilities for user contributions all come on top of the newswork expected of earlier generations of journalists. And they are just the most tangible of the ongoing transformations.

Singer, 2010: 105

### Increased workload

Multiskilling and job enlargement take their toll. A study on the implementation of newsroom convergence at two Spanish media companies shows that “journalists involved in multimedia news production agree it is a very demanding job, and they show concerns about time pressures and a heavy workload” (García Avilés and Carvajal, 2008: 232). Concerns about heavy work pressure recur in many studies on the computerization and digitalization of newsrooms (Rintala and Suolanen, 2005; Chung,

2007; Ursell, 2001). The idea that technology leads to an increased workload may sound paradoxical since new technologies allow journalists to gather and produce news much easier and faster than ever before. However, history shows that the successive implementations of new technologies in media organizations, from the telegraph to the Internet and its related technologies, have always been accompanied by processes of rationalization. Several authors have pointed out how technology has always been used by management as a tool to increase the productivity and cost-efficiency in the newsroom, which suggests again that changes in journalistic labor “are not so much driven by technological necessity as by capitalist necessity to reduce overall labour costs” (Örnebring, 2010: 64). In other words, it is not technology per se, but the associated management’s obsession with cost reduction and productivity maximization which leads to increased workload (see also Marjoribanks, 2000; Cottle and Ashton, 1999).

### *Lack of time*

By means of an analysis of employment figures and the average number of pages of UK newspapers throughout the past few decades, Lewis, Williams, and Franklin (2008: 36) estimate that in 2006 editorial employees in the British national press were expected to produce three times as much content as in 1985. Strikingly, this estimation did not take into account the content that journalists were expected to produce for the web or platforms other than the print edition. Interviews with UK journalists, conducted by Lee-Wright, Philips, and Witschge, revealed that as multiskilling becomes “increasingly mandatory for any news journalist,” their work schedules are changing in significant ways. Working shifts in multimedia newsrooms start much earlier, at six or seven in the morning, and tend to get longer, “as much as 15 hours, servicing both those online demands and the conventional newspaper production schedules” (Lee-Wright, Philips, and Witschge, 2011: 74). Similar changes in the daily work rhythm of journalists in multimedia newsrooms have been observed in Belgium (Paulussen, Geens, and Vandenbrande, 2011).

Journalism research shows that a lack of time is a major structural barrier for newsroom staff to take on new tasks and roles. Studies on online journalism, for instance, mention time efficiency considerations as one of the inhibiting factors for the adoption of interactivity and multimedia in (online) news production (Paulussen, 2004; García Avilés and Carvajal, 2008). When time forces journalists to make an either/or choice between interacting with users and traditional news work, they are more likely to stick to what they believe they do best – that is, gathering information, selecting news, and telling stories (Singer *et al.*, 2011: 64).

Data from the 2008 journalist survey in Flanders provide additional support for the idea that multimedia journalists, defined here as those journalists who work for more than one media platform, tend to work more hours a week than their colleagues working for one single medium (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010).<sup>4</sup> While the latter group declared themselves to be working an average of 44.3 hours a week, the multimedia journalists said they spent an average of 48.9 hours a week on their work. Similarly, freelancers appear to have longer working hours (on a weekly basis) than their salaried colleagues, with an average of 50.4 hours and 44.7 hours, respectively. Work schedules of freelancers and multimedia journalists are also more likely to vary

from one week to the next. Further, according to the Flemish journalist survey, freelance and multimedia journalists also appear to work significantly more often in the evening and during the weekends and holidays.

While these findings justify concerns over the time pressures on freelance and multimedia journalists, it comes as a surprise that the journalists themselves seem to accept the situation. Indeed, the Flemish journalist survey shows no differences between multimedia and monomedia journalists, nor between freelance and salaried journalists, with regards to their satisfaction with the working hours and work pressure in their profession (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010). This can be partly explained by the fact that journalism in general is not perceived as a nine-to-five job and has always required a high degree of flexibility (see also Weaver, 1998; Weaver *et al.*, 2007). Another explanation for the rather relaxed attitude of multimedia journalists toward the impact of multiskilling on their workload may be found in the fact that many of them believe that “splitting their time across multiple platforms is a positive change rather than a problem that is taking time from their reporting or spreading them thin,” as the 2008 American journalist survey by the Pew Research Center’s Project on Excellence in Journalism suggested (Rosenstiel and Mitchell, 2008: 21).

Regardless of this finding that multimedia and freelance journalists do not seem to be more worried than their counterparts about the increased workload in journalism, it is important to keep in mind that the high work pressure *is* an issue in contemporary journalism: about one-third of the professional journalists in Flanders (32%) is dissatisfied with the work pressure, which makes it the main reason for job dissatisfaction in the news media sector (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010).

### *The sense of immediacy*

Journalists’ relationship to time has not only changed due to increased workload, but also, and maybe even more importantly, due to the “discourse of speed,” which promotes speed as “the main measure of competitive success in the news industry” (Örnebring, 2010: 65).

As the media have moved toward 24/7 news production and multiplatform news delivery, the notion of a deadline, which profoundly shaped newsroom routines and practices in the twentieth century, seems to vanish in daily news work. Especially in broadcast media organizations, several journalism scholars observed, “The sense of rush and shortage of time is becoming an important element of newsroom culture, where to be obsessed by time is a constant element of the news day with no sense of reprieve” (García Avilés *et al.*, 2004: 89; see also Baisnée and Marchetti, 2006). With the emergence of the web, the “discourse of speed” also entered and conquered newspaper organizations as they increasingly moved to breaking news coverage online.

Today, the sense of speed, which implies “constant deadlines,” is at the core of online journalism. Early studies of online journalists already pointed to immediacy as a central constitutive element of their professional identity (Deuze and Paulussen, 2002). When asked to describe their job, most, if not all, online journalists stress the importance of constant and real-time news delivery. Aside from the pressure of keeping the news web sites permanently up-to-date with new content, live breaking news

coverage has become a key aspect of online journalism as well (Rosenstiel and Mitchell, 2008). Online journalists themselves are likely to view the need for speed and time-lines as a result of technological innovation. An interview study of online journalists from Europe, Latin America, and the USA confirms that they consider technology as the primary catalyst for today's 24/7 always-on news culture. The authors conclude that, from the viewpoint of online journalists:

The processing technology of the speed at which content is posted is the infrastructure that supports the rapid response time for receiving and posting news on the web and it has in turn changed the news production process across a compressed time dimension with local and global implications.

Schmitz Weiss and de Macedo Higgins Joyce, 2009: 599

### Increased desk work

Literature also shows how the computerization of journalistic labor has led to more desk work. Even before the Internet became a dominant tool for newsgathering, research in broadcast newsrooms suggested that much of the journalistic work is performed in front of computer work stations (Cottle and Ashton, 1999). More explicitly, research in the UK and Spain shows that a growing part of television newsroom staffs consists of “computer-bound ‘mouse monkeys’” (García Avilés *et al.*, 2004), while Baisnée and Marchetti (2006) observe the advent of “sedentary or ‘sit-down’ journalism.” Based on a newsroom ethnography at the pan-European news channel Euronews, the authors argue that “the organization of work and the haste of production often means processing news or images partly produced by others without going, and even in some cases, never going, to the ‘scene’” (Baisnée and Marchetti, 2006: 114). Some authors underline that also in newspaper organizations a growing number of journalists are occupied with “desk-bound, office-based” work (Lewis, Williams, and Franklin, 2008: 29).

The qualification of “sedentary news work” is probably most applicable to online journalism. Surveys of the first generation of online journalists in Belgium and The Netherlands indicated that due to the small staff size in online newsrooms, web editors are compelled to perform a “desktop job” that focuses on producing “shovelware,” taking content from other media and deploying or repurposing it for the news web site (Deuze and Paulussen, 2002), a finding that has been supported by other studies (Quandt *et al.*, 2006: 178; Boczkowski, 2009).

The 2008 journalist survey in Flanders provides some additional evidence for this shift toward “desk-bound, office-based” journalism. Almost nine out of ten Flemish professional journalists (87%) said they work regularly or always in the newsroom. One out of five journalists added they rarely if ever work outside the office. Notably, the percentage of journalists saying that they never perform field work (and thus always work inside the office) rose from merely 4% in 2003 to 9% in 2008, whereas the percentage of journalists saying they invest time each day in “research outside the newsroom” declined from 69% in 2003 to 59% in 2008 (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010). While these figures suggest significant changes that need careful monitoring, one should

beware of exaggerating the issue, because a large majority of the population of professional journalists still perform field work on a regular basis (Raeymaeckers, Paulussen, and De Keyser, 2012).

Since more and more journalists are working in front of their computers, the importance of digital technologies for research and newsgathering has grown. According to a study on journalists' use of the Internet, the digitalization of journalistic labor seems to instigate "self-referentiality" in journalism "because only information that has already been published is adopted" (Machill and Beiler, 2009). This is consistent with data from the Flemish journalist survey, which indicate that the more time journalists spend inside the newsroom, the more likely they are to use press releases, news agency material, and content published by other media as sources for news (Raeymaeckers, Paulussen, and De Keyser, 2012).

### **Conclusion: Journalistic Labor Changes and Quality Concerns**

Journalistic labor is undergoing profound changes due to the digitalization and commercialization of the media industry. An international literature review on the labor and working conditions in contemporary journalism suggests that news work is increasingly characterized by atypical, non-standard forms of employment, an ever-growing demand for functional and temporal flexibility to keep pace with the expanding workload and time pressures, and a tendency toward desk-bound office work.

When confronting these widespread ideas from literature with empirical data from a 2008 journalist survey in Flanders, we can conclude that each of the observed international trends is also apparent in the Flemish news industry – with the minor exception of the trend toward more temporary and part-time employment, which could not be confirmed by the Flemish survey data. At the same time, statistical data can also help to put these trends into perspective, for instance by showing that not all professional journalists are equally affected by the changes taking place in contemporary news work. For example, compared with their salaried colleagues, young freelance journalists appear to work more and under higher time pressures, and experience more job insecurity, fewer promotion prospects, and lower wages. The data also suggest that multimedia journalists are more likely than single-media journalists to be confronted with job enlargement, increased workload, and a tendency toward desk work. A further monitoring of such tendencies is necessary, especially given that the number of freelance and multimedia journalists, though still a minority within the profession in Flanders in 2008, is growing.

On a more general level, the consideration of empirical evidence also reminds us of the rather slow evolutionary pace of social and cultural changes. An analysis of the findings of the ten-yearly American journalist surveys from 1972 to 2002 suggests "more stability than change" in the profile of professional journalists and the nature of their work (Weaver *et al.*, 2007: 239). A focus on change may lead to a neglect of the stability in journalistic labor and cause overstatement. Indeed, literature on employment and labor

organization in contemporary capitalist society has the tendency to generalize minority trends and to highlight the downsides of ongoing changes (see Doogan, 2009). This explains the apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, reports of high burn-out risk among journalists, and on the other, studies indicating a high degree of job satisfaction within the profession. Notwithstanding that a significant and growing part of the population suffers from stress, for a majority of journalists feelings of discontent about working conditions seem to be outweighed by several (perceived) positive aspects of news work (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010; see also Weaver, 1998).

This chapter has also tried to shed light on the role of technology in relation to journalistic labor changes. The main argument is that the transformative potential of technology is generally overestimated. At best new technologies amplify transitions in news work, but the major drivers of these changes are of an economic nature. While the material adoption of new technologies is probably the most tangible of all changes taking place in the newsroom, labor conditions are much more, and more directly, affected by management strategies toward cost-efficiency and productivity maximization. Consequently, the digitalization of news work is seemingly not capable of improving the quality of journalistic performance because of the accompanying rationalization of the labor process. This is indeed the main point made by several authors trying to explain some of the major paradoxes of journalism today. To end this chapter, I will briefly touch on three such paradoxes to illustrate that digital discourse, which serves and promotes flexible and individualized labor, is much more effective in reshaping news work than technology in its material form.

A first example deals with the tension between speed and accuracy in journalism. Never before have journalists had so many tools at their disposal to check information so easily and quickly, yet more than ever they struggle with maintaining standards of accuracy and verifiability (Singer, 2011: 218). Since the material adoption of new technologies is embedded in a digital discourse around multiskilling, job enlargement, and a growing demand for speed, journalists have not been able to exploit the potential benefits of technology in terms of time efficiency. In this respect, it is worth considering the words of Tom Brokaw, an American veteran television journalist, who warned two decades ago that “if journalism is reduced simply to an exercise in swiftness, then we will have become hostages to new technologies; and not the masters of it” (cited in Willis, 1994: 190).

A related topic of concern is that the ultimate – and again paradoxical – result of the growing demand for multiskilled journalists might be a “deskilling” and even de-professionalization of the workforce. At the end of the twentieth century, Cottle and Ashton (1999) described some of the “deleterious consequences” of multiskilling, while Hanno Hardt (2000: 217) stated that “the manufacture of news no longer demands professional involvement, but can be accomplished by a cheap labor force which is computer-literate and more attuned to packaging information than to exercising analytical skills.” Similar concerns about the negative impact of functional flexibility on the quality of news have been repeated in several studies on the changing working conditions in journalism.

A third articulation of the dual role of technology – in its material and discursive sense – has to do with the increased desk work in journalism. Media scholar Pablo Boczkowski

(2009) gives a comprehensive account of how the increase in desk-based mediated newsgathering enabled by technological innovations seems to result in a further homogenization of the news output. While the Internet is associated with information overload and a diversity of voices, desk-bound journalists, pressured by efficiency considerations due to scarce time and resources, tend to rely on only a tiny fraction of mediated information brought to them through wire services and a limited number of other trusted media outlets (Boczkowski, 2009).

The apparent implications of the changes in journalistic labor for the quality of news (less accuracy, less diversity) and the professionalism of journalists (risk of deskilling) are worrisome. Therefore, it is important to keep monitoring evolutions in employment and labor organization in the news industry, especially given that most of the trends are likely to deteriorate rather than improve. At the same time, it is also important to reflect on how journalists can empower themselves to cope with the changes, uncertainties, and demands of contemporary news work.

## Notes

- 1 The open letter of Flemish journalists in 2009 somewhat dramatically entitled “Journalistiek zonder journalisten: De nagel aan de doodskist van de democratie [Journalism without journalists: The nail in the coffin of democracy],” is available (in Dutch) at the web site [Mediakritiek.be](http://Mediakritiek.be), [www.mediakritiek.be/index.php?page=7&detail=386](http://www.mediakritiek.be/index.php?page=7&detail=386) (last accessed September 18, 2011).
- 2 The Flemish journalist survey, partly based on the seminal work by David Weaver and colleagues in the USA (see Weaver and Willnat, 2012), provides unique data on the basic, occupational, and professional characteristics of professional journalists in Flanders. For an English report of the Flemish journalist survey, I refer to a chapter by Raeymaeckers, Paulussen, and De Keyser (2012). Some of the data presented in this contribution have previously been published in Dutch in a chapter I wrote with Pieter Ugille for the book *Journalisten. Profiel van een Beroepsgroep* [Journalists. Profile of a Profession] (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010).
- 3 The percentages reported on the reasons for freelancing are based on new statistical calculations on the original data of the Flemish journalist survey of 2008 (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010).
- 4 All figures about the workload and work schedules of Flemish professional journalists that are presented in this chapter are based on new, not previously published, analyses of the original data of the Flemish journalist survey of 2008 (Paulussen and Raeymaeckers, 2010).

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# Journalism and Cross-media Publishing: The Case of Greece

Andreas Veglis

## Introduction

During the past two and a half decades information and communication technologies (ICTs) have transformed media organizations. Digitization of production in media organizations has facilitated changes in the organization and practices of journalism (Erdal, 2007). This change affects production work and has resulted in new ways of newsmaking. It also involved fundamental changes in the final products and consequently in the way that the final products were delivered to the end users.

For a long time, newspapers' only product was the print edition of the newspaper, radio stations' only product was their radio program, and TV stations' only product was their TV program. But the convergence of informatics and communication technologies has produced various channels that can deliver news. Thus the tendency has been for the larger media organizations and companies to have several publishing channels at their disposal (Sabelström, 2000, 2001; Veglis, 2007). This trend came about mainly due to the wide popularity of the Internet as well as the mobile telephone network (Veglis, 2008a). This resulted in the rapid expansion of news output from many broadcasters covering a wide range of media platforms (Erdal, 2007).

The basis for this development was the digitization of production systems, which enabled content to travel across media boundaries. TV footage and radio soundbites can be published on the web, and TV sound is frequently used on radio (Erdal, 2007), which has resulted in fundamental changes in the workflow of media organizations (Sabelström, 2001). The news is now produced once and deployed in various formats for different publication channels. Thus, media companies can cover more audience needs and offer channels that complement each other. We must also take into account that trends in the worldwide media industry have clearly shown that in order to

guarantee long-term success with audiences in the future, it is vital to change from a single product to a multimedia content and a user-oriented approach (Dietmar, 2008).

Media companies are changing and distribute the news in a synchronized manner via different channels, guiding their readers from one medium to the next in order to generate brand loyalty. The synchronous use of multiple publishing channels enables a media company to make contact with its audience in a comprehensive and cross-media way. Media companies use these channels as independent delivery paths. Thus the same information is available via many different channels (Dena, 2004).

This chapter discusses the issue of cross-media publishing. Firstly it defines cross-media publishing and briefly presents the history of cross-media publishing. Next, the channels that can be employed in a cross-media scheme are presented and grouped according to various characteristics (medium, content, publishing speed, and publishing rhythm). The reasons for deploying cross-media publishing are discussed in the third section. The fourth section proposes a model for cross-media publishing. This model is specifically customized for the cases of a newspaper, a radio, and a TV station. In the penultimate section we have included a case study on the implementation of cross-media publishing by Greek media companies. Concluding remarks can be found in the last section.

## **Cross-media Publishing – Definitions**

Cross-media can be defined as the production of any content (news, music, text, and images) for more than one media platform (for example print, web, and TV) within the same media organization (Veglis, 2005). The content is posted once and it is available on other media. Another term that is widely used is “multiple media,” which specifies the inter-platform or inter-device possibilities. The term multiple media indicates that the same content is delivered to end users in more than one medium. A medium can be defined as means of communication or, more precisely, a system where transmission media are using more than one type of transmission path (e.g. optical fiber, radio, and copper wire) to deliver information (Veglis, 2007).

An alternative term for multiple media is multichannel publishing. The same content is published on various channels or media. The term multiple media is broader than cross-media, as it expands the concept from devices to content (Antikainen, Kangas, and Vainikainen, 2004).

Cross-media publishing in newspaper organizations has been investigated by some researchers (Sabelström, 2000, 2001; Veglis, 2007). However, the issue of cross-media publishing in broadcast media has drawn very little attention, although it is worth mentioning that there are a small number of important contributions to the literature on this subject (Cottle and Ashton, 1999; Duhe, Mortimer, and Chow, 2004).

## **Cross-media History**

The term cross-media was already used in the early days of electronic publishing. In the print world, cross-media was used to describe database publishing (ACTeN, 2004). The first publishing segment to automate cross-media was directory and reference publishing.

When material was finally in a normalized database, creating new extract and transformation routines for CD-ROM and eventually web production was not radically different from what publishers had been doing for the previous two decades of database print publishing. In the late 1980s, new cross-media publishing systems emerged that were focused on “content-driven” publications: manuals, books, treatises, and other publications whose length is usually determined by the content, rather than trimmed to fit a predefined space (Walter, 1999).

The print and publishing industries have incorporated cross-media for a long time. One driver was efficiency, but in newspaper and magazine publishing cross-media is used for marketing and market penetration as well. In book printing and publishing, cross-media started out as media that were complementary to each other, such as a book and a CD-ROM. In magazine and newspaper publishing, cross-media are used more extensively to bridge the time between publications by providing information on the Internet, and to create a community. In the most rudimentary form of cross-media, newspapers and magazines had an electronic counterpart. They did not really add to the content of the magazine or the newspaper, but reproduced the content of the magazine or the newspaper (ACTeN, 2004).

## Media Channels

Media companies have been employing various channels in order to relay news to their readers. These channels are being used in a cross-media scheme. It should be noted that these channels do not represent different categories of technology but simply various methods for publishing news. These channels are the ways in which the news is published by media companies around the world. The channels are the world wide web (WWW), webcasting, smartphones, Tablets, e-mail, short message service (SMS), portable document format (PDF), really simple syndication (RSS), Twitter (Veglis, 2008b), and social networks. Next we briefly present the publishing channels.

### WWW

The main advantage of the WWW is the transportation of information over great distances, and the possibility of continuous updating (Negroponte, 1995). Surveys indicate that it is the first alternative publishing channel that newspapers adopt (Veglis, 2007). Newspapers publish the majority of their articles along with photos and in some cases they enrich the articles with additional sources that cannot be included in the printed edition.

### Webcasting

Webcasting can be broadly defined as the delivery of media content on the web (Veglis, 2007). Web sites can be used for webcasting audio and video content. This content is available on demand and it is used in order to add value to the services offered by the online edition of the media company.

## Smartphone

A smartphone is a high-end mobile phone that combines the functions of a personal digital assistant (PDA) and a mobile phone. These devices serve as portable media players and camera phones with high-resolution touch screens, GPS navigation, Wi-Fi, and mobile broadband access. They include browsers that enable users to access regular web sites. But these devices have small screens (in comparison with PCs) and thus web surfing is not an easy task. That is why many media companies are offering portals prepared for such mobile devices that include limited graphics (with basic navigation functions) but all the necessary text and pictures for each article. This increases access speed and makes navigation more effortless for mobile readers.

## Tablets

Tablets are portable PCs that include touch screens and wireless connection to the Internet. These devices offer relatively large high resolution displays and an extensive storage capacity (in comparison with other mobile devices, for example, smartphones) that allow publishers to provide readers with visually rich content in a fixed format that can retain each publication's established brand identity (Wearden and Fidler, 2001).

## E-mail

E-mail is employed by media companies in order to alert their readers to breaking news, relay to them the headlines of the main stories (with links to the entire articles included in an online version), or send them the entire edition – in the case of a newspaper – in a PDF file (Schiff, 2003).

## PDF

PDF is a file format. PDF files are portable, platform-independent, and highly compressed. They are also searchable and can include features for interactive document use. That is why many newspapers have used this format to deliver exact copies of their printed edition (Schiff, 2003).

## SMS

SMS is a service offered by network providers that allows customers to send text messages over their mobile phones. Many media companies are employing SMS in order to send their readers the main headlines or to alert them to breaking news (Gillmor, 2004).

## RSS

RSS is a method of describing news or other web content that is available for feeding from an online publisher to web users. Today many media companies are employing RSS in order to alert their readers to the news headlines (Veglis, 2007). An RSS feed usually employs text and often small pictures.

## Blogs

A blog is a web site where entries are written in chronological order and displayed in reverse chronological order. An important feature of blogs is the ability for readers to leave comments. That is the reason why newspapers have included blogs as a supplement to their web editions, thus giving their journalists the opportunity to comment on current events and their readers the ability to interact with them (Veglis, 2007).

## Social networks

Social networks are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Many newspapers and other media companies have established a presence in the most popular social networks (e.g. Facebook) in order to publish their news articles and attract other members of the social network to their web site. They have also integrated social media links in their web articles in order for the users to link to them through their social network profiles. The users also have the ability to interact with media companies by leaving comments.

## Twitter

Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read other users' updates, which are known as tweets. Twitter is often described as the "SMS of the Internet," in that the site provides the back-end functionality to other desktop and web-based applications to send and receive short text messages, often obscuring the actual web site itself. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length. Updates are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have signed up to receive them. Users can send and receive updates via the Twitter web site, SMS, RSS (receive only), or through applications.<sup>1</sup> The service is free to use over the web, but using SMS may incur phone service provider fees. Many media companies use Twitter in order to alert their readers to breaking news.

Although one may argue that Twitter belongs to the social network category, its distinct characteristics allow us to categorize it as a separate channel.

## Channel Categorization

Because the alternative channels described in the previous section differ in many ways, direct comparison is not an easy task. Some of them are Internet services (the WWW, e-mail), others are mobile telephone network services or devices (SMS, smartphone), and others fall into other categories (e.g. PDF is a file format). But we have included them in this form in our study because they are employed in order to publish news by the newspapers. Table 12.1 includes the publishing channels as well as the medium that these channels employ. We note that three groups exist, namely, file format, Internet, and mobile.

**Table 12.1** Channel – medium.

<i>Channel</i>	<i>Medium</i>		
	<i>File format</i>	<i>Internet</i>	<i>Mobile</i>
WWW		✓	
E-mail		✓	
RSS		✓	
Twitter		✓	✓ <sup>a</sup>
Webcasting		✓	
Blogs		✓	
Smartphones		✓	✓
Tablets		✓	
SMS			✓
PDF	✓	✓	
Social networks		✓	

<sup>a</sup>In some countries.

As was expected, the majority of the channels belong to the Internet category. We have included smartphones in both the Internet and mobile categories because, although they are implemented over a mobile network, they are usually used in order to access the Internet. Also Twitter is included in both the Internet and mobile categories since in some countries users can receive tweets via SMS. We must also note that although PDF is actually a file format, we have included it in the Internet category because PDFs are usually sent via e-mail or can be downloaded via the WWW.

Based on Table 12.1 we can make the following observations. The WWW, webcasting, blogs, and social networks appear as different channels although they are actually webpages. This is due to the fact that they possess different characteristics that force media companies to treat them as different mediums. For example, the ability to comment on posts (blogs and social networks), include video that resembles TV (videocasting), or sound that relates to radio (podcasting). The same thing can be said for smartphones and tablets, which have small screens (smartphones and, in some cases, tablets), different interfaces – touch screens (smartphones and tablets), and enhanced portability.

Different publishing channels can be classified as more or less push or pull oriented. A channel is defined as push oriented when forced upon the end user without a specific request from him or her. On the other hand, a channel is characterized as pull oriented when the end user makes a deliberate action to access the information (Sabelström, 1998). Based on the above categories we classify in Table 12.2 the alternative publishing channels as push and pull.

The WWW is characterized as a pull publication channel. In the same category we include webcasting and blogs since their content is usually webpages. Of course many blogs and web sites offer RSS feeds, but this is covered by the RSS channel. On the other hand e-mail, RSS, Twitter, and SMS are considered to be push publication channels that deliver (push) information to the readers.

It is worth noting that in order to receive pushed information from a publishing channel the reader has to actively choose a channel (for example, subscribe to an RSS



**Table 12.2** Push–pull orientation.

<i>Channel</i>	<i>Push</i>	<i>Pull</i>
WWW		✓
E-mail	✓	
RSS	✓	
Twitter	✓	
Webcasting		✓
Blogs		✓
Smartphones	✓	✓
Tablets	✓	✓
SMS	✓	
PDF	✓	✓
Social networks	✓	✓

channels, subscribe to a mailing list, follow a user on Twitter). Conversely, the reader usually does not know what will be received when he or she is looking for pull oriented information (Sabelström, 1998).

Table 12.2 includes a group of publishing channels (smartphones, tablets, PDF, social networks) that seem to belong to both push and pull categories. Smartphones and tablets are just different kinds of computers that may differ from standard PCs in terms of screen resolution, and in that they can support push or pull channels. PDF files are included as both push and pull channels, because they can be downloaded through a web page, and thus be considered as a pull channel, or can be sent via an e-mail and thus be treated as a push channel. In the case of social networks they can be characterized as a pull channel when a user is accessing a profile, but also as a push channel in the case that a relationship is established between two users and material that is published by one user is sent to the other user.

## Content Elements

All the publishing channels consist of content elements. Content elements can be categorized into static and dynamic elements. Textual matter, still images, and graphics are considered to be static content elements that can be created and edited independently of each other and later compiled and logically connected in an article. Video and sound are characterized as dynamic content elements. These elements are sequentially built up. The majority of publishing channels employ a combination of content elements (Sabelström, 1998). Table 12.3 includes a precise description of the content elements that are incorporated in each channel.

Based on Table 12.3 we can separate the publishing channels into two types: one that is considered to be static (e-mail, SMS, PDF, RSS, and Twitter), and a second (WWW, blogs, webcasting, smartphones, social networks, and tablets) that can include both static and dynamic content.

It is worth noting that preparing content for a dynamic channel is more time consuming than for a static channel. That is why the fastest channels are always static channels. This subject is discussed in more detail in the next section.

**Table 12.3** Dynamic–static channels.

<i>Channel</i>	<i>Content</i>			
	<i>Static</i>		<i>Dynamic</i>	
	<i>Text</i>	<i>Picture</i>	<i>Sound</i>	<i>video</i>
WWW	✓	✓	✓	✓
Blogs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Webcasting	✓	✓	✓	✓
Smartphones	✓	✓	✓	✓ <sup>a</sup>
Tablets	✓	✓	✓	✓
E-mail <sup>b</sup>	✓	✓		
SMS	✓			
PDF	✓	✓		
RSS	✓			
Twitter	✓			
Social networks	✓	✓	✓ <sup>c</sup>	✓ <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Probably low-quality video.

<sup>b</sup> We assume e-mails include only text (simple or formatted) and images.

<sup>c</sup> Usually embedded from an outside source (for example YouTube).

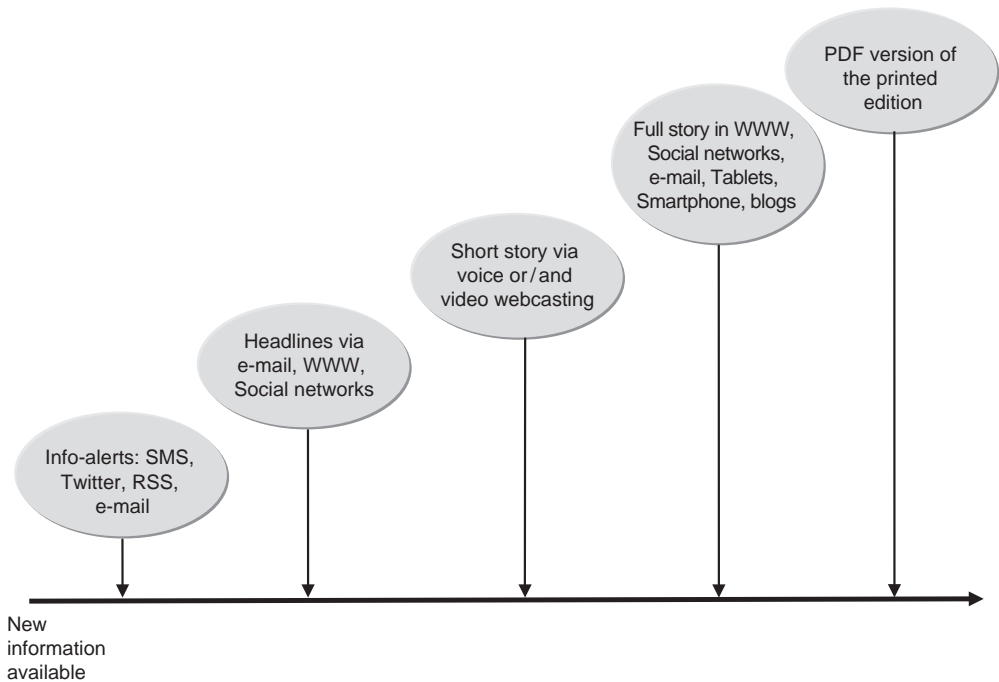
## Publishing Speed

One other parameter that must be taken into account is time. The content of each channel requires different amounts of time to be spent on them in production. In Figure 12.1 we plot the publishing channels versus time. The first channels that relay the headline news to the readers are SMS, Twitter, and RSS. These channels can be characterized as info-alerts (Antikainen, Kangas, and Vainikainen, 2004). The idea of info-alerts is to make the reader aware of content available in different publishing channels. The RSS feeds and tweets link directly to the media company's web site, and the SMSs tempt the receiver to seek another publication channel in order to obtain more information.

The next set of channels that relay news are e-mails, the WWW (running headlines), and social networks. E-mails can also be categorized as info-alerts since they can be received by mobile devices (smartphones) or they can attract readers' attention when special software is employed (e-mail notifiers). In the case of the WWW we refer only to running headlines that announce the news, without giving more details. These headlines can also appear in the social network channel.

Next, short story descriptions are available via voice or video webcasting. This is the equivalent of the voice or video correspondence of the radio and TV channels.

The full story is available first on webpages (the WWW for PCs, social networks and tablets) and later in the form of PDF files sent via e-mails. Usually this story is edited in more detail and presents the facts with more accuracy. This is because there is more time to prepare this content. Webpages can include both static and dynamic elements. In the same category we have included blogs. Blogs are usually updated later than the WWW edition of the newspaper, since they include journalists' comments on the main news.

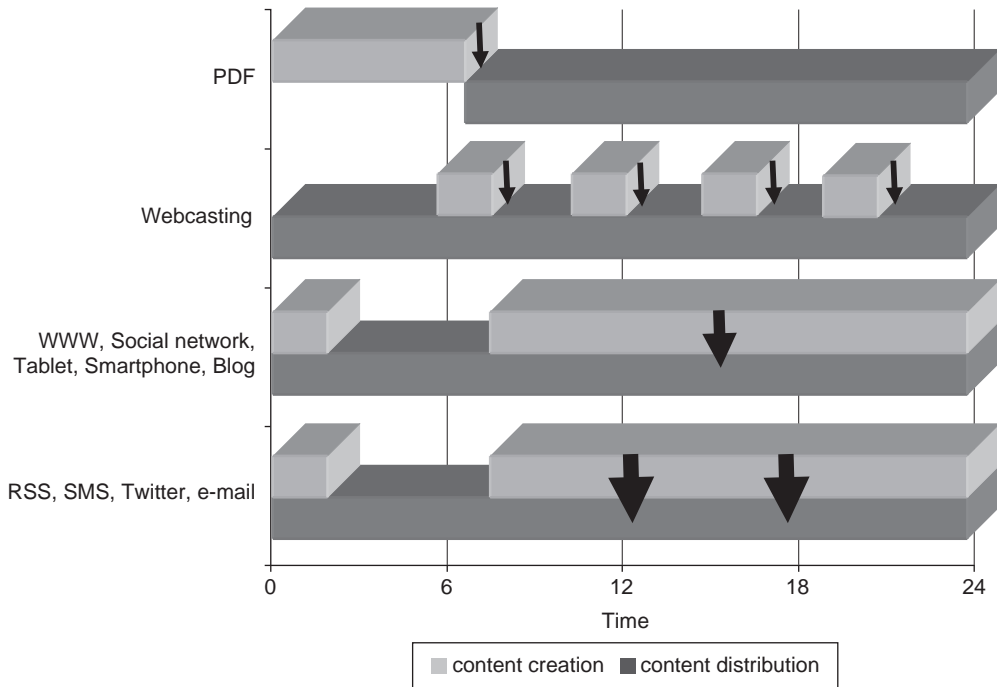


**Figure 12.1** Publishing channels versus time.

It is worth noting that static channels are the channels that relay news first. Dynamic channels follow. Thus, although dynamic channels appear to be more attractive to the audience, since they include more multimedia material, static channels are the first to inform them about breaking news. This can be explained by the short time it takes to create them, as they are usually text based. The above classification may tempt us to reach the conclusion that some channels overlap. For example, SMS, Twitter, and RSS are three of the fastest channels and thus a media company may choose to implement one of them. But this is not true, because each channel targets different groups of readers (Veglis, 2008b). For example, Twitter users are more likely to be young and non-white in the USA (Paglia, 2011).

## Publishing Cycle

The publishing cycle is different among the various publishing channels and depends on the type of information they include (Sabelström, 2000). The lead-time from the collection of news by a reporter until the point in time when the audience is able to receive information varies between channels. A reporter writing for the print edition of a newspaper often has several hours to do research and write the report, whereas the same reporter has less than half an hour to write a news item for the WWW. On the other hand webcasting publishes updated news bulletins on schedule several times a day; that is to



**Figure 12.2** Creation and publishing rhythm for different publishing channels.

say the time for research and content creation is shorter than for the printed daily newspaper, which is published only once a day. The same thing stands for all other publishing channels, always depending on the publication schedule of each channel.

We propose the classification of the publishing channels into four categories depending on the frequency of updates per day (Figure 12.2) (Veglis, 2007). The PDF version of the print edition is usually a rather slow publishing channel, with a publishing cycle of 24 hours (except very important events that may force the publication of a second or even third edition).

The next category with more than a single publication per day is webcasting. Webcasting resembles radio and TV bulletins. Production and publishing rhythms are somewhat faster. The created content is published (broadcast) at least two or three times, depending on the media company's policy. Unlike newspaper production there is no real difference between broadcast editing and production and they are carried out almost simultaneously.

The next category includes channels (the WWW, social networks, tablets, smartphones) with more frequent publication rhythms. Content is published continuously day and night with no deadlines. The distribution phase is integrated with the production. We have included blogs in the same category, since they are updated several times per day, either from the owner of the blog or by readers that post comments on the blog's content.

The final category includes RSS, SMS, Twitter, and e-mail. These are the channels that usually broadcast breaking news faster than the other channels. One might argue that

they must belong to the same category as the WWW, but we choose to include them in a separate category in order to stress the speed of their publication. When news is received it can be instantly published.

If we carefully examine the four categories described above, we realize that the majority of them consist of only dynamic or static channels. Thus we conclude that the nature of the channels defines their publishing rhythm. Static channels with fast production time support a high publishing rhythm. The only exception is the PDF edition, which is confined to a single edition due to high production cost and slow distribution.

## **Reasons for Deploying Cross-media Publishing**

It is worth noting that the adoption of cross-media by media companies is influenced by a number of parameters. These parameters are briefly discussed below.

### **Additional material**

One common complaint is that media do not put issues into their proper context (Tenenbaum, 1997: 2). Context is defined as coherent analysis that makes complex topics understandable; it is necessary in newspaper reporting because of competition from other media such as TV and radio, which offer little context (McCleneghan, 1997: 21). In addition, research has shown that readers learn more from articles with background and context included (Griffin and Stevenson, 1992: 84). The WWW, PDF, and tablet channels, with their unlimited space and hyperlinking ability, offer media companies the potential to cover issues in more detail. This space limitation may be an issue to some extent in the smartphone channel, since long articles are not easy to read on small screens. Also we must note that it is quite inexpensive to produce larger editions.

### **Multimedia features**

Multimedia features add new dimensions to news. Maps, charts, animations, and so on, can be employed in order to describe events and phenomena. Multimedia can be included in the WWW, tablet, PDF, smartphone, and e-mail channels (Veglis, 2007).

### **Interactive characteristics**

Interactivity is usually closely associated with multimedia features. These characteristics allow media companies to receive feedback from their readers. Thus they are able to make corrections, additions, and other adaptations in order to better meet their audience's needs (Veglis, 2007).

### **Competition – new groups of readers**

The majority of media companies moved into cyberspace with little knowledge about the function and potential of the new medium (Spyridou and Veglis, 2003). Yet, in order to remain important players in the media landscape, many newspapers set up early online

services (Spyridou and Veglis, 2006). A basic reason for employing alternative publishing channels is an attempt to reverse declining circulation by building a new base of readers, and especially of young and computer-savvy users (Spyridou and Veglis, 2006). Surveys indicate that teenagers in Greece are more likely than adults to access web radio and web TV online (50% for 16–24-year-old, 43% for 25–34, 36% for 35–44, 30% for 45–54, and 20% for 55–74). On the other hand Greek adults appear to read more online newspapers and magazines (46% for the 16–24 age group, 59% for 25–34, 62% for 35–44, 64% for 45–54, and 58% for 55–74) (Observatory for Digital Greece, 2010).

### Advertising

Advertising on the Internet is increasing. According to data from the Interactive Advertising Bureau and from PricewaterhouseCoopers, online advertising in the USA totaled \$26.0 billion for 2010. Internet advertising revenues for 2010 increased 15% over 2009 (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2011). Newspapers exploit Internet services in order to develop a new source of advertising revenue by basically offering the same product through a new channel, and charging advertisers to participate (Veglis, 2007). Furthermore, moving to the Internet seemed a smart move to protect their advertising base, and particularly classified ads (Spyridou and Veglis, 2003).

### Broadband connections

“Broadband” is a term for high-speed Internet and data connections. Research suggests broadband users are more likely than dial-up users to perform a number of online activities, including consuming news. What’s more, there is a strong possibility that the availability and ease of accessing video news clips and stories over broadband connections will prompt further growth in online news consumption; growing numbers of news organizations are offering the video feature. There is also a possibility that as more citizens contribute to news content, either on formal news sites or on amateur sites and blogs, the menu of news will expand and attract new markets. Thus any increase in broadband adoption would include an increase in online news use as well (Veglis, 2007).

The latest survey about Internet usage in Greece reported that 44% of the population used the Internet in 2010. More precisely 41% are connected to the Internet at least once a week. This percentage was 38% in 2009 and 33% in 2008. These percentages indicate a steady growth of the Internet population in Greece. It seems that the Internet and consequently the web is increasingly becoming part of Greeks’ daily lives. As far as newspapers and magazines are concerned, the percentage of Greeks who get news online appears to have increased (57% in 2010, 50% in 2009, and 49% in 2008). In the case of web radio and web TV the percentages appear to have stabilized around 35–40% (Observatory for Digital Greece, 2010).

Internet usage in the USA was almost double (in comparison with Greece), 77.3% in 2010 (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>). As far as news is concerned 61% of Americans said they get at least some of their news online, according to a survey by

the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Purcell *et al.*, 2010). It is worth noting that this percentage is very close to the percentage in Greece.

Based on this, the web is a strong alternative publishing channel. Many online newspapers are becoming stand-alone news products, rather than supplements or advertising vehicles for their print parents (Veglis, 2007).

## Modeling Cross-media Publishing

Based on the characteristics of the channels under investigation we can reach some conclusions that will guide us in forming a model of deploying cross-media publishing. There are some distinctions relating to the type of media company; that is, newspapers, radio, and TV stations (Veglis, 2008b, 2010).

Static channels are the channels that relay news first. Dynamic channels follow. As already noted static channels are faster and more immediate while dynamic channels are using multimedia material and thus it takes more time to produce.

Of course we must also take into account the fact that the implementation of a publishing channel strongly depends on the usage percentage by the potential target group. For example there is no need for a radio or TV station to employ the smartphone publishing channel if the particular devices (smartphones) are not very popular among the media company's audience (or potential audience). That is why media companies must always implement cross-media publishing based on a model that will take into account their potential audience and adapt to their needs.

### Newspapers

Based on the above we can start constructing the adopting model for the case of a newspaper (Veglis, 2008b). The WWW version of the newspaper is the first alternative channel that a newspaper implements when it deploys cross-media publishing. Thus it constitutes the first stage of the model. Another channel that is easily (and with no additional cost) implemented and enriches the newspaper's web site is PDF. PDF is already used in post-editorial production in the printed version of the newspaper (Veglis, 2008a).

In order for newspapers to alert their readers about breaking news or to attract readers to the WWW or the printed version of the newspaper, the info-alert channels are the second possible channels to be adopted. The implementation of the RSS channel is quite cheap. It simply requires the creation of a certain file type. The same thing stands for the e-mail channel. The readers can be informed about the news stories that are made available on the newspaper's web site with the help of regular newsletters. In the same category we can include Twitter. This channel appears to have a growing popularity among Internet users who want to be informed about breaking news. It is easy to implement and it is a free service.

The SMS channel is quite different in terms of implementation but there are many companies that are specialized in such services. The high penetration of mobile telephone use in many countries worldwide makes the SMS channel very attractive for the

newspapers that are interested in implementing cross-media publishing. In most cases this service is offered to the readers with a subscription fee.

The blog channel is easily implemented and it offers the possibility of two-way communication between the newspaper and its readers. The implementation of this channel depends on the readers' attitude to interaction with the newspaper, as well as the newspaper's willingness to open a direct dialogue with its readers. Of course another factor is the familiarity of readers with using blogs.

The webcasting channel is a different story. It differs from the other channels since it commits the newspaper to developing a different media product. This channel can be implemented by newspapers that belong in the same media groups as radio and TV stations or through collaborations with radio and TV stations.

The social network channel is usually implemented automatically after the update of the WWW channel. It is preferred by newspapers in order to reach young people who usually use social networks.

All the previously mentioned channels constitute the second stage of the model following the development of a web site, which is the first stage. The remaining channels constitute the third stage, and they are channels that are deployed under certain conditions.

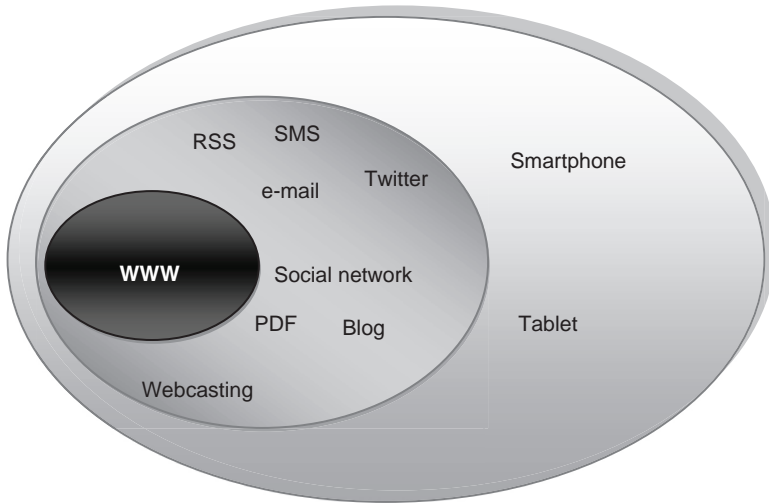
More precisely, the implementation of the smartphone and tablet channels depends, as we have mentioned earlier, on the popularity of these channels among readers. For example, smartphones are very popular among, say, business executives, and thus a financial newspaper that targets this specific group of readers may choose to implement this channel. The last channel that we have included in the third stage is the tablet channel. Tablets constitute an increasingly popular category of computers. Many newspapers around the world have developed special applications that run on tablets and access their news. The majority of these applications give readers a plain version of the WWW edition of the newspaper. Of course, some newspapers have developed applications specifically tailored to the needs and the capabilities of tablets. This channel exhibits a high rate of adoption and many people believe that it may become one of newspapers' main publishing channels in the near future (Hassan and Alejandro, 2010).

In Figure 12.3 we have visualized the previously described model. At the center of the model stands the WWW edition of the newspaper. The second stage includes the four info-alert channels (RSS, e-mail, Twitter, and SMS) as well as PDF, blogs, webcasting and social networks. Finally the third stage includes channels that target specific groups of readers: smartphones and tablets.

### Radio stations

Next we construct the adoption model in the case of radio stations. As in the case of a newspaper, the WWW is the first alternative channel that a radio station implements when it deploys cross-media publishing. The next channel that is deployed is the webcasting channel; in other words, the transmission of the radio program in real time via the Internet. This channel is easy to implement, since it does not require a lot of bandwidth, and it enables the radio station to be heard in any geographical location.





**Figure 12.3** Cross-media publishing model for newspapers.

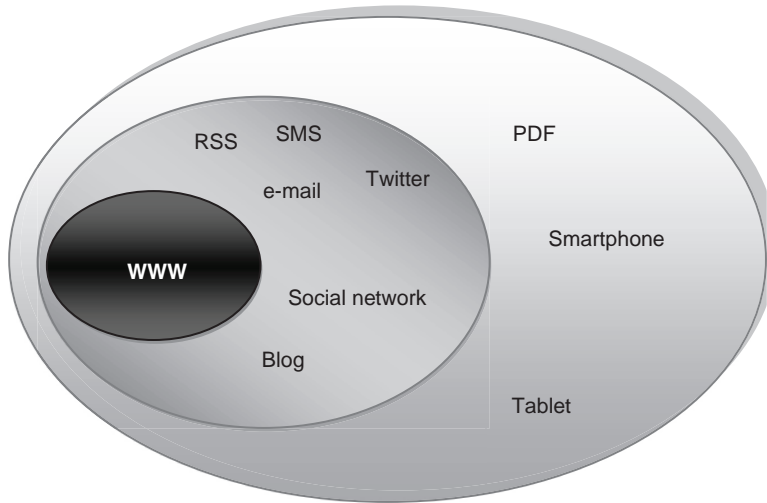
It is worth noting that webcasting may be the only channel that a radio station implements since there are many radio stations that broadcast only via the Internet.

In order for a radio station to alert its audience about breaking news or to attract listeners to its program, the info-alert channels (RSS, e-mail, Twitter, and SMS) are the next possible channels to be implemented.

Blog and social network channels are frequent choices for radio stations since they are easily implemented and offer the possibility of two-way communication between the radio station and its audience. The implementation of these channels depends on the audience's disposition to interaction with the station as well as the station's intention to open up a direct dialogue with its audience. Audience familiarity is another factor that should be considered in blog and social network use. All the above constitute the second stage of the model.

The remaining channels constitute the third stage, as they are channels that are deployed under certain conditions. More precisely the implementation of the smartphone and tablet channels depends, as we have mentioned earlier, on the popularity of these channels among the radio's audience. Although the PDF channel does not appear to be an attractive channel for a radio station to use in order to send information to its audience, the low production cost obliges us to include it with all the previously mentioned channels. The PDF channel may be used by radio stations in order to provide certain information that the users can easily print, like the program schedule or other general or financial information.

In Figure 12.4 we have depicted the previously described model. The WWW and webcasting channels lie at the center of the model. The second stage includes the four push channels (RSS, e-mail, Twitter, and SMS) as well as blog and social network channels. Finally the third stage includes channels that target special groups of users in possession of smartphones and/or tablets and the PDF channel.



**Figure 12.4** Modeling cross-media publishing in a radio station.

### TV stations

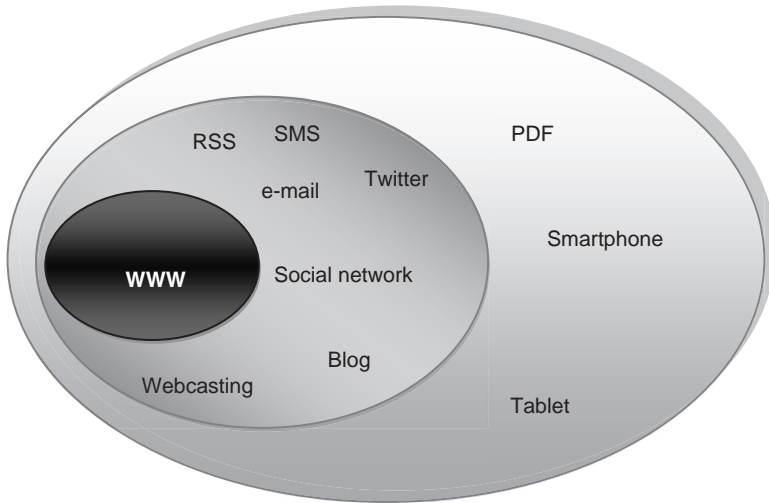
In the case of TV stations the proposed model has one difference from the above model for radio stations. This is mainly caused by the different product they offer (sound and video). More precisely the first stage of the model includes only the WWW channel. The webcasting channel is an attractive channel for TV stations since it allows them to reach remote viewers. But the implementation of this channel presents some difficulties.

More precisely the production of the content is easy, since it is actually the basic product of the TV station, but the distribution phase requires many resources. This is due to the fact that video webcasting requires a substantial amount of bandwidth (always depending on the format and resolution) and that the cost increases with the number of the users that the station wishes to service at the same time. Of course one may argue that this problem can be solved by reducing the quality of the broadcast. But then there is no guarantee that the low resolution webcasting will be an attractive channel for the viewers.

It is worth mentioning that, although there are TV stations that broadcast their programs exclusively on the Internet, their number is far smaller than the number of Internet radio stations.

Thus, in the proposed model webcasting is grouped in the second stage along with the info alert channels, the blog, and the social network channels. The info-alert channels (RSS, e-mail, Twitter, and SMS) are implemented in order for the TV station to alert its viewers of breaking news or to attract them to watch a program. The implementation of the RSS, e-mail, and Twitter channels is quite simple and cheap. The cost in the case of SMS is higher but it is justified by the high penetration of the mobile telephone network worldwide.

TV stations may use blogs in order to communicate with their viewers. Usually blogs include posts from the station's journalists and the audience can interact with them by



**Figure 12.5** Modeling cross-media publishing in a TV station.

commenting on their posts. Also many TV shows have their own blog. Social network is another channel that is included in the second stage and is best suited for TV stations that target young audiences.

The remaining channels (smartphone, tablet) constitute the third stage, and these channels are deployed under certain conditions. The PDF channel can be used in order to send information to the viewers (program descriptions, announcements, program changes, etc.). In Figure 12.5 we have included the visualization of the above described model.

Although all three models include channels that support two-way communication between the medium and the users (SMS, e-mail, blog, social networks), usually newspapers and radio stations are the ones that utilize these channels, because they are more likely to seek direct communication with their audience.

## Case Study – Cross-media Publishing in Greece

A survey of the web sites of Greek media companies was conducted in order to identify the degree of adoption of alternative publishing channels.<sup>2</sup> The survey was conducted in June 2009. The sample included all the national newspapers, the radio stations in Athens and Thessaloniki (the second biggest city in the country), and all TV stations with national coverage. In the sample we have included only the media that have an active web site. We have also excluded all media that focus mainly on sports news. In cases when more than one medium (newspaper, TV station, and radio station) shared the same web site, we have included this site only once in the final sample. The data from the survey can be found in Table 12.4.

The study included nine types of publishing channels (which included the channels analyzed in the first section of the chapter); each coded as present (1) or not present (0).

**Table 12.4** Sample data.

<i>Type of media</i>	<i>Initial sample</i>	<i>Sample<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Final sample<sup>b</sup></i>
TV stations	38	24	23
Radio stations	53	52	43
Newspapers	55	40	40
<b>Total number</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>106</b>

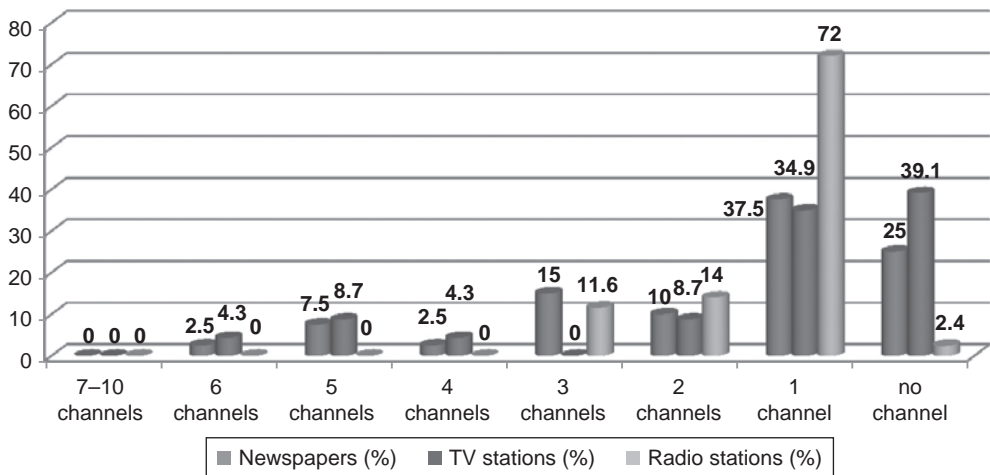
<sup>a</sup>Had a URL address

<sup>b</sup>We have excluded the sites that were unreachable or under construction.

We have not included the WWW channel since it is a prerequisite in order for the media to be included in this study.

The results of the study showed that above average implementation of alternative publishing channels (5 or 6 channels out of 10) was found in 13% of the TV stations, and 10% of the newspapers. In the case of radio stations the numbers are even lower with a mere 11.6% using three different alternative publishing channels. Also 25% of the newspapers, 39% of the TV stations, and 2.4% of the radio stations have deployed no alternative channel (excluding the WWW as mentioned above). This differentiation in the case of radio stations was due to the fact that 72% of the radio stations have utilized one alternative publishing channel, which was webcasting (see Figure 12.6). The most popular alternative channel was PDF in the case of newspapers, and, surprisingly, webcasting (web radio to be more exact) for TV stations. This can be explained by the fact that most TV stations also own a radio station. Next the result for each media category is presented in more detail.

More specifically in the case of newspapers 54% of the sample offered a PDF version of their paper edition, 39% alerted their readers via RSS feeds, and 29% sent e-mail newsletters to their registered readers. The rest of the channels exhibited lower usage: 10% SMS,



**Figure 12.6** Cross-media publishing by Greek media companies (newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations).

10% blogs, and 7% smartphones. We must note that none of the newspapers offered the tablet channel during the period of the survey.

Moving to the TV stations there were significant differences in the percentages of use of the alternative publishing channels. More precisely 29% of the TV stations offer webcasting (not their own TV program, but live radio programming for radio stations that belong to the same media group). In contrast only 17% of the TV stations offered their program live via webcasting. Also 25% offered information via the PDF channel and 17% of the stations also offered e-mail, RSS, and blog channels. Finally some other channels exhibited very low percentages of adoption, 8% SMS and 4% smartphones.

Almost all radio stations (98%) offer their live program via the webcasting channel. All other channels exhibit much lower percentages. More specifically 12% of the radio stations offer RSS, 9% blogs, 2% PDF, and 2% the smartphone channel.

If we try to compare the above results with the results of a similar study (conducted in 2008) concerning newspapers in USA we can identify a significant lag of Greek media companies (Veglis, 2008b). More precisely the analysis found that all top 10 US dailies employed a substantial number of alternative publishing channels. All the dailies had WWW editions, used e-mail to notify their readers about their headlines, and allowed readers to receive their news via RSS feeds. Nine out of 10 newspapers offered their readers the possibility of watching or listening to some of their news via webcasting and included blogs in their WWW editions. Seven newspapers offered a wireless application protocol (WAP) version of their edition and four allowed users to access a PDA version of their edition. Four newspapers sent their headlines via SMS, and a PDF edition was offered by only three newspapers.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed the issue of cross-media publishing in media companies. The publishing channels that may be employed in such a scheme have been presented, examined, and categorized systematically. Based on the characteristics of these channels, in conjunction with the needs of media companies, we have constructed cross-media publishing models for the three main categories of media companies (newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations). Finally we have presented the results of a survey that investigated the adoption of cross-media by Greek media companies.

The results exhibit a tendency for Greek media companies to deploy alternative publishing channels that relate to the main product (text, sound, video) of each company, and also channels that can be utilized at a minimum cost. Obviously newspapers lead media companies in this field, because the majority of the newspaper sample employs alternative publishing channels. In the case of TV stations although some have deployed a moderate number of channels, most have not invested yet in cross-media publishing. The radio stations exhibit even lower percentages of alternative publishing channels usage.

Of course the implementation of alternative publishing channels is only one parameter that media organizations must take into account. The quality of the implementation of the publishing channels plays an equally important role. There may be many reasons for

the poor implementation of alternative publishing channels (for example unequal treatment of online journalists and journalists working on the printed version on TV and radio stations (Veglis, 2007)). Nevertheless, large papers and papers with separate online staff are more likely to produce original content for the online edition and to add interactive features such as discussion groups (Lowrey, 2003). Of course only major companies can afford to have separate online staff.

Organizational complexity is another major factor. An organization is more complex if it is larger in size and is owned by large, distant corporate owners (Demers, 1998: 572). Larger more complex organizations have more differentiated staff, greater resources, and the ability to take financial risks – such as using cross-media publishing.

Many of these problems are caused by the editorial process in media companies. The workflows in a traditional editorial department have been set for decades. They include reporters and news editors that evaluate news information, texts that are written, images that are shot by photographers, and graphics that are drawn. The complete pages are composed and sent for printing, bundling, and distribution. The news and information sources for the printed and the alternative editions are often the same, but since the collaboration between the different editorial departments is usually inadequate, the information is processed independently for nearly every publishing channel. The resulting work scheme leads to a heavy workload and moderate outcome (Veglis, 2007). In some newspaper companies photographers and reporters from different channels within the same company cover the same story or event as if they were competitors (Northrup, 2001).

Adopting alternative publishing channels is not an easy task. Actual data on the financial success of such endeavors are not easy to acquire, but there is a growing trend for media organizations to explore cross-media publishing. Many companies move some of their publications from print to the Internet. This kind of decision to concentrate on fewer printed titles illustrates how the accelerating shift of advertising from print to the Internet is forcing publishers to make tough calls in the scramble to expand their web sites (Karnitschnig and Ellison, 2006).

## Notes

- 1 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>.
- 2 The survey was part of a research project that was conducted by Media Informatics Lab, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece, funded by IOM (Hellenic Audiovisual Institute-<http://www.iom.gr>).

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# The Economics of Online Journalism

Richard van der Wurff

“I am like a fish out of water ... awfully lost...” With these words, deprived New Yorkers described how they felt when their favorite newspapers were not available for a long 17 days in 1945 (Berelson, 1949: 125). It shows the emotional attachment that people once had to their newspapers. Who, in that world, would have expected teenagers to consult “boring” news services only infrequently, because “you hear about things anyway...” (Meijer, 2007: 104; van Tuyll, 2010).

As a sign of these new times, Finland’s second financial daily, *Taloussanomati*, closed its print edition on December 28, 2007, and started an uncertain second life as an online-only service. The main reason for the print closure was financial. The SanomaWSOY-owned paper just lost too much money, and dropping print meant eliminating print and distribution costs. Unfortunately, revenues plummeted even more strongly. Staff was consequently reduced, working conditions deteriorated, and news quality suffered (Thurman and Myllylahti, 2009).

Declining audiences and not enough revenue to maintain quality journalism – these paint a bleak future for the news business. “Who will pay for the nation’s newsgathering efforts?” (Rieder, 2009). A new business model for quality online news; that is the twenty-first-century Holy Grail that the news business is looking for. Crucial to this quest – more critical observers emphasize – is rediscovering and redefining the value that journalists add. Because “these days,” says media economist Robert G. Picard (2009a: np), “journalists simply aren’t creating much value.”

## Chapter Outline

This chapter discusses the economics of online journalism, focusing on the news industry’s search for a viable business model. First, we use the concept of the value chain to describe the news industry in a nutshell. Next, we consider the peculiar

characteristics of news as economic product. These characteristics lay the foundation for the business challenges that news providers face, both in the analog past as well as in the online future.

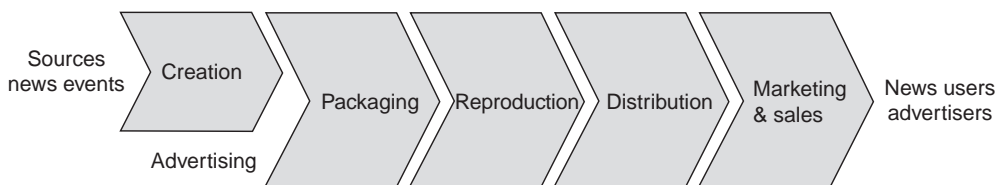
The traditional business models of print newspapers and TV news were ingenious solutions to deal with the particular challenges of providing news as a profitable product. But they relied on a specific set of conditions that started to crumble some 30 years ago and which rapidly disappeared with the development of the Internet into a mass communication network. Understanding these traditional models as well as the forces that destroy them, helps us appreciate the magnitude of problems that online news providers face today.

Digital and online technologies offer news providers and journalists unprecedented opportunities to innovate and improve the provision of news in society. But – as this chapter argues – these technologies also complicate the search for business models that could sustain the provision of quality journalism as a profitable product in the twenty-first century. How can companies respond to these challenges? What are the business opportunities and revenue streams they can build upon? Many suggestions have been made, but no definite answers can be given yet. After reviewing the various options, a typology of seven business models for the future of online news is presented. Hopefully, these ideal types and the underlying economic analyses will enable all those interested to keep close track of the development of the business of online news in the years to come.

## The News Value Chain

The value chain describes technologically and strategically distinct activities that are successively performed by a firm to produce and deliver its product or service to its customers (Porter, 1985). Analogously, the concept of the *news value chain* is used to describe five distinct activities that need to be performed by the news industry (see Figure 13.1).

The first activity is news content *creation*: the production of news stories by journalists and other authors. This is the stage where journalists add value by selecting stories, accessing sources, obtaining information, determining its significance and reliability, and converting it into eloquent stories. The second stage is the stage of content *packaging*. Here editors add value by selecting and aggregating news stories, possibly also with



**Figure 13.1** The news value chain.

other content (including advertising), into the master copy of the print paper, a TV newscast, or an online news service.

Third and fourth come content *reproduction* and *delivery*, usually dealt with by technical departments. Depending on the medium, these are separate activities (as in print media) or interwoven (as in broadcasting and online). The final activities, customarily put at the end of the value chain though conceptually interwoven with the previous activities, are *marketing and sales*. For news media, these do not only involve the *news market* – that is, marketing and sales of news to readers, viewers, listeners, and online visitors – but also, and for some media even primarily, the *advertising market* – that is, marketing and sales of advertising slots to advertisers.

### Vertical disintegration

A typical newspaper company in the past would take care of all five value-adding activities. The newspaper industry thus was *vertically integrated*. But the modern news industry tends toward *vertical disintegration*. Different firms perform different activities. Take online news. A range of players is involved in providing the necessary fixed and mobile network infrastructures, transporting and routing services, user access and payment services, and other soft- and hardware necessary for online reproduction and distribution. News agencies and freelance journalists specialize in news production; news aggregators in news packaging. Aggregators and search engine providers play a role in distribution, too, and use that position to attract part of the marketing and sales activities (and revenues). Users, finally, may participate in news production, packaging, and distribution – for example via their social networks.

Vertical disintegration results in a more complex news industry. More specialist players with heterogeneous backgrounds and different strategic orientations compete with incumbent news providers for access to audiences and a share of the profits. Consider the new challenges posed by online intermediaries to traditional newspaper publishers. Apple's new subscription policy for newspaper apps, for example, gave Apple 30% of the payment and kept customer data with Apple, unless readers opted to disclose their personal information to the publisher (Benton, 2011). These developments hinder collusive behavior and contribute to more intense rivalry in the industry (Porter, 1985). They may well reduce opportunities for firms to invest long-term in the provision of quality news to all – which is still the industry's most important social responsibility.

## The Peculiarities of News as Economic Product

It is almost a platitude that news is not just any other product. Obviously, news has important political and social functions that are indispensable to modern western democracies. But also in a strictly economic analysis, news has peculiar economic characteristics that differentiate it from standard economic products. These characteristics explain why it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to produce and sell news as a commercial product.

### High first copy costs and non-rival consumption

The first special economic characteristic of news is that it has *high first copy costs*. Producing news is expensive. It requires skilled human labor. Journalists need to report events and editors need to compile these into attractive services. Moreover, costs do not depend on the number of people that use a news product. Of course, there might be a relationship between the amount of resources invested and audience size (e.g. Meyer, 2004). Yet, once the scope and quality ambitions of a news service are determined, the costs of news production are fixed. It does not matter whether the news service is ultimately used by a thousand or a million people.

One important implication of the high first copy costs is that news providers can realize considerable *economies of scale*. The higher the number of customers, the lower the average costs of producing news – because the first copy costs are covered by more people. One could even make a case that news markets are natural monopolies. A monopolist could serve all customers more efficiently than competing providers, since the latter duplicate news production costs (e.g. by sending several reporters to the same press conference). Another implication is that potential new entrants – who generally operate on a smaller scale than incumbents – face considerable *market entry barriers*. They start with a considerable cost disadvantage. These implications explain why, in practice, we witness a considerable degree of editorial cooperation in the news industry (e.g. via news agencies), and for a long time saw many smaller news outlets disappear but few new players enter.

The reverse side of the high first copy costs is that news is *non-rival* in consumption. Using news does not finish it; after consumption, someone else can use the same news. This means that news, once produced, is not scarce. News shares this characteristic with other intangible and media products.

### Non-payer excludability

The second special characteristic of news as an economic product is that providers find it difficult to exclude non-payers from using it. This characteristic is related to the previous ones. Since news is not finished when used and since its costs do not increase when more people use it, users can easily share or pass on news. In the Netherlands, for example, 21% of national and regional paid newspapers are shared by neighbors, family, and acquaintances (Bakker and Scholten, 2009). Online news readers likewise may redistribute interesting news accounts on their personal blogs. And heavy news users pass on information to less-interested citizens in a two-step flow of information.

As these examples illustrate, the actual degree of *non-excludability* varies historically with the technical characteristics of a medium. Copying and delivering a print paper, for example, is more expensive (for the publisher as well as the user) than copying and delivering an electronic copy, unless (expensive) digital rights management systems are used to close off digital signals to non-payers. The important implication of non-excludability is that commercial providers cannot ensure customer payment, especially in the online but also in the print environment. This seriously limits providers' opportunities to sell their product on the market – as the fate of the music industry has shown.

### News as public good?

Perfect non-rivalry in consumption and perfect non-excludability of non-paying customers are the defining characteristics of a pure *public good*. The archetypical example is national defence. Once produced, it doesn't matter how many people benefit from it, and non-paying citizens cannot be excluded. More than that, excluding non-paying customers makes no economic sense. It would reduce the number of people profiting from the good, without a concomitant reduction in production costs. This would reduce total welfare. For these reasons, public goods are not left to the market but are produced or funded by the government. Since news shares characteristics of a public good, the question arises whether it should not be provided as a public service by government, too.

### Merit good and positive externalities

There are two other arguments in favor of government support for news production. The first is that news is a *merit good*. Buyers systematically underestimate the benefits of news consumption. Hence, they are less willing to pay for the product than they should – and would, if they only discovered its “true” value. In common parlance, these are products that are “good” for you, even though we might not particularly like them. Education is a frequently mentioned example of a merit good.

The other argument is that news consumption generates *positive externalities*. When citizens are well informed, they do not only profit personally, but society as a whole benefits, too. Society in the future, for example, profits when citizens make informed decisions on educational policy or environmental issues. These societal benefits are positive externalities that cannot be appropriated by the principal economic actors – in our cases, users that buy news. Their actions create benefits to a third party – future citizens – for which they are not rewarded. This is problematic, because it prevents users from properly weighing all benefits against the costs of buying news. The undesirable outcome is that citizens buy less news than when the externalities were internalized and users would personally enjoy all benefits that follow from their purchase.

One way for government to internalize positive externalities is by compensating news buyers, for example, by subsidizing news prices. In the same way, governments may reduce the negative impact of the merit good character on news consumption. Subsidizing news providers, partly or completely exempting news from VAT, and publicly funding (TV) news – common practices in many western democracies – thus emerge, in this line of reasoning, as practical ways to deal with the problems that emerge from the merit good character and positive externalities of news consumption.

### Paying for news?

Overall, the latter economic characteristics reviewed – news being a merit good with positive externalities – indicate that users are not willing to pay the “true” value of news. The characteristics mentioned before – high first copy costs, non-rival consumption, and

non-excludability – indicate that news is not scarce and therefore cannot be sold on markets like standard economic goods. Together, these characteristics imply that it is difficult for firms to produce news as a commercial product that is sold at a profitable price to users. In the next section, we discuss how newspaper publishers and TV news broadcasters – temporarily – solved this problem.

## **The Rise and Fall of the Traditional Newspaper and TV News Business Models**

A business model captures the essentials of a business in a nutshell. It explains in economic and technical terms how companies can serve particular needs of a particular group of customers at appropriate costs, and make a profit in the process. It includes a basic description of the product, the needs that it serves, the ways in which it is produced, and the sources of revenue for the provider (Magretta, 2002).

The traditional business models of newspapers and TV news are specific to the period in which they flourished as mass media – not more than 150 and 50 years, respectively (Socolow, 2010; van Tuyl, 2010). At that time, they were the primary sources of public affairs information and the primary mediators of public debate. They were trusted in their respective communities and attracted devoted audiences. They “mattered” – that made them ultimately into profitable businesses (Clark-Johnson, 2009: 23).

### Bundling content for dual product markets

One important characteristic of newspapers and TV broadcasts is that they are bundles of different types of content (Sparks, 2003). They provide news stories on various topics as well as different types of advertising, service information, and entertainment. The resulting bundle serves mainstream and minority tastes with one comprehensive product. Given the available printing and broadcasting technologies in the twentieth century, bundling was the most efficient and at times the only feasible way to cater for the varied needs of a heterogeneous customer base.

An important case of bundling, crucial to the business success of newspapers and TV news, is the addition of advertisements to the editorial bundle, making newspapers and TV news casts into products that are sold on *dual product markets*. Providers offer news content to users in exchange for money or attention on the news market, and subsequently sell “access to audiences” to advertisers on the advertising market (Picard, 1989: 18).

The reliance on advertising revenues enabled publishers and broadcasters to circumvent the difficult problem of generating sufficient revenues from *users* to pay the costs of news production. In commercial TV, viewers only pay attention to news and advertisements, and broadcasters depend almost entirely on advertising revenues. In the newspaper business, advertising makes up between half (e.g. in the Netherlands) and 80% (in the USA) of

newspaper revenues. In most countries reader revenues cover only printing and distributing costs, not the costs of news production (Picard, 2009b).

### Dominant position

Bundling enabled news providers to operate on a relatively large scale, reaching a mass audience with one single, mass-produced product. This was advantageous for providers. News services that reach larger audiences are more attractive to advertisers and generate more advertising revenues. At the same time, providers could realize economies of scale in news production, reducing the average cost of serving news users and advertisers. Combined, these characteristics – as well as the scarcity in TV frequencies – drove a profitable cycle of concentration, higher market entry barriers, and increasing economies of scale.

In the heyday of newspapers and TV news – that is, before the expansion of cable TV and the emergence of the World Wide Web – TV viewers could only choose between a few TV channels, and local and regional communities were increasingly served by a single newspaper. No other substitutes could replace newspapers and TV in providing information to society and facilitating public communication and debate. Publishers and broadcasters thus occupied a dominant position, in their markets and in society. Few could bypass their gates to reach local, regional, and national populations. Businesses, politicians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental organizations that sought public exposure, and citizens that sought information on current affairs all depended on TV channels and newspapers.

This dominant position ultimately explains the business success of newspapers and TV news. It was based on a – historically specific – scarcity in distribution channels. That ultimately enabled them to offer exclusive value to users and advertisers and earn a profit in return.

### The end of distribution scarcity

Technological change and the subsequent entry of new competitors affected the foundations of newspaper and TV news business models. Newspapers were first challenged by the emergence of TV news. Later, both newspapers and incumbent TV news faced increasing competition for news and advertising markets from cable networks and other TV channels. This triggered a stronger emphasis on short-term profits, cost and staff reductions, too strong a focus on the needs of advertisers, and a stronger reliance on press agency materials (Lewis, Williams, and Franklin, 2008; Meyer, 2004). Of course, these developments varied from country to country. Nevertheless, the overall picture is one in which the prestige and market position of print newspapers and TV news casts is weakening. They matter less.

And then came the Internet – or more precisely, the World Wide Web, which turned the Internet into a global mainstream multipurpose communication and distribution platform. The characteristic of the Internet that is crucial to understanding its business impact is that it enables any organization or individual that wishes to do so, to reproduce and

distribute content to any audience across the world *at virtually no cost*. This ends for all practical purposes the scarcity in distribution that characterized the pre-Internet period.

One important implication is disintermediation, literally the removal of intermediaries from the value chain. In the news industry, disintermediation means that sources (like politicians) and advertisers can bypass news media and communicate directly, and on their own terms, with their audiences. Disintermediation effectively signals that news media have lost their monopoly on public communication.

### Increasing competition

The low costs of online distribution further imply that there are no pressing technological and business needs to bundle content into comprehensive products. Instead, providers use online technology to distribute unbundled content to smaller audiences at low cost, too. This enables firms to specialize and provide more value to users. Online, providers can aim for reach – that is, serving a mass audience – and richness – providing a tailor-made product – at the same time (Evans and Wurster, 2000). Compare, for example, the national weather forecast on a TV news programme with a series of local forecasts that is available online.

The most threatening type of unbundling for newspapers is the emergence of dedicated classified ad-sites, like Craigslist and Monsterboard. These take away important revenues – on which newspapers increasingly relied since they lost part of the display advertising business to television. Of course, news providers may and do attempt to develop competing services. But it is unlikely that they will earn enough revenues with classified ad services to continue cross-subsidizing editorial content.

A further threat to the news business is the vast increase in competition in news markets, in particular by providers of free news. The disappearance of online reproduction and distribution costs enables users to choose from a much wider variety of news services – including free online services provided by commercial and public broadcasters, newspaper publishers that experiment with online newspapers, net-native news services, and Internet service providers like AOL and Google that offer news for free to draw more customers to their primary business (be it the sales of Internet access, or the creation of audiences for advertisers).

Ironically, traditional news providers facilitated the emergence of new competitors. Many emerging news providers buy, copy, or aggregate their news from incumbent providers and news agencies. In an ideal world, traditional news providers would have put a stop to the emerging free news business by deciding collectively to charge users and new competitors for news. In practice, however, the temptation to break ranks and offer news for free when all others charge for news will always be too strong for one or the other incumbent (Farhi, 2009). It is very unlikely that providers in a global market like the online news market will be able to solve this collective action problem. This means that free news is here to stay.

### Scarcity of attention

For users, these developments have brought them a wide variety of generalist and specialist online news services to choose from. These include online variants of established offline services, such as the online editions of the *Financial Times*, *Bild Zeitung*,



the BBC, and Associated Press; general or dedicated news services offered by online service providers like Google, Yahoo, and CNET; and a wide variety of general and specialist news and information services provided by (collectives of) amateurs, experts, and bloggers, like the Huffington Post and Drudge Report.

The range of available news services combines with an infinite number of other informational, communication, and entertainment services into considerable information overload. This is where new successful intermediaries enter, and new types of intermediation and bundling emerge. News aggregators offer one-stop access to news from many different sources. Search engines help users to navigate the net and find the information they need. These new intermediaries offer value where individual users most need it, in accommodating the infinity of supply and the scarcity of human time and attention. By doing this, they create audiences, whose scarce attention they subsequently sell to businesses, organizations, news sources, and advertisers that want to communicate with potential customers and clients but find it hard to reach them through the clutter of the net.

News providers thus not only face more competition on news markets but especially intense competition in the advertising and attention business. This not only increases the power of advertisers and threatens editorial independence of news media, it also – and more fundamentally – affects opportunities of news media to cross-subsidize editorial content with advertising revenues. This forcefully confronts news media with the question of how to cover the costs of news production, if not make a profit, under these new conditions.

## Business Opportunities for Online Journalism

In the early days of the World Wide Web, in the mid- and late 1990s, professionals and scholars commended so-called *internet-specific features* as business opportunities for news providers. These features include multimedia (the bundling of text, audio, and video), personal and content interactivity (facilitating user contributions and discussions), immediacy (real-time news), hyperlinks (to relevant and interesting sources), and personalization (enabling users to receive preferred news items only).

These features differentiate online from offline news media. They increase the value of an online service in the “local” market (Chyi and Sylvie, 1998: 4) in ways that print and TV news cannot match. But they do not increase the attractiveness of news services in the “long-distance” market (Chyi and Sylvie, 1998) where they compete with other online services. Providing Internet-specific features, therefore, though potentially attractive to users, does not suffice for a business to survive in the age of online news.

### Online advertising

The primary source of revenues for news providers, from the early days of the web onward, has been advertising. Many online news providers offer news for free to audiences and subsequently sell “eye-balls” to advertisers. Providers thus aim to gain a share of growing online advertising expenditures. One of the major advantages of online advertising is that it is much easier online than offline to personalize advertising: to

target advertising to particular users on the basis of information collected, inter alia, via compulsory user registration.

At the other site of the equation, providers use algorithms – like Google Analytics and AOL’s Demand/ROI – to predict and assess the advertising value of news items on the basis of real-time visitor behavior and user interests (revealed, e.g., by search engine requests and forum discussions; Anderson, 2010). One not-for-profit news site, for example, learned “that \$600 spent on one long story produces a lot less traffic than \$600 spent generating six to 12 shorter stories” (Kramer, 2009: 6). The twin crafts of maximizing advertising value and lowering content production costs are pushed to the limits by so-called content farms, like Demand Media. These pay freelance writers, including discharged journalists, a small fee to write commercial content: items that are predicted to generate audiences and thus advertising income (Spangler, 2010).

Competition in the online advertising market is very strong. News providers face a wide range of other players that offer access to similar audiences. Moreover, online visitors spend less time on an online news service than on a newspaper or TV news cast, and thus pay less attention to advertisements. For these reasons, online advertising generally brings fewer revenues per user than print or television advertising. Observers argue that one newspaper reader brings as much revenues as between three and 10 online readers (*The Economist*, 2006; Kuttner, 2007).

Given these figures, it is not surprising that news providers find it difficult to cover the costs of original news reporting with advertising revenues. Accordingly, they rely on news (or revenues) from a companion print or TV edition, on low-cost news provided by news agencies and PR departments or aggregated from other news web sites, or on news stories offered by users, volunteers, and citizen journalists.

### Online editions of traditional newspapers

A common approach in the online news business is for traditional publishers to complement their offline news service with online editions. The offline editions generate most of the (advertising) revenues – which pay for news creation and packaging. The online editions in turn may bring additional advertising revenues, but in particular allow the publishers to claim a stake in the online news environment and experiment with online services and possible revenue streams (Krumsvik, 2006). Apart from providing familiar news stories, online editions may cover breaking news as it develops, provide room for bloggers, invest in community building, and include – sometimes edited – materials from citizen journalists, social media, YouTube, and blogs.

The underlying hope of publishers is that online revenues increase at least as quickly as print circulations decline, so that in the years to come online editions will start to pay their own ways, print editions can be phased out, and printing and distribution costs can be saved. One newspaper already embarking on this road is the *Christian Science Monitor* in the USA, which appears only online on weekdays – when many of its readers sit behind computers anyway – and in print on Sundays – when people have more time to read (Regan, 2008). At the same time, however, providers of online services take the opposite route and start print editions to generate more advertising revenues. An example is the

Politico web site, which started “a weekly print product, which is responsible for much of its revenue” (Clark-Johnson, 2009: 24). The print–online conversion thus is far from a done deal.

### Value added services and brand extensions

Traditional news providers with quality editorial content, rich archives, and strong brand names may choose to add a range of other products and services to their online edition, in order to attract larger audiences, increase page visits, and generate additional user payments. They may add value to the news service by providing valuable information on particular issues (e.g. the *Guardian's* University Guide or the *Financial Times's* Companies Research), or access to older materials via online dossiers and archives. Or they may offer *value-added services*, such as personalization and interaction features, e-papers, mobile news services, and dedicated news clipping services – services that enable users to derive more value from the news. In the UK, for example, national newspapers offer, and charge for, digital editions, access to electronic archives, and mobile services (Herbert and Thurman, 2007).

Rather than adding value to the basic news service, providers may also sell additional products, so-called *line and brand extensions*. Line extensions are products that are part of the same product line as the original news product. Think of compilations of columns, books written by journalists, or events matching the editorial focus of a news service (e.g. *The New York Times's* Arts and Leisure Weekend, or *Süddeutsche Zeitung's* Wissensforum). Brand extensions, in contrast, are unrelated to the original product, but nevertheless sold under the same brand. For example, it is not uncommon for newspapers to sell wine. Ideally, brand loyalty of news users stimulates sales of other products, whereas good experiences with these extensions reinforce brand image and loyalty. Extensions provide a growing stream of revenues, contributing to as much as a third of the profits of some news companies (Herbert and Thurman, 2007).

The provision of value added and commercial services may develop into a strategy of *value exchange* optimization. This is the strategy where providers identify their most loyal, profitable, and thus valuable customers, and build their business upon serving these customers as best and as long as they can with as many profitable products as possible (Grant and Schlesinger, 1995). Firms accordingly focus on the quality rather than size of their audience and provide news that attracts that audience. They may charge for news to earn some revenues, but in particular to self-select preferred customers. User data are collected to target services and to sell targeted advertising that interests rather than irritates the valuable, and valued, customer.

### Low-cost news

Another strategy is to produce an online service that can be supported with limited advertising revenues, by relying on free news provided by volunteers, experts, citizen journalists, and users. The Huffington Post in the USA is one example of a successful and profitable news and commentary blog that relies for its content on more than 6000 volunteers and not more than 53 paid editorial staffers (Lee, 2010), reaching a similar

online audience to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (Sherman, 2010). Another example is the progressive political blog annex community Daily Kos. In addition, there are countless small voluntary news services and blogs that specialize in particular topics or geographical areas. Besides, traditional news media, too, rely on user contributions and participatory journalism, to reduce costs and produce attractive news (Deuze, Bruns, and Neuberger, 2007).

The feasibility of such a strategy obviously depends on the quality of volunteer contributions in relation to the image and quality that a news service wants to maintain and the resources that are available for moderation and editing. One particular characteristic of user and volunteer contributions is that users and volunteers comment upon and discuss news rather than producing original news stories. Voluntary news services thus depend considerably on news provided by traditional news organizations, newspapers first (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010).

*News aggregators* are a particular type of new entrant that compete with incumbents by redistributing the incumbents' news for free. They provide a comprehensive overview of news collected from many different sources, notably traditional news providers. Some only collect headlines, others also offer summaries. Some select news manually, some add their own contributions, whereas others – like Google News – (used to) select and present news automatically.

Reliance on a continuous stream of news stories produced by traditional media enables these news aggregators to provide a low-cost service that can be financed with advertising revenues. The main challenge is to attract as large an audience as possible to maximize advertising revenues. The resulting threat to traditional providers is that online visitors do not visit their homepages any more, but hyperlink directly from a news aggregator to a particular news item, or even confine themselves to the aggregator-offered summary. This reduces advertising revenues for incumbents – also because homepages in principle generate a substantial part of online advertising revenues.

### Paid-for news

The main alternative to relying on advertising revenues or commercial services is to charge for news. Charging for news is a business strategy that is frequently discussed, but not that frequently adopted (Mensing, 2007). The main problem is that many users can easily find free substitutes. Providers that put their content behind payment walls thus risk losing a substantial part of their audience and hence advertising revenues. Revenues generated from the smaller paying audience are usually not sufficient to fill the gap.

Similar problems hinder the development of micro-payments. The idea of selling individual articles for very small fees briefly attracted attention but soon died away, in spite of the success of iTunes in the music industry. One reason is that it is more difficult for the news than the music industry to reach sufficient sales of items to cover the transaction costs involved in setting up and running a micro-payment system, let alone make a profit (Picard, 2009c). The underlying reasons are familiar: news items, used only once and competing with many free substitutes, face lower demand and command lower prices (reportedly around 25¢ per article; Seward, 2009, or less) than

music songs (for which we happily pay between 69¢ and \$1.29 on iTunes). The news business, moreover, misses a few mass players that could kick-start a micro-payment scheme, like the five major music companies did for iTunes. In addition, newspaper publishers seem to be more reluctant than music companies to share control of valuable customer relations with powerful online players, or to become more dependent on them for online innovations.

Charging money for online news is thus a loss-making strategy, unless providers have something really unique to offer; something that cannot be easily found for free elsewhere on the net. The archetypical example here is the online edition of the *Wall Street Journal*, which has been charging since 1996. The *Wall Street Journal* is able to charge over one million online subscribers about \$100 a year (or \$1.99 per week), because it provides unique, highly regarded financial and business news. In the UK, since 2010 News Corporation has charged £2.00 per week for combined online access to *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*. In a different league, *Orangebloods*, in the USA, charges \$100 a year for “what no one else can provide, which is year-round coverage of Longhorns [the University of Texas football team] recruiting” (Shapiro, 2009: 30).

Charging restricts access to news. It also requires providers to devote scarce resources to producing exclusive news that attracts paying customers, rather than producing or purchasing general news that interests everyone (Shapiro, 2009). Charging thus may change the focus of news reporting in unknown ways (e.g. more business, and less local news). As a result, paid online news services are shifting in the same direction as some see traditional print papers moving: niche products that serve the needs of small but prosperous elites.

### Charitable and public funding

Instead of charging users, news providers may turn to charitable donors to pay for news. Increasingly, journalists and publishers seek the support of foundations and angel investors to cover part of the costs of (investigative) reporting. “According to ... the J-Lab at American University, about \$143 million of foundation money has flowed into news media enterprises between 2005 and April 2010. More than half of that has gone to twelve investigation-oriented news organizations, according to ... CJR” (Drew, 2010: 23). Others, like Spot.Us, set up by the non-profit Center for Media Change and partly funded by the Knight foundation, invite the public to fund stories “on important and perhaps overlooked topics” (Spot.Us web site).

Some commentators advocate stronger government support for the press. In Europe, governments routinely support public broadcasters to provide, inter alia, TV and online news. An example is the renowned BBC news web site. Proposals in the USA include the establishment of “an independent trust, funded by a ten-year tax on broadcast advertising revenue,” “a tax-credit system in which every citizen would be allowed a \$100 donation to any creative outlet, including journalism,” and “one-time subsidies for [...] the development of electronic papers” (Nordenson, 2007: 41).

Government, foundation, and community support for the production of quality news makes economic sense when we consider the public and merit good character of news. If quality news is important for society and should be made available to all, even when

individual users are not willing to pay the full price, it figures that public-interest organizations should contribute the revenues that markets fail to provide. At the same time, publicly funded news sites – which generally provide quality news for free – make it even more difficult for commercial providers to make a profit on news or attention markets. Besides, charitable funding tends to be limited in time and dedicated to specific (investigative news) projects. It makes news providers more vulnerable to sudden shifts in donation patterns, and to pressures from organizations that want to use their financial influence to favor their own news agenda.

### E-commerce and local platforms

Online news providers may also choose to further develop the commercial side of their news services, developing them into information annex e-commerce platforms. The underlying idea is that news services capitalize upon their visibility and the trust that they command to facilitate a wide range of commercial transactions. Customers may turn to the news service as a – perceived or real – trusted source of consumer information and as an entry point to online vendors. Suppliers may rely in turn on the news service to bring target audiences into their shops. Depending on the target audience, news and services offered on the platform may vary in quality and scope. News providers that embark on this strategy, however, have to steer a narrow course between business opportunities and user credibility (Ihlström and Palmer, 2002).

One particular model that is frequently discussed and recommended in the trade literature, is the (*hyper*)*local platform* model: the bundling of all kinds of locally relevant content – news, business information, blogs, opinions, user-generated content, advertisements – into one local platform, together with commercial and, perhaps, transaction services. This strategy is, for example, adopted by AOL-owned Patch Media, which runs a network of hyperlocal sites in the USA. In Scotland, commercial broadcaster STV started several local web sites in 2010; in the Netherlands, the Telegraaf Media Group is currently developing its own hyperlocal platforms; and in Germany the *Hamburger Abendblatt* launched Mein Quartier.

There are also grass-roots and other not-for-profit local initiatives, with a community rather than commercial orientation. Examples are the Haringay Online civil social network in north London, and the not-for-profit MinnPost that provides “high-quality journalism for people who care about Minnesota” (MinnPost web site). Overall, it is perhaps most striking to see the strong market positions occupied by non-newspaper companies in these local news markets.

### News as experience

A final strategy for news providers that may gain prominence in the future is to enter the “experience economy” (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Experiences are a different type of economic product, next to commodities, mass-produced goods, and intangible services. Their distinguishing characteristic is that they are personal, require the active or passive participation of the buyer, and command a premium price. Like the delivery of customized news services, staging news experiences would be a way for a news provider to make

a profit in a business where selling basic news – news as a commodity, with no distinguishing characteristics – is not profitable any more.

What news as a personal experience would look like is a matter of speculation. One ingredient could be for users to closely follow or virtually accompany journalists to a particular place or country where important events took place. Another option would be for news to be presented as a virtual reality in which users can dwell for some time, visiting places and witnessing events as if at first hand.

## The Value of Online Journalism

The underlying challenge that providers ultimately face in developing online business models is to discover the value that they and their journalists can add for users. Of course, news services still serve familiar gratifications. They inform on public affairs and practical matters, they provide topics for conversation, they may be entertaining and help users to pass time, and they may be used out of habit. But this is not sufficient any more, given the wide range of competing products and substitutes that serve the same or similar gratifications.

### Reduced transaction costs

One important source of additional value added is the *reduction of transaction costs*: the costs involved in preparing and making economic transactions, notably purchases. Both sellers and users may appreciate it when news providers bring vendors together with potential customers, facilitating targeted advertising and commercial transactions. Part of the value offered by local platforms, for example, is that they make shopping more efficient and thus allow sellers and users to save scarce time and attention.

Related to this, providers may offer one-stop access to relevant news and public affairs information, be it local news (provided by a local platform), international news (provided by news aggregators), or national news and debates (provided by a news weblog). Again, these services reduce information search costs. Additional value can be created when a particular quality of news, vendors, and products is selected and made available under the brand name of a news service.

### Journalistic value

A traditional source of added value can be found in the production of good old-fashioned journalism: new stories that adhere to traditional journalistic norms. Good journalism still adds *journalistic value* for those interested in public affairs, by providing quality accounts of events and by offering context, background, and interpretation.

But nowadays, journalism needs to be presented in involving and inspiring ways, too, rather than merely informing (Meijer, 2007). Users may want to be enabled and invited to select topics, contribute content, signal interesting items to online friends, judge the expedience of journalist decisions themselves, compile their own news stories, personally know the journalists they depend upon, hear about their personal experiences in

**Table 13.1** Seven ideal-type business models.

	<i>Paid news</i>	<i>Value exchange</i>	<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Public good</i>	<i>Local platform</i>	<i>Free news</i>	<i>Free debates</i>
<b>Target audience</b>	Professionals	Affluent groups in society	Mainstream audience	Local or national communities; less affluent groups	Local communities	Mass audiences in different countries	Politically or culturally engaged community
<b>Product</b>	Comprehensive offer of exclusive (need-to-know) high-quality news and value added services	Comprehensive offer of branded news plus line and brand extensions that fit user world view and life style	Personalized news experiences that are enjoyable and matter to users	Comprehensive offer of quality news	Comprehensive local coverage of basic local news and commercial and transaction services	Comprehensive and free access to basic news from all over the world	Comprehensive and free access to challenging opinions and debates that fit political world view of user; free participation in community.
<b>Added value<sup>a</sup></b>	Journalistic value; reduction of information search costs	Reduction of transaction costs; some journalistic, community building and participatory value	Participatory (experiential) value; some journalistic value	Journalistic, community building and participatory value	Reduction of transaction costs; perhaps local community building and participatory value	Reduction of transaction costs	Community building and participatory value
<b>Revenues</b>	User payments, some advertising	Extensions, advertising, some user payments	User payments	Charitable and/or public funding; perhaps other sources	Advertising, transaction fees	Advertising	Advertising
<b>News costs</b>	High cost: production of original content				Low cost: reliance on volunteers, citizen journalists and news from other providers		
<b>Value chain</b>	Production and packaging; control over distribution; marketing and sales on news and attention markets				Packaging, distribution, and marketing and sales on attention market; production outsourced		

<sup>a</sup>All services offer basic news gratifications. They provide public affairs and practical information, topics for conversation and entertainment, help users to pass time, and may be used out of habit.



gathering the news (Singer, 2010), and live through the news personally. Focusing on the fulfilment of some of these needs might be a good way for journalistic news providers to add *participatory value* for customers and to differentiate their service from the countless competitors.

Finally, providers can add *community building value* by providing people with access to others, and facilitating communication within and between communities. Local platforms, for example, may build or reinforce local identities. Politically oriented news blogs offer access to like-minded people and support politically engaged communities. Other news services may contribute to the development of social-cultural groups or involvement in society as a whole. To the extent that users value these opportunities, they may be willing to pay more attention to, or even pay more money for, news services that offer this value.

### Seven ideal-type business models

Table 13.1 summarizes the reviewed possibilities somewhat speculatively into seven ideal-type business models. At the high end of the news market, we find the *high-quality news* model, where providers serve professionals with exclusive, high-quality need-to-know news that commands a premium price. Next, in the *value exchange* model, providers with strong brand names offer quality news to attract high-potential customers, usually from affluent groups in society. They earn money by selling line and brand extensions to these customers. Both models restrict access to quality content to elites. News *experiences*, offered in the third model, instead may attract larger audiences among those that use news more infrequently. In all three models, providers are involved in content production and incur high first copy costs. This makes it likely that these providers want to keep maximum control over distribution, marketing, and sales, and aim to develop close relationships with end-users, in order to be able to recoup the high costs.

The fourth model is the (*news as*) *public good* model. Here, not-for-profit providers compensate the lack of sufficient direct user payments with charitable support (from foundations, angel investors, communities), government funding, or both. Providers adopting this model offer quality news to smaller or larger audiences, ranging from a small community platform to a nationwide public broadcasting news service. In particular, they serve audiences and needs that are not served by other quality news providers. Like the first three business models, “public good” providers incur high first copy costs. They may adopt elements of the value exchange and (hyper)local models, described above and below, to increase their attractiveness to national or local audiences, broaden their revenue base, and cover costs better. In addition, and as part of their public service, they may distribute their news via commercial news media, to reach wider audiences.

Providers adopting the (*hyper*)*local platform* model – the fifth model – aim to become the preferred provider of access to all locally relevant content and services, including news, business and commercial information, and transaction services. The main sources of revenue are advertising and transaction fees. Advertising is also the main source of revenue in two other models where direct user payments are insufficient: the *free news* model adopted by news aggregators, and the *free comment and debate* model adopted by voluntary news blogs. Providers adopting these latter models specialize in packaging and distribution, and outsource content production to other firms or volunteers.

## The Future of the Online News Business

Providing news is a challenging business. The particular characteristics of news as economic product make it difficult to sell it at its “true” value to customers. Newspapers and broadcasters bypassed this problem by financing news indirectly with advertising revenues. But the conditions that enabled their business models were fundamentally affected when the Internet eradicated the scarcity in distribution. Thus, at the same time that digital and online technologies offer tremendous opportunities to develop innovative reporting – with multimedia, hyperlinks, user involvement in all stages of the news value chain, immediacy, and personalization – the business opportunities to finance such reporting deteriorate rapidly.

Numerous business solutions and revenue strategies have been proposed and experimented with. So far, however, a clear and commonly shared business model that supports the continued production and large-scale sales of quality news by commercial firms – like the business models of newspapers and TV news – has not been discovered, and it is unlikely that such a model will emerge in the near future. Instead, providers will continue to experiment with different business opportunities, combining them into various ad hoc and situation-specific models for some time.

The crucial uncertainty for the future is audiences’ willingness to pay for news. The general tendency for users to undervalue news is reinforced in the twenty-first century by the abundant availability of free news into an aversion to pay for news at all – at least among members of the main audience. Whether this will remain the case in the future, is a matter of speculation. Perhaps users will become convinced that news is worth paying for when providers add more value, or when the negative cycle of declining revenues and declining news quality hits the bottom. Perhaps, the “free” World Wide Web will give way to a world of mobile apps where payment is more customary. Overall, however, it will be more difficult than in the past for commercial providers to recoup the costs of news creation and packaging – except for providers that serve affluent elites and a few international providers that serve global audiences with low-cost news.

The biggest challenge, therefore, is to maintain inclusive quality news services, which serve those members of society who are neither particularly interested in news nor willing to pay for it. Charitable and public support remain necessary here to overcome the problems caused by the merit good character and positive externalities of news consumption. The change in distribution of news from printed paper and airwaves to digital networks does not change that.

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# Part IV

## Practices



# Crowdsourcing Investigative Journalism: Help Me Investigate – A Case Study

Paul Bradshaw with Andy Brightwell

In both academic and mainstream literature about the World Wide Web, one theme consistently recurs: the lowering of the barrier allowing individuals to collaborate in pursuit of a common goal. Whether it is creating the world's biggest encyclopedia (Lih, 2009), spreading news about a protest (Morozov, 2011), or tracking down a stolen phone (Shirky, 2008), the rise of the network has seen a decline in the role of the formal organization, including news organizations.

Two examples of this phenomenon were identified while researching a book chapter on investigative journalism and blogs (De Burgh, 2008). The first was an experiment by *The Florida News Press*: when it started receiving calls from readers complaining about high water and sewage connection charges for newly constructed homes the newspaper, short on in-house resources to investigate the leads, decided to ask its readers to help. The result is by now familiar as a textbook example of “crowdsourcing” – outsourcing a project to “the crowd” or what Brogan and Smith (2009: 136) describe as “the ability to have access to many people at a time and to have them perform one small task each:”

Readers spontaneously organized their own investigations: Retired engineers analyzed blueprints, accountants pored over balance sheets, and an inside whistle-blower leaked documents showing evidence of bid-rigging.

Howe, 2006

The second example concerned contaminated pet food in the USA, and did not involve a mainstream news organization. In fact, it was frustration with poor mainstream “churnalism” that motivated bloggers and Internet users to start digging into the story. The resulting output from dozens of blogs ranged from useful information for pet owners and the latest news to the compilation of a database that suggested the official numbers

of pet deaths recorded by the US Food and Drug Administration were short by several thousand. One site, Itchmo.com, became so popular that it was banned in China, the source of the pet food in question.

What was striking about both examples was not simply that people could organize to produce investigative journalism, but that this practice of “crowdsourcing” had two key qualities that were particularly relevant to journalism’s role in a democracy. The first was engagement: in the case of the News-Press for six weeks the story generated more traffic to its web site than “ever before, excepting hurricanes” (Weise, 2007). Given that investigative journalism often concerns very “dry” subject matter that has to be made appealing to a wider audience, these figures were surprising and encouraging for publishers.

The second quality was subject: the contaminated pet food story was, in terms of mainstream news values, unfashionable and unjustifiable in terms of investment of resources. It appeared that the crowdsourcing model of investigation might provide a way to investigate stories that were in the public interest but which commercial and public service news organizations would not consider worth their time. More broadly, research on crowdsourcing suggested that it worked “best in areas that are not core to your product or central to your business model” (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 82).

These two qualities were to be key elements in the early formation of the Help Me Investigate project. But before describing how that evolved it is necessary to describe the broader context surrounding investigative journalism within which the project was to sit.

## **Investigative Journalism: Its History and Discourses**

De Burgh (2008: 10) defines investigative journalism as “distinct from apparently similar work [of discovering truth and identifying lapses from it] done by police, lawyers and auditors and regulatory bodies in that it is not limited as to target, not legally founded and usually earns money for media publishers.” The term is notoriously problematic and contested: some argue that all journalism is investigative, or that the recent popularity of the term indicates the failure of “normal” journalism to maintain investigative standards. This contestation is a symptom of the various factors underlying the growth of the genre, which range from journalists’ own sense of their democratic role, to professional ambition and publishers’ commercial and marketing objectives (De Burgh, 2008).

More recently investigative journalism has been used to defend traditional print journalism against online publishing, with publishers arguing that true investigative journalism cannot be maintained without the resources of a print operation. This position has become harder to defend as online-only operations and journalists have won increasing numbers of awards for their investigative work – Clare Sambrook in the UK and VoiceOfSanDiego.com and Talking Points Memo in the USA are three examples – while new organizations have been established to pursue investigations without any associated print operation including Canada’s OpenFile, the UK’s Bureau of Investigative Journalism, and a number of bodies in the USA such as ProPublica, The Florida Center for Investigative Reporting, and the Huffington Post’s investigative unit.

While computer-assisted reporting has been part of journalism since the 1960s, increasing processing power and connectivity has played an increasingly important role



in print investigative journalism: Stephen Grey's investigation into the CIA's "extraordinary rendition" programme (Grey, 2006) was facilitated by the use of software such as Analyst's Notebook, which allowed him to analyze large amounts of flight data and identify leads. *The Telegraph's* investigation into MPs' expenses was made possible by digitization of data and the ability to store large amounts on a small memory stick. And newspapers around the world collaborated with the Wikileaks web site to analyze Iraq and Afghanistan "warlogs" and hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables.

Institutionally, the success of Wikipedia inspired a raft of examples of "Wiki journalism" where users were invited to contribute to editorial coverage of a particular issue or field (Bradshaw, 2007), with varying degrees of success. More recently, in Italy *La Repubblica* experimented with inviting web site users to vote for subjects of investigations (Bonomolo, 2011) and in the USA Spot.us adopted a similar approach in inviting users to donate to "crowdfund" nominated investigations (Snyder, 2008). The UK's Channel 4 News used Twitter to crowdsource details of budget cuts (Marshall, 2011), and in the USA The Center for Public Integrity, Public Radio International (PRI), and Global Integrity partnered up to create a platform for scrutinizing local corruption. Michael Skoler, vice president of Interactive Media for PRI, said of the project:

I think one of the misconceptions about crowdsourcing is when you crowdsource, you're trying to attract and engage everyone. And that doesn't work. Crowdsourcing is about reaching out to the people who are naturally interested and knowledgeable about something and inviting them to play.

Ellis, 2011

This "outreach" approach to crowdsourcing has been adopted by investigative journalists such as the *Guardian's* Paul Lewis, who has worked with online communities to break stories including the role of police in the death of newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson, the existence of undercover agents in the environmental protest movement, and the death of a man being deported to Angola (Belam, 2011b: np).

This is part of a broader move to networked journalism explored by Charlie Beckett (2008):

In a world of ever-increasing media manipulation by government and business, it is even more important for investigative journalists to use technology and connectivity to reveal hidden truths. Networked journalists are open, interactive and share the process. Instead of gatekeepers they are facilitators: the public become co-producers. Networked journalists "are 'medium agnostic' and 'story-centric'." The process is faster and the information sticks around longer.

Beckett, 2008: 147

As one of its best-known practitioners Paul Lewis talks particularly of the role of technology in his investigations – specifically Twitter – but also the importance of the crowd itself and journalistic method:

A crucial factor that makes crowd-sourcing a success [was that] there was a reason for people to help, in this case a perceived sense of injustice and that the official version of events did not tally with the truth. Six days after Tomlinson's death, Paul had twenty reliable witnesses

who could be placed on a map at the time of the incident – and only one of them had come from the traditional journalistic tool of a contact number in his notebook.

Belam, 2011b: np

A further key skill identified by Lewis is listening to the crowd – although he sounds a note of caution in its vulnerability to deliberately placed misinformation, and the need for verification.

Crowd-sourcing doesn't always work... The most common thing is that you try, and you don't find the information you want... The pattern of movement of information on the internet is something journalists need to get their heads around. Individuals on the web in a crowd seem to behave like a flock of starlings – and you can't control their direction.

Belam, 2011b: n.p.

## Conceptualizing Help Me Investigate

Help Me Investigate was a project that aimed to make it easier for members of the public and journalists to investigate issues of public interest. It did this in two main ways: by providing a technological platform that made it easier for a community of interested parties to collaborate, and by providing journalistic support as they did so.

The project was conceptualized by Paul Bradshaw and developed with co-founders Nick Booth (a community media specialist) and web developer Stef Lewandowski, and launched at HelpMeInvestigate.com in July 2009 with funding from the UK broadcaster Channel 4's 4iP (innovation for the public) fund and Screen West Midlands. The initial version of the site ran until February 2011, at which point the source code was published and work on a second version of the site began.

The first plans for Help Me Investigate were made in 2007 and built on research into crowdsourced investigative journalism, as well as other research into online journalism and community management. In particular the project sought to explore concepts of "P2P journalism," which enables "more engaged interaction between and *amongst* users" (Bruns, 2005: 120, emphasis in original) and of "produsage," whose affordances included probabilistic problem solving, granular tasks, equipotentiality, and shared content (Bruns, 2008: 19). At the heart of Help Me Investigate's design, for example, was the concept of breaking down the imposing idea of an "investigation" into manageable "granular tasks," and the assumption that all participants had the potential to contribute in some way, as explained further in the next section.

A key feature in this was the ownership of the news agenda by users themselves (who could be either members of the public or journalists). This was partly for reasons identified above in research into the crowdsourced investigation into contaminated pet food. It would allow the site to identify questions that would not be considered viable for investigation within a traditional newsroom; but the feature was also implemented because "ownership" was a key area of contestation identified within crowdsourcing research (Lih, 2009; Benkler, 2006; Surowiecki, 2005) – "outsourcing" a project to a group of people raises obvious issues regarding claims of authorship, direction, and benefits (Bruns, 2005).

These issues were considered carefully by the founders. The site adopted a user interface with three main modes of navigation for investigations: most-recent-top, most popular (those investigations with the most members), and two “featured” investigations chosen by site staff – these were chosen on the basis that they were the most interesting editorially, or because they were attracting particular interest and activity from users at that moment. There was therefore an editorial role, but this was limited to only two of the 18 investigations listed on the “Investigations” page, and was at least partly guided by user activity.

In addition there were further pages where users could explore investigations through different criteria such as those investigations that had been completed, or those investigations with particular tags (e.g. “environment,” “Bristol,” “FOI,” etc.).

A second feature of the site was that “journalism” was intended to be a by-product: the investigation process itself was the primary objective, which would inform users, as research suggested that if users were to be attracted to the site, it must perform the function that they needed it to (Porter, 2008), which was – as became apparent – one of project management. The “problem” that the site was attempting to “solve” needed to be user-centric rather than publisher-centric: “telling stories” would clearly be lower down the priority list for users than it was for journalists and publishers. Of higher priority was the need to break down a question into manageable pieces, find others to investigate those with, and get answers. This was eventually summarized in the strapline to the site: “Connect, mobilise, uncover.”

Thirdly, there was a decision to use “game mechanics” that would make the process of investigation inherently rewarding. As the site and its users grew, the interface was changed so that challenges started on the left hand side of the screen, coloured red, then moved to the middle when accepted (the colour changing to amber), and finally to the right column when complete (now with green border and tick icon). This made it easier to see at a glance what needed doing and what had been achieved, and also introduced a level of innate satisfaction in the task. Users, the idea went, might grow to like the feeling of moving those little blocks across the screen, and the positive feedback (see Graham, 2010; Dondlinger, 2007) provided by the interface.

Similar techniques were coincidentally explored at the same time by the *Guardian’s* MPs’ expenses app (Bradshaw, 2009). This provided an interface for users to investigate MP expense claim forms that used many conventions of game design, including a “progress bar,” leaderboards, and button-based interfaces. A second iteration of the app – created when a second batch of claim forms were released – saw a redesigned interface based on a stronger emphasis on positive feedback. As developer Martin Belam explains (2011a, np):

When a second batch of documents were released, the team working on the app broke them down into much smaller assignments. That meant it was easier for a small contribution to push the totals along, and we didn’t get bogged down with the inertia of visibly seeing that there was [sic] a lot of documents still to process.

By breaking it down into those smaller tasks, and staggering their start time, you concentrated all of the people taking part on one goal at a time. They could therefore see the progress dial for that individual goal move much faster than if you only showed the progress across the whole set of documents.

These game mechanics are not limited to games: many social networking sites have borrowed the conventions to provide similar positive feedback to users. Jon Hickman (2010: 2) describes how Help Me Investigate uses these genre codes and conventions:

In the same way that Twitter records numbers of “followers,” “tweets,” “following” and “listed,” Help Me Investigate records the number of “things” which the user is currently involved in investigating, plus the number of “challenges,” “updates” and “completed investigations” they have to their credit. In both Twitter and Help Me Investigate these labels have a mechanistic function: they act as hyperlinks to more information related to the user’s profile. They can also be considered culturally as symbolic references to the user’s social value to the network – they give a number and weight to the level of activity the user has achieved, and so can be used in informal ranking of the user’s worth, importance and usefulness within the network.

Hickman, 2010: 8

This was indeed the aim of the site design, and was related to a further aim of the site: to allow users to build “social capital” within and through the site: users could add links to web presences and Twitter accounts, as well as add biographies and “tag” themselves. They were also ranked in a “Most active” table; and each investigation had its own graph of user activity. This meant that users might use the site not simply for information-gathering reasons, but also for reputation-building ones, a characteristic of open source communities identified by Bruns (2005) and Leadbeater (2008) among others.

There were plans to take these ideas much further, which were shelved during the proof of concept phase as the team concentrated on core functionality. For example, it was clear that users needed to be able to give other users praise for positive contributions, and they used the “update” feature to do so. A more intuitive function allowing users to give a “thumbs up” to a contribution would have made this easier, and also provided a way to establish the reputation of individual users, and encourage further use. This function was not implemented, however.

Another feature of the site’s construction was a networked rather than centralized design. The bid document which secured funding proposed to aggregate users’ material:

via RSS and providing support to get users onto use web-based services. While the technology will facilitate community creation around investigations, the core strategy will be community-driven, “recruiting” and supporting alpha users who can drive the site and community forward.

Bid document to Channel 4’s 4iP fund, September 2008

Again, this aggregation functionality was dropped as part of focusing the initial version of the site. However, the basic principle of working within a network was retained, with many investigations including a challenge to blog about progress on other sites, or use external social networks to find possible contributors. The site included guidance on using tools elsewhere on the web, and many investigations linked to users’ blog posts.

## Building the Site

By 2008 two members had joined the Help Me Investigate team: web developer Stef Lewandowski and community media specialist Nick Booth, and the project won funding that year from Channel 4's 4iP fund and regional development agency Screen West Midlands.

Two part-time members of "staff" were recruited to work one day per week for the site throughout the 12-week funded "proof of concept" period: a support journalist and a community manager.

Site construction began by expanding on the four target user profiles in the bid document to outline 12 profiles of users who might be attracted to the site, identifying what they would want to do with the site and how the design might facilitate that – or prevent it (as in the case, for example, of users who might want to hijack or hoax the site).

This was followed by rapid site development, and testing for six weeks with a small private "beta" (i.e. an unfinished version limited to a small number of users). The plan was to use "agile" principles of web development – launching when site development was still ongoing to gain an understanding of how users actually interacted with the technology, and saving the majority of the development budget for "iterations" of the software in response to user demand.

The resulting site experience can be described as follows: a user coming across the site was presented with two choices: to join an existing investigation, or start their own. If they started an investigation they would be provided with suggestions for ways of breaking it down into smaller tasks and of building a community around the question being pursued. If they joined an existing investigation they would be presented with those tasks – called "challenges" – that needed completing to take the investigation forward. They could then choose to accept a particular challenge and share the results of their progress underneath.

The concepts of actor–network theory (Paterson and Domingo, 2008) were accounted for in development: this describes how the "inventors" of a technology are not the only actors that shape its use; the technology itself (including its limitations and its relationship with other technologies, and institutional and funding factors), and those who use it would also be vital in what happened from there.

Reserving the majority of the development budget to account for the influence of these "actors" on the development of the technology was a key part of the planning of the site. This proved to be a wise strategy, as user behavior differed in some respects from the team's expectations, and development was able to adapt accordingly.

For legal reasons, casual visitors to the site (and search engines) could only see investigation titles (which were pre-moderated) and, later, the Reports and KnowledgeBase sections of the site (which were written by site staff). Challenges and updates (the results of challenges) – which were only post-moderated – could only be seen by registered users of the site.

A person could only become a user of the site if they were invited by another user. There was also a "request an invite" section on the homepage. Non-UK requests were refused for legal reasons but most other requests were granted. At this stage the objective was not to build a huge user base but to develop a strong culture on the site that would

then influence its healthy future development. This was a model based on the development of the editorially constructive Seismic video blogging community.

On July 1 HelpMeInvestigate.com went live with no promotion. The day after launch one tweet was published on Twitter, linking to the site. By the end of the week the site was investigating what would come to be one of the biggest stories of the summer in Birmingham – the overspend of £2.2 million by the city council on a new web site. It would go on to complete further investigations into parking tickets and the use of surveillance powers, as well as much smaller-scale questions such as how a complaint was handled.

## Reflections on the Proof of Concept Phase

By the end of the 12-week proof of concept phase the site had also completed a number of investigations that were not “headline-makers” but fulfilled the objective of informing users: in particular “Why is a new bus company allowed on an existing route with same number, but higher prices?;” “What is the tracking process for petitions handed in to Birmingham City Council?;” and “The DVLA and misrepresented number plates.”

The site had also unearthed some promising information that could provide the basis for more stories, such as Birmingham City Council receiving over £160 000 in payments for vehicle removals; and “Which councils in the UK (that use Civil Enforcement) make the most from parking tickets?” (as a byproduct, this also unearthed how well different councils responded to Freedom of Information requests<sup>1</sup>)

Although numerous meetings were conducted with mainstream news organizations, these invariably failed to lead to anything formal. Journalist Tom Scotney, who was involved in one of the investigations, commented: “Get it right and you’re becoming part of an investigative team that’s bigger, more diverse and more skilled than any newsroom could ever be” (Scotney, 2009: np) – but it was becoming clear that most journalists were not culturally prepared – nor had the time – to engage with the site unless there was a story “ready-made” for them to use.

After 12 weeks the site had around 275 users (whose backgrounds ranged from journalism and web development to locally active citizens) and 71 investigations, exceeding project targets. It is difficult to measure “success” or “failure” but at least eight investigations had resulted in coherent stories, representing a success rate of at least 11%: the target figure before launch had been 1–5%. That figure rose to around 21% if other promising investigations were included, and the sample included new investigations that were yet to get off the ground.

“Success” was an interesting metric that deserves further elaboration. In his reflection on the *Guardian’s* crowdsourcing experiment, for example, developer Martin Belam (2011a: np) noted a tendency to evaluate success “not purely editorially, but with a technology mindset in terms of the ‘100% – Achievement unlocked!’ games mechanic.” In other words, success might be measured in terms of degrees of “completion” rather than results.

In contrast, the newspaper’s journalist Paul Lewis saw success in terms of something other than pure percentages: getting 27 000 people to look at expense claims was, he felt, a successful outcome, regardless of the percentage of claims that those represented. And BBC special reports editor Bella Hurrell – who oversaw a similar but less ambitious

crowdsourcing project on the same subject on the broadcaster's web site, felt that they had also succeeded in genuine "public service journalism" in the process (personal interview).

A third measure of success is noted by Belam – that of implementation and iteration (being able to improve the service based on how it is used):

It demonstrated that as a team our tech guys could, in the space of around a week, get an application deployed into the cloud but appear integrated into our site, using a technology stack that was not our regular infrastructure.

Secondly, it showed that as a business we could bring people together from editorial, design, technology and QA to deliver a rapid turnaround project in a multi-disciplinary way, based on a topical news story.

And thirdly, we learned from and improved upon it.

Belam, 2010: np

A percentage "success" rate of Help Me Investigate, then, represents a similar, "game-oriented" perspective on the site, and it is important to draw on other frameworks to measure its success.

For example, it was clear that the site did very well in producing raw material for "journalism," but it was less successful in generating more general civic information such as how to find out who owned a piece of land. Returning to the ideas of actor-network theory outlined above, the behavior of two principal actors – and one investigation – had a particular influence on this, and how the site more generally developed over time. Site user Neil Houston was an early adopter of the site and one of its heaviest contributors. His interest in interrogating data helped shape the path of many of the site's most active investigations, which in turn set the editorial "tone" of the site. This attracted users with similar interests to Neil, but may have discouraged others who did not – further research would be needed to establish this.

Likewise, while Birmingham City Council staff contributed to the site in its earliest days, when the council became the subject of an investigation their involvement was actively discouraged. This left the site short of particular expertise in answering civic questions.

At least one user commented that the site was very "FOI [Freedom Of Information request]-heavy" and risked excluding users interested in different types of investigations, or who saw Freedom of Information requests as too difficult for them. This could be traced directly to the appointment of Heather Brooke as the site's support journalist. Heather is a leading Freedom of Information activist and user of FOI requests: this was an enormous strength in supporting relevant investigations but it should also be recognized how that served to set the editorial tone of the site.

This narrowing of tone was addressed by bringing in a second support journalist with a consumer background: Colin Meek. There was also a strategic shift in community management, which involved actively involving users with other investigations. As more users came onto the site these broadened into consumer, property, and legal areas.

However, a further "actor" then came into play: the legal and insurance systems. Due to the end of proof of concept funding and the associated legal insurance the team had to close investigations unrelated to the public sector as they left the site most vulnerable legally.

A final example of actor-network theory in action was a difference between the intentions of the site designers and its users. The founders wanted Help Me Investigate

to be a place for consensus, not discussion, but it was quickly apparent users did not want to have to go elsewhere to have their discussions. Users needed to – and did – have conversations around the updates that they posted.

The initial challenge-and-result model (breaking investigations down into challenges with entry fields for the subsequent results, which were required to include a link to the source of their information) was therefore very quickly changed to challenge-and-update: people could now update without a link, simply to make a point about a previous result, or to explain their efforts in failing to obtain a result.

One of the challenges least likely to be accepted by users was to “Write the story up.” It seemed that those who knew the investigation had no need to write it up: the story existed in their heads. Instead it was either site staff or professional journalists who would normally write up the results. Similarly, when an investigation was complete, it required site staff to update the investigation description to include a link to any write-up. There was no evidence of a desire from users to “be a journalist.” Indeed, the overriding objective appeared rather to “be a citizen.”

In contrast, a challenge to write “the story so far” seemed more appealing in investigations that had gathered data but no resolution as yet. The site founders underestimated the need for narrative in designing a site that allowed users to join investigations while they were in progress.

As was to be expected with a “proof of concept” site (one testing whether an idea could work), there were a number of areas of frustration in the limitations of the site – and identification of areas of opportunity. When looking to crowdfund for an investigation, for example, there were no third-party tools available that would allow this without going through a non-profit organization. And when an investigation involved a large crowdsourcing operation the connection to activity conducted on other platforms needed to be stronger so users could more easily see what needed doing (e.g. a live feed of changes to a Google spreadsheet, or documents bookmarked using Delicious).

Finally investigations often evolved into new questions but had to stay with an old title or risk losing the team and resources that had been built up. The option to “export” an investigation team and resources into a fresh question/investigation was one possible future solution.

“Failure for free” was part of the design of the site in order to allow investigations to succeed on the efforts of its members rather than as a result of any top-down editorial agenda – although naturally journalist users would concentrate their efforts on the most newsworthy investigations. In practice it was hard to “let failure happen,” especially when almost all investigations had some public interest value.

Although the failure itself was not an issue (and indeed the failure rate lower than expected), a “safety net” was needed that would more proactively suggest ways investigators could make their investigation a success, including features such as investigation “mentors” who could pass on their experience, “expiry dates” on challenges with reminders, improved ability to find other investigators with relevant skills or experience, a “sandbox” investigation for new users to find their feet, and developing a metric to identify successful and failing investigations.

Communication was central to successful investigations and two areas required more attention: staff time in pursuing communication with users, and technical infrastructure



to automate and facilitate communication (such as alerts to new updates or the ability to mail all investigation members).

The much-feared legal issues threatened by the site did not particularly materialize. Out of over 70 investigations in the first 12 weeks, only four needed rephrasing to avoid being potentially libellous. Two involved minor tweaks; the other two were more significant, partly because of a related need for clarity in the question.

Individual updates within investigations, which were post-moderated, presented even less of a legal problem. Only two updates were referred for legal advice, and only one of those rephrased. One was flagged and removed because it was “flamey” and did not contribute to the investigation.

There was a lack of involvement by users across investigations. Users tended to stick to their own investigation and the idea of “helping another so they help you” did not take root. Further research is needed to see if there was a power law distribution at work here – often seen on the Internet – of a few people being involved in lots of investigations, most being involved in one, and a steep upward curve between.

### Case Study: *The London Weekly* Investigation

In early 2010 Andy Brightwell and I conducted some research into one particular successful investigation on the site. The objective was to identify what had made the investigation successful – and how (or if) those conditions might be replicated for other investigations both on the site and elsewhere online.

The investigation chosen for the case study was “What do you know about *The London Weekly*?” – an investigation into a free newspaper that was, the owners claimed (part of the investigation was to establish if the claim was a hoax), about to launch in London.

The people behind *The London Weekly* had made a number of claims about planned circulation, staffing, and investment that went unchallenged in specialist media. Journalists Martin Stabe, James Ball, and Judith Townend, however, wanted to dig deeper. So, after an exchange on Twitter, Judith logged onto Help Me Investigate and started an investigation.

A month later members of the investigation (most of whom were non-journalists) had unearthed a wealth of detail about the people behind *The London Weekly* and the facts behind their claims. Some of the information was reported in MediaWeek and the *Guardian* podcast Media Talk; some formed the basis for posts on James Ball’s blog, Journalism.co.uk, and the Online Journalism Blog. Some has, for legal reasons, remained unpublished.

### Methodology

Andy Brightwell conducted a number of semi-structured interviews with contributors to the investigation. The sample was randomly selected but representative of the mix of contributors, who were categorized as either “alpha” contributors (over six contributions),

“active” (two to six contributions) and “lurkers” (whose only contribution was to join the investigation). These interviews formed the qualitative basis for the research.

Complementing these data was quantitative information about users of the site as a whole. This was taken from two user surveys – one conducted when the site was three months old and another at 12 months – and analysis of analytics taken from the investigation (such as numbers and types of actions, frequency, etc.)

## What are the Characteristics of a Crowdsourced Investigation?

Tapscott and Williams (2006: 269) explore a range of new models of collaboration facilitated by online networks across a range of industries. These include:

- peer producers creating “products made of bits – from operating systems to encyclopedias;”
- “ideagoras ... a global marketplace of ideas, innovations and uniquely qualified minds;”
- prosumer – “professional consumer” – communities that can produce value if given the right tools by companies;
- collaborative science (“The New Alexandrians”);
- platforms for participation;
- “global plant floors” – physical production lines split across countries;
- Wiki workplaces that cut across organizational hierarchies.

Most of these innovations have not touched the news industry, and some – such as platforms for participation – are used in publishing, but rarely in news production itself (an exception here can be made for a few magazine communities, such as Reed Business Information’s *Farmers Weekly*).

Examples of explicitly crowdsourced journalism can be broadly classified into two types. The first – closest to the “global plant floors” described above – can be described as the “Mechanical Turk” model (after the Amazon-owned web service that allows you to offer piecemeal payment for repetitive work). This approach tends to involve large numbers of individuals performing small, similar tasks. Examples from journalism would include the *Guardian*’s experiment with inviting users to classify MPs’ expenses in order to find possible stories, or the pet food bloggers inviting users to add details of affected pets to their database.

The second type – closest to the “peer producers” model – can be described as the “wisdom of crowds” approach (after James Surowiecki’s 2005 book of the same name). This approach tends to involve smaller numbers of users performing discrete tasks that rely on a particular expertise. It follows the creed of open source software development, often referred to as Linus’ Law, which states that: “Given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow” (Raymond, 1999). The Florida News Press example given above fits into this category, relying as it did on users with specific knowledge (such as engineering or accounting) or access. Another example – based explicitly on examples in Surowiecki’s book – is that of an experiment by the *Guardian*’s Charles Arthur to predict the specifications of Apple’s rumoured tablet (Arthur, 2010). Over 10 000 users voted on 13 questions, correctly predicting its name, screen size, color, network, and other specifications – but getting other specifications, such as its price, wrong.

Help Me Investigate fits into the “wisdom of crowds” category: rather than requiring users to complete identical tasks, the technology splits investigations into different “challenges.” Users are invited to tag themselves so that it is easier to locate users with particular expertise (tagged “FOI” or “lawyer” for example) or in a particular location, and many investigations include a challenge to “invite an expert” from a particular area that is not represented in the group of users.

Some elements of Tapscott and Williams’s list can also be related to Help Me Investigate’s processes: for example, the site itself was a “platform for participation” that allowed users from different professions to collaborate without any organizational hierarchy. There was an “ideagora” for suggesting ways of investigating, and the resulting stories were examples of peer production.

One of the first things the research analyzed was whether the investigation data matched up to patterns observed elsewhere in crowdsourcing and online activity. An analysis of the number of actions by each user, for example, showed a clear “power law” distribution, where a minority of users accounted for the majority of activity.

This power law, however, did not translate into a breakdown approaching the 90–9–1 “law of participation inequality” observed by Jakob Nielsen (2006). Instead, the balance between those who made a couple of contributions (normally the 9% of the 90–9–1 split) and those who made none (the 90%) was roughly equal. This may have been because the design of the site meant it was not possible to “lurk” without being a member of the site already, or being invited and signing up. Adding in data on those looking at the investigation page who were not members may shed further light on this.

In Jon Hickman’s ethnography of a different investigation (into the project to deliver a new web site for Birmingham City Council) he found a similar pattern: of the 32 “investigators,” 13 did nothing more than join the investigation. Others provided “occasional or one-off contributions,” and a few were “prolific” (Hickman, 2010: 10). Rather than being an indication of absence, however, Hickman notes the literature on lurking that suggests it provides an opportunity for informal learning. He identifies support for this in his interviews with lurkers on the site:

One lurker was a key technical member of the BCC DIY collective: the narrative within Help Me Investigate suggested a low level of engagement with the process and yet this investigator was actually quite prominent in terms of their activism; the lurker was producing pragmatic outcomes and responses to the investigation, although he produced no research for the project. On a similar note, several of the BCC DIY activists were neither active nor lurking within Help Me Investigate. For example, one activist’s account of BCC DIY shows awareness of, and engagement with, the connection between the activist activity and the investigation, even though he is not an active member of the investigation within Help Me Investigate.

Hickman, 2010: 17

## **What Made the Crowdsourcing Successful?**

Clearly, a distinction should be made between what made the investigation successful as a series of outcomes, and what made crowdsourcing successful as a method for investigative reporting. This section concerns itself with the latter.

What made the community gather, and continue to return? One hypothesis was that the nature of the investigation provided a natural cue to interested parties – *The London Weekly* was published on Fridays and Saturdays and there was a build-up of expectation to see if a new issue would indeed appear.

The data, however, did not support this hypothesis. There was indeed a rhythm but it did not correlate to the date of publication. Wednesdays were the most popular day for people contributing to the investigation.

Upon further investigation a possible explanation was found: one of the investigation’s “alpha” contributors – James Ball – had set himself a task to blog about the investigation every week. His blog posts appeared on a Wednesday.

That this turned out to be a significant factor in driving activity suggests one important lesson: talking publicly and regularly about the investigation’s progress is key to its activity and success.

These data were backed up from the interviews. One respondent mentioned the “weekly cue” explicitly. And Jon Hickman’s research also identified that investigation activity related to “events and interventions. Leadership, especially by staffers, and tasking appeared to be the main drivers of activity within the investigation” (2010: 10).

He breaks down activity on the site into three “acts,” although their relationship to the success of the investigation is not explored further:

- “brainstorm” (an initial flurry of activity, much of which is focused on scoping the investigation and recruiting);
- “consolidation” (activity is driven by new information);
- “long tail” (intermittent caretaker activity, such as supportive comments or occasional updates).

## Networked Utility

Hickman describes the site as a “centralised sub-network that suits a specific activity” (2010: 12). Importantly, this sub-network forms part of a larger “network of networks,” which involves spaces such as users’ blogs, Twitter, Facebook, e-mail, and other platforms and channels.

And yet Help Me Investigate still provided a useful space for them to work within; investigators and staffers feel that the website facilitates investigation in a way that their other social media tools could not:

“It adds the structure and the knowledge base; the challenges, integration with ‘what do they know’” ability to pose questions allows groups to structure an investigation logically and facilitates collaboration” (interview with investigator).

Hickman, 2010: 12

In the *London Weekly* investigation the site also helped keep track of a number of discussions taking place around the web. Having been born from a discussion on Twitter, further conversations on Twitter resulted in further people signing up, along with comments threads and other online discussion. This fitted the way the site was designed culturally – to be part of a network rather than asking people to do everything on-site.

The presence of “alpha” users like James and Judith was crucial in driving activity on the site – a pattern observed in other successful investigations. They picked up the threads contributed by others and not only wove them together into a coherent narrative that allowed others to enter more easily, but also set the new challenges that provided ways for people to contribute. The fact that they brought with them a strong social network presence is probably also a factor – but one that needs further research.

The site had been designed to emphasize the role of the user in driving investigations. The agenda is not owned by a central publisher, but by the person posing the question – and therefore the responsibility is theirs as well. This cultural hurdle – toward acknowledging personal power and responsibility – may be the biggest one that the site has to address, and the offer of “failure for free” (Shirky, 2008), allowing users to learn what works and what doesn’t, may support that.

The fact that crowdsourcing worked well for the investigation is worth noting, as it could be broken down into separate parts and paths – most of which could be completed online: “Where does this claim come from?” “Can you find out about this person?” “What can you discover about this company?.” One person, for example, used Google Streetview to establish that the registered address of the company was a postbox. Other investigations that are less easily broken down may be less suitable for crowdsourcing – or require more effort to ensure success.

## **Momentum and Direction**

A regular supply of updates provided the investigation with momentum. The accumulation of discoveries provided valuable feedback to users, who then returned for more. In his book on Wikipedia, Andrew Lih (2009: 82) notes a similar pattern – “stigmergy” – that is observed in the natural world: “The situation in which the product of previous work, rather than direct communication [induces and directs] additional labour.” An investigation without these “small pieces, loosely joined” (Weinberger, 2002) might not suit crowdsourcing so well.

Hickman’s interviews with participants in the Birmingham council web site investigation found a feeling of the investigation being communally owned and led:

Certain members were good at driving the investigation forward, helping decide on what to do next, but it did not feel like anyone was in charge as such.

I’d say HMI had a pivotal [sic] role in keeping us together and focused but it felt owned by everyone.

Hickman, 2010: 10

One problem, however, was that the number of diverging paths led to a range of potential avenues of enquiry. In the end, although the core questions were answered (was the publication a hoax and what were the bases for their claims?), the investigation raised many more questions. These remained largely unanswered once the majority of users felt that their questions had been answered. As in a traditional investigation, there came a point at which those involved had to make a judgment as to whether they wished to invest any more time in it.

Finally, the investigation benefited from a diverse group of contributors who contributed specialist knowledge or access. Some physically visited stations where the newspaper was claiming distribution to see how many copies were being handed out. Others used advanced search techniques to track down details on the people involved and the claims being made, or to make contact with people who had had previous experiences with those behind the newspaper. The visibility of the investigation online also led to more than one “whistleblower” approach providing inside information, which was not published on the site but resulted in new challenges being set.

## Conclusion

Looking at the reasons that users of the site *as a whole* gave for not contributing to an investigation, the majority attributed this to “not having enough time.” Although at least one interviewee, in contrast, highlighted the simplicity and ease of contributing, it needs to be as easy and simple as possible for users to contribute (or appear to be) in order to lower the perception of effort and time needed.

Notably, the second biggest reason for not contributing was a “lack of personal connection with an investigation,” demonstrating the importance of the individual and social dimension of crowdsourcing. Likewise, a “personal interest in the issue” was the single largest factor in someone contributing. A “Why should I contribute?” feature on crowdsourcing projects may be worth considering.

Others mentioned the social dimension of crowdsourcing – the “sense of being involved in something together” – what Jenkins (2006: 244) would refer to as “consumption as a networked practice,” a motivation also identified by Yochai Benkler in his work on networks (2006). Looking at non-financial motivations behind people contributing their time to online projects, he refers to “socio-psychological reward.” He also identifies the importance of “hedonic personal gratification.” In other words, fun.

Although positive feedback formed part of the design of the site, no consideration was paid to negative feedback: users being made aware of when they were not succeeding. This element also appears to be absent from game mechanics in other crowdsourcing experiments such as the *Guardian*'s MPs' expenses app.

While it is easy to talk about “Failure for free,” more could be done to identify and support failing investigations. A monthly update feature that would remind users of recent activity and – more importantly – the lack of activity might help here. The investigators in a group might be asked whether they wish to terminate the investigation in those cases, emphasizing their responsibility for its progress and helping “clean up” the investigations listed on the first page of the site.

However, there is also a danger in interfering too much in reducing failure. This is a natural instinct, and the establishment of a reasonable “success rate” at the outset – based on the literature around crowdsourcing – helps to counter this. That was part of the design of Help Me Investigate: it was the 1–5% of questions that gained traction that

would be the focus of the site. One analogy is a news conference where members throw out ideas – only a few are chosen for investment of time and energy, the rest “fail.”

It is the management of that tension between interfering to ensure everything succeeds (and so removing the incentive for users to be self-motivated) and not interfering at all (leaving users feeling unsupported and unmotivated) that is likely to be the key to a successful crowdsourcing project. More than a year into the project, this tension was still being negotiated.

In summing up the research into Help Me Investigate it is possible to identify five qualities that successful investigations shared: “alpha users” (highly active, who drove investigations forward); modularity (the ability to break down a large investigation into smaller discrete elements); public-ness (the ability for others to find out about an investigation); feedback (game mechanics and the pleasure of using the site); and diversity of users.

Relating these findings to other research into crowdsourcing more generally it is possible to make broader generalizations regarding how future projects might be best organized. Leadbeater (2008: 68), for example, identifies five key principles of successful collaborative projects, summed up as “core” (directly comparable to the need for alpha users identified in this research), “contribute” (large numbers, comparable to public-ness); “connect” (diversity), “collaborate” (self-governance – relating indirectly to modularity), and “create” (creative pleasure – relating indirectly to feedback). Similar qualities are also identified by US investigative reporter and Knight fellow Wendy Norris in her experiments with crowdsourcing (Lavrusik, 2010).

The most notable connections here are the indirect ones. While the technology of Help Me Investigate allowed for modularity, for example, the community structure was rather flat. Leadbeater’s research (2008) and that of Lih (2009) into the development of Wikipedia and Tsui (2010) into Global Voices indicate that “modularity” may be part of a wider need for “structure.” Conversely “feedback” provides a specific, practical way for crowdsourcing projects to address users’ need for creative pleasure.

As Help Me Investigate reached its eighteenth month a number of changes were made to test these ideas: the code was released as open source, effectively crowdsourcing the technology itself, and a strategy was adopted to recruit niche community managers who could build expertise in particular fields, along with an advisory board that was similarly diverse. The Help Me Investigate design was replicated in a plugin that would allow anyone running a self-hosted Wordpress blog to manage their own version of the site.

This separation of technology from community was a key learning outcome of the project, and it suggests that future journalism crowdsourcing projects should focus on the brakes and accelerators on connecting communities and expertise as the basis of any technical development.

## Note

- 1 The UK’s Freedom of Information Act entitles citizens to request information from public bodies as long as the information is not exempt on grounds of cost, privacy, or other conditions outlined by the Act.

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# Media Accountability Practices in Online News Media<sup>1</sup>

David Domingo and Heikki Heikkilä

## Introduction

In recent years, the news media have been suffering what seems like one crisis but is several intense and inter-related crises: in technology, audiences, economics, and workforce (Barnhurst, 2011: 575). In a way, how media organizations respond to this situation boils down to media accountability: How are newsrooms and professional journalists to reclaim their legitimacy before audiences and convince them that the news institutions will be most adept to meet with the expectations of relevance, credibility, and quality of public communication set by society?

Given that mass media in general, and professional news organizations in particular, have lost their privileged position as hubs of public communication, this pledge is now probably more seriously questioned than ever in the history of high modernism in journalism (Hallin, 1992). Thus, news organizations are compelled to find ways to convince their users and critics in terms of three normative principles central to media accountability. First, journalists need to be transparent about who they are, and who they work for (*actor transparency*). Second, news organizations are obliged to explain how they gather and select the news, and how they deal with their sources (*production transparency*). Third, journalists and their editorial offices need to be open to feedback and facilitate criticism and discussion resulting from news production (*responsiveness*).

At least since the report of the Hutchins Commission in the USA in the 1940s, a number of institutional arrangements and practices have been set up for fostering media accountability. Codes of ethics have been framed for informing the work of individual journalists, and self-regulatory bodies – such as press councils (usually in the form of an independent board of experts at national level) and ombudsmen (advocates for the audience within the newsrooms) – have been established to deal with complaints about the

editorial content of newspapers and broadcasters. In addition, regular channels for feedback from readers have been maintained, for instance, in the form of the letters to the editor section in newspapers and online comments on news web sites.

Many of these institutional arrangements have been subjected to increasing criticism regarding their effectiveness (Von Krogh, 2008). Surveys disclose that citizens and journalists share a decreasing trust in professionals' compliance to ethical rules. Press councils and ombudsmen are criticized for lack of adequate prerogatives for uplifting sanctions for questionable practices. Also, the impact of traditional forms of feedback is regarded as waning, as letters to the editor have been relegated to the inside pages of newspapers and they tend to lack a necessary counterpart: a letter *from* the editor (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004: 29; Lauk and Denton, 2011: 223).

How problems of self-regulation in journalism relate to online journalism is under debate. Some warn that the legitimacy problems of journalism may be exacerbated by the "tyranny of the buzz," that is, the obsession with immediacy and capturing attention embedded in online news production (Domingo, 2008). Therefore, it is argued that media accountability is needed now more than ever to address the ethical challenges posed by the Internet (Singer, 2010; Heinonen, 2010).

On the other hand, some argue that new means for leveling out the gap between journalism and its audiences are now available through user-generated content and citizen journalism (Gillmor, 2004). Interactive tools may yield practices that are more direct and effective than those of traditional accountability institutions. This viewpoint relies partly on the professional ambition within the traditional media (newspapers, broadcasters) and net-native news initiatives (independent online news web sites, not created by traditional media) to reinvent their practices in the online environment. At the same time, it points to broader changes in the convergence culture whereby users – both in the role of audiences and producers – would increase the pressure on the standards of how news is produced (Green and Jenkins, 2011; Bruns, 2008).

## Between Systems and Instruments: Online Practices

In recent years, awareness of the complexity of media accountability mechanisms within specific media systems and the diversity of solutions in different countries has fostered comparative research (Baldi, 2007; Koene, 2009; Eberwein *et al.*, 2011). Yet, the role of the Internet in media accountability, both as a challenge for media legitimacy and as a space for developing accountability practices has remained more or less unexplored. As a part of the EU-funded project "Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe" (MediaAcT),<sup>2</sup> a group of researchers<sup>3</sup> from seven countries initiated an explorative study mapping out the development of media accountability on the Internet in western and eastern Europe, the USA, and a selection of Arab countries.

The first step of the explorative study conducted in Autumn 2010 was to identify and single out a set of practices that appear distinctive to the online environment. The first rough mapping encompassed 19 countries: 14 of them in Europe and 5 outside Europe, and aimed at distinguishing the diversity of online media accountability practices. In the next level of analysis, the findings were evaluated against a total of 80 interviews

conducted with journalists, representatives of self-regulation institutions, bloggers, civic activists, and experts in media ethics between October and December 2010. The 13 countries included in the analysis were: Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, the UK, Jordan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Syria, Tunisia, and the USA.

There are three plausible vocabularies available for discussing aspects of media accountability. At one end, media accountability is often understood in terms of *systems* and mechanisms (see Bertrand, 2003). In our view, this line of thought runs a risk of emphasizing a too holistic approach whereby not only journalism but also legislation, education, and civic cultures need to go through a reform before the media can truly be held accountable. While this idea seems simply to ask too much, it also suggests that it is insufficient, if not misleading, to analyze the development of media accountability in online journalism without paying due attention to the “system” as a whole.

At the other end, media accountability is said to depend on appropriate *instruments* enabling real exchange of views between producers and recipients of news (Eberwein *et al.*, 2011: 15). This use of wording may lead us to think that what the improvement of media accountability calls for is a “technological fix,” and to assume that the introduction of instruments such as blogs, Twitter, and the like would solve problems of accountability in their own right. In addition, the notion of instruments echoes a certain amount of universalism implying that when put into use, these instruments would bring about similar consequences wherever applied.

Instead of systems, mechanisms, and instruments, online media accountability is understood here in terms of *practices* (Pritchard, 2000). By practices we mean generally accessible and sustained modes of social and public agency designated by institutions or groups of publicly active people. With regard to media accountability, the main actors initiating such practices are media organizations (the online newsrooms of traditional media and net-native news projects) on the one hand and online content providers from civil society (bloggers, grassroots movements, etc.) on the other.

Analyzing media accountability as practices may directly benefit from De Haan and Bardoel’s (2009) ethnographic case study on the appropriation of accountability practices at the Dutch public broadcaster Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS). This study demonstrates that the process of harnessing news technologies and working methods in the newsroom is far from straightforward. Analytically speaking, the authors argue that any given instrument – such as a newsroom blog – is first *implemented* when the management decides to develop it. After this, an assignment to run the blog on a regular basis needs to be *incorporated* into daily routines of some of the journalists working in the newsroom. Then, the idea of functionality of applying the instruments needs to be understood and gradually shared among journalists and finally *internalized* as a necessary and useful part of their professional remit. We would add yet another step to the process: In order to become an enduring convention, a practice needs to be separated from persons initiating and thus become *consolidated* into the principles and routines of the newsroom.

Following Bourdieu’s field theory, it is assumed that the conditions for media accountability are shaped in a process whereby media managers, journalists, and Internet users negotiate their relationship with external forces (state and market) and internal forces (other practitioners and users). The positions of actors within the field, and their capacity

to pursue their interests, depend on the forms of capital – economic, cultural, political, social – they are able to invest in the negotiation process (Bourdieu, 2005; Benson, 2006).

The results of analyses describing the development of online media accountability in 13 countries and the distinct dynamics in respective journalistic fields have been published on the MediaAcT project web site.<sup>4</sup> This chapter draws from those reports by describing the typology created and used in the explorative study, and summarizing some of their findings. At the end of the chapter, our focus will be on the role of journalistic fields in either fostering or undermining the emergence of media accountability practices. This approach is illustrated by observations about two seemingly different cases: the USA and Finland.

## A Typology for Online Media Accountability Practices

Bertrand (2003) argues that the fundamental means for media accountability are evaluation, feedback, and discussion. Thus, holding the media accountable presumes communication between news producers and users or recipients of media. As with any act of communication, media accountability needs to be understood as a *process*. Theoretically, this implies that the accountability process starts when members of the public actually call the media to account. In order to keep it going, these pleas need to be responded to or elaborated by other stakeholders. Ideally, these processes should be circular, but in real circumstances, many opportunities for calling the news media into account are not taken by users, and when they are, many of their initiatives do not result in a response from news producers.

Instead of assuming ideal typical circular accountability processes, it seems more viable to pay attention to how media organizations facilitate incentives for media accountability processes with regard to different phases of news production. In this vein, varying practices may be distinguished taking place: (i) *before* the act of publication (addressing norms and expectations of public communication); (ii) *during* the production (managing access, selection, and presentation of news); and (iii) *after* the production (responding to questions and criticism).

Based on the distinction of different phases of news production, a typology of media accountability practices was induced in the course of the exploratory study. Firstly, we propose to label practices situated *before* the act of publication as *actor transparency*. These include a set of practices wherein contextual information about the persons and organizations involved in the news production is shared with users. Some background information may be given, for instance, about the individual journalists responsible for a piece of news (what sort of expertise they hold regarding the issue they are covering).

At the level of organization, information may shed light on the owner structures of the given media organization, and its political or other affiliations. Making available to the public codes of ethics and in-house rules set by the newsroom also fosters actor transparency. A preliminary inventory scheme for identifying such practices is presented in Table 15.1.

Secondly, practices *during* the act of publication denote *production transparency*, whereby news organizations provide users with additional information for the items they

**Table 15.1** Practices for actor transparency.

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Profiles of journalists
Published mission statements
Published code of ethics
News policy document, in-house code of ethics
Public information on company ownership

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**Table 15.2** Practices for production transparency.

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Links to original sources
Newsroom blogs
Collaborative news production
Citizen journalism, initiated by the news media

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**Table 15.3** Practices for responsiveness.

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Online news comments
Correction buttons
Responding to users through social media

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publish. This information may be relayed, for instance, by enabling users to access initial sources of information, or by giving accounts explaining professional judgment informing the process of publication. Production transparency may also be pursued by soliciting outside contributions to be used in the news; texts, images, and videos created by users to be published side by side with contents produced by staff members. The preliminary inventory scheme for practices pursuing *production transparency* is presented in Table 15.2.

Thirdly, practices *after* the act of publication aim at *responsiveness* by acquiring feedback from recipients of news and reacting to their concerns. Responsiveness as a form of being accountable refers to, for instance, notifications of errors in the news, encouraging tip-offs for potential topics to be covered and comments to news from users. Responsiveness also refers to how news organizations engage in dialogue with those calling them to explain, or apologize for their judgments. The practices associated with responsiveness are listed in Table 15.3.

In what follows, we describe how these practices have been adopted by online news services of established media organizations in 13 countries represented in the second phase of the explorative study (see the list mentioned in the previous section). Given that practices and the degree of how they have been established at the level of news production vary from one country to another, we distinguish three categories. A given practice appears to be “widespread” in a given news culture, if it is applied by several online news services on a regular basis. Online media accountable practices are regarded as “partly applied” if some online news organizations have that practice, while others do not implement it at all, or very rarely. In the third category, a given media accountability

practice is regarded as “not available” if it is not applied or it is applied very rarely and irregularly by media organizations. More specific information about separate national news cultures can be found in the national reports.

## The Inventory of Online Practices for Media Accountability

Given that news organizations’ main capital is their credibility, plentiful information about them and their journalists seems a reasonable expectation from the normative perspective of media accountability. Even if nowadays there are not insurmountable technical obstacles for sharing information fostering actor transparency with news audiences, our inventory suggests that only a few practices are widespread among online news organizations (see Table 15.4).

Most online news items include a byline and photograph crediting the individual journalist as its main author. Nonetheless, more detailed profiles of journalists specifying their professional background or their expertise on the topic covered in the news are only sporadically published in connection to online news. While such information may be disregarded from offline news due to limited space, this restraint does not hold to the Internet. Our investigation suggests that profiles of journalists tend to be most frequent among the most prestigious media outlets, highlighting some of their star reporters. Due to this selectivity, it may be assumed that actor transparency is most likely to be associated with marketing value for the given media outlet. In Arab countries (Jordan, Syria, and Tunisia) profiles of journalists are practically non-existent.

Another relatively widespread practice aimed at actor transparency sheds light on ownership structures of online news services. The publication of this information is required by corporate law in many countries, or in the case of some Arab countries by autocratic state policies. On many online web sites, for instance, in the USA and Finland, financial statements are designated to special sections addressed to investors and thus these documents are not easily accessible to ordinary news consumers. Some of our interviewees in the USA doubt whether links to the corporate owner’s web site are really helpful in making sense of who owns that particular media company (Domingo, 2011). In Bulgaria and France, information about ownership structures is rarely available online.

**Table 15.4** Adoption of practices fostering “actor transparency.”

	<i>Widespread</i>	<i>Partly applied</i>	<i>Rarely, or not at all available</i>	<i>n</i>
Profiles of journalists	0	10	3	13
Published mission statements	3	4	6	13
Published codes of ethics	1	6	6	13
News policy document, in-house codes of ethics	1	1	11	13
Public information on company ownership	5	6	2	13

Mission statements articulating the political affiliations of media organizations are clearly forms of actor transparency. However, the role of mission statements tends to vary from one news culture to another. In countries where mission statements still exist – or their existence is admitted – mission statements tend to provide generic information only. For instance, in the USA and Finland, mission statements claim that a given media organization defends freedom of speech and democracy without specifying what they mean by these concepts. It is probably due to their alleged obsolescence that mission statements are rarely published on online news web sites, even if they are available in newspaper editions.

Mission statements as guidelines for editorial offices have been, in effect, to a great extent replaced by specific in-house news policy documents. These tend to include specific ethical guidelines for journalists that either mimic nationally approved codes of ethics or specify their meanings. Even if such documents verifiably exist in news organizations, they are very rarely published on online news web sites. This practice is most systematically adopted in France, but in most countries these documents are considered off limits for regular Internet users.

Even the collectively approved codes of ethics for journalists are rarely published on online web sites, the UK being the exception. A representative of the press council interviewed in Finland, told us about their proposal concerning the possibility of placing a section on news web sites disclosing aspects of ethical conduct. This drop-down box would contain the code of ethics approved by the Journalists' Union, more specific in-house rules, and a record of previous decisions of the Press Council given regarding the media organization. Despite its practical merits and technical feasibility, the proposal has not been implemented by any Finnish online media organization as yet (Heikkilä, 2011).

*Production transparency* refers here to three sets of accountability practices whereby the features of the Internet are directly applied in the process of composing and publishing news stories. For instance, publishing original sources for news items through hyperlinks enables Internet users to evaluate the veracity of the news independently. While this practice resonates with the Internet's unique incentives for intertextuality and should not be too technically challenging to implement, this opportunity is not systematically used in our sample of countries (see Table 15.5). Nonetheless, even if this practice is not systematically adopted or widespread, links to original sources do appear at least occasionally in all national news cultures, except those of the Arab countries and Bulgaria.

Our interviewees – particularly those who are journalists – explain that links to original sources pose a problem of veracity. Should news organizations provide those links, they would have to take responsibility for not just the truthfulness of the news item, but also

**Table 15.5** Adoption of practices fostering “production transparency.”

	<i>Widespread</i>	<i>Partly applied</i>	<i>Rarely, or not at all available</i>	<i>n</i>
Links to original sources	0	7	6	13
Newsroom blogs	0	5	8	13
Collaborative news production	0	9	4	13



the document used as a source. Some interviewees doubted this explanation and pointed out that online journalism is governed by “portal thinking” whereby all efforts are made to keep visitors on their web site. In this economically motivated mindset, links directing users outside of one’s own platform pose the risk of losing a potential customer (Evers and Eberwein, 2011).

Blogs constitute a popular form of online publishing for media professionals and ordinary Internet users (Domingo and Heinonen, 2008). Our study reveals that journalist blogs or media blogs are not as widespread as could be assumed. Blogs produced by media professionals tend to emerge most frequently where the blogosphere in general appears to be flourishing (the UK and the USA). Nonetheless, very few of them deliberately focus on production issues: the Editor’s blog and the Sports Editor’s blog run by the BBC being notable exceptions to the rule (Evers, Jempson, and Powell, 2011). Also, in the Netherlands newsroom blogs hosted by in-house ombudsmen or a reader’s editor constitute an ongoing practice in some online news web sites. Yet, given that the number of ombudsmen and reader’s editors is in decline, the prominence of this practice may be decreasing (Groenhart, 2011).

Collaborative news production – or user-generated content (UGC) – denotes practices designed for combining the efforts of staff members and potential contributors among end-users (Wahl-Jorgensen *et al.*, 2010). As such, this set of practices does not merely aim at improving the means for holding news media accountable. Many commentators and practitioners describe collaborative news production as part of a larger set of trends revolutionizing journalism by disrupting traditional relationships between journalists and audiences (e.g. Deuze, Bruns, and Neuberger, 2007).

Given the rate of radicalism and professional ambition invested in this notion, it is not surprising that practices aimed at launching collaborative news production are not widespread but rather “partly applied” at best. Experiments with collaborative news production tend to be shaped by specific development projects or put into limited use only. These projects may be regarded as potentially elemental to media accountability, as they tend to assume transparency and responsiveness from news organizations before, during, and after the act of publication.

Probably the best-known example of collaborative news production so far is the *Guardian*’s attempt to pool resources with Internet users to investigate the expenses of UK MPs. This project, initiated in Spring 2008 and completed more than a year later, was instrumental in the *Guardian* winning the Knight Batten award for innovation in journalism. Also in France and the USA, a number of projects aimed at capitalizing crowdsourcing have been established, for instance, the Public Insight Network initiated by Minnesota Public Radio.

The third set of accountability practices relates to *responsiveness* of news media. This objective may be pursued simply by enabling users to have their say and exchange their views about news publicly. Comments on news provide a platform for this objective on online news web sites. Indeed, the practice of facilitating online comments on news has been developed practically everywhere, including Arab countries (see Table 15.6). Interestingly, journalists from Arab countries, Europe, and the USA share a tendency of *not* responding publicly to comments on their news stories. This reluctance often results from perceiving online discussions as being too crude or uncivil.

**Table 15.6** Adoption of practices fostering “responsiveness.”

	<i>Widespread</i>	<i>Partly applied</i>	<i>Rarely, or not at all available</i>	<i>n</i>
Online news comments	13	0	0	13
Social networking sites used for responding to users	0	0	13	13
Correction buttons	0	2	11	13

Social networking sites, most notably Facebook and Twitter provide news organizations with another means of interacting with their audiences. While Facebook was ineffectively censored in Tunisia until 2009 and is still officially banned in Syria, this platform attracts hundreds of thousands of users in those countries. Elsewhere, about 25–40% of the population is estimated to be registered on Facebook. Thus, it is not surprising that online news organizations even in Tunisia (but not Syria) are actively present on Facebook. Twitter, on the other hand, continues to be a much more exclusive platform at the moment. Twitter is used actively by media organizations in the USA and western Europe, except in Finland. In eastern Europe and Arab countries Twitter is still in its infancy.

What is remarkable, though, is that social media are mainly used by online newsrooms for promotional purposes. Facebook status reports and tweets aim at announcing breaking news stories and enhancing sharing them among social networks of users. As individual users of social networking sites, journalists may, of course, incorporate Facebook and Twitter into their routines of sourcing. In this way, journalists are responsive to discussions in social networking sites, but only some professionals use these sites for responding to users’ concerns about journalism.

When online news organizations are notified of factual errors in the news, these would be taken into account by online news desks. Nonetheless, practices rendering corrections for errors transparent to users – correction buttons attached to online news items – are not usually applied. Thus, only a few newsrooms explicitly invite their readers to report errors, and some acknowledge publicly that a story has been corrected. In the USA, an initiative called “Report an Error Alliance” was launched in 2010 by independent media critics to persuade online news organizations to incorporate correction buttons into their online news items.<sup>5</sup> Only half a dozen of them have done that so far. Outside the USA, correction buttons are applied by most of the online newspapers in Spain, demonstrating how market competition fosters mimicry of innovations.

## Toward Comparative Research of Online Journalism

A strong dose of universalism is often attached to our assumptions about how uses of the Internet and the World Wide Web are diffused across the world. However, our explorative study on how media accountability practices have been introduced to online journalism in western and eastern Europe, the USA and a selection of Arab countries, suggests that

very few practices afforded by technology have become widespread even within national media systems, let alone being applied everywhere simultaneously.

On the other hand, it was noticed that the core objectives of media accountability – actor transparency, production transparency, and responsiveness – are not totally ignored or sidelined in the development of online journalism. Given that many of the practices singled out in our typology are experimented with and partly applied by online news organizations it may be assumed that some of these practices are incorporated and consolidated in how online news organizations work. Thus, this development should call for our attention beyond this explorative study.

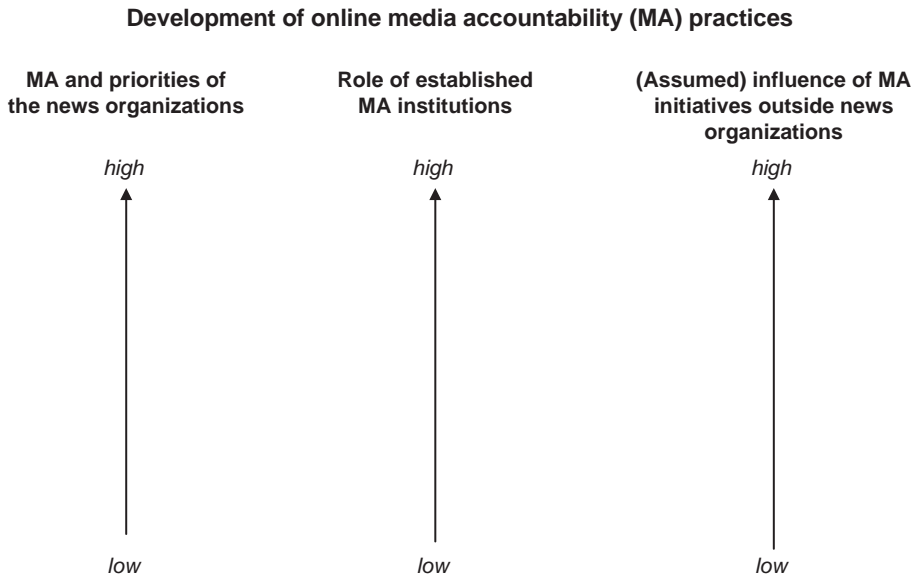
While the development of media accountability practices is an important object of study in its own right, it also provides a good opportunity for comparative research on the dynamic changes within journalism in general and within online journalism in particular. With regard to both objectives, a solid understanding of the distinct cultural contexts whereby questions of media accountability and strategic choices of development strategies within journalism are taken is absolutely called for.

A well-known and useful starting point for any comparative study on journalism cultures may be drawn from Hallin and Mancini's (2004) typology of media systems. In their book, Hallin and Mancini demonstrate that, historically, four general variables have tended to be crucial determinants of media systems: the size and reach of the news market, parallelism between political parties and newspapers, the degree of professionalism among journalists, and the role of state intervention in media policies. Based on their analysis of 18 countries in Europe and North America, Hallin and Mancini named three types of media systems: the liberal model (represented by the USA, the UK, Canada, and Ireland); the polarized pluralist model (including France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece); and the democratic–corporatist model (including Germany, the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries).

Even if their focus is not particularly on media accountability, in each model media accountability has been enacted in a slightly different manner. This suggests that the actual practices through which media accountability are pursued and the cultures wherein its objectives are understood are to a great extent culturally sensitive.

At the end of their book, Hallin and Mancini (2004: 300) note that since the 1970s, a number of tendencies – mainly related to commercialization and the growth of critical professionalism – have blurred distinctions between the analyzed models. This points to two opposite but simultaneous trends within the media systems. On the one hand, national media systems are *diverging internally*, due to differentiation of media outlets and profiles of journalists. Historically, this trend has resulted, for instance, in the separation and polarization of quality newspapers and popular press in the UK and Germany.

Other patterns of divergence may lack such institutional features but may prove to salient all the same. One of such developments may refer to the increasing division of labor among journalists resulting in specialization, which adds to complexity within journalistic production. Divergence may also be triggered by generational differences among journalists. The notion of a generation gap is often associated with how journalists relate to digital technologies. While this gap may be valid to some extent, the actual dynamics of divergence must be more complicated than that.



**Figure 15.1** Framework for analyzing development of online media accountability in the journalistic field.

On the other hand, Hallin and Mancini argue that there is a tendency toward *convergence* of media systems as many national news cultures and media systems – both in southern and northern Europe – are gravitating toward liberal model as a result of increasing commercialization in the media. This is indeed a controversial argument, which has become further complicated by the developments in central–eastern Europe after the collapse of media systems under communism (see Dobek-Ostrowska, Jakubowicz, and Sükösd, 2008). Quite recently, the convergence hypothesis has been challenged by the popular uprisings in the Arab world. Do we have any idea of what direction these media systems are developing in?

Due to parallel and contradicting forces of divergence and convergence, changes within journalism are difficult to analyze in terms of fixed systems and through country clustering. Thus, in the *MediaAcT* project, these contextual features have been analyzed with the concept of the journalistic field. As noted above, this field constitutes of media managers, journalists, Internet users, press councils, policy makers, and so on, as they negotiate their relationship to external forces (state and market) and internal forces (other practitioners and users). Given that these actors assume different positions in the field, their objectives and capacities to pursue their interests may vary. Consequently, their ideas about the urgency of media accountability may be either high or low, which in turn, has an effect on their strategic action (see Figure 15.1).

In the light of interviews conducted in the explorative study, media organizations in general tend to put much less priority on media accountability practices than experts on media ethics, or active media bloggers. This division of opinion is obvious in the case of Arab countries where the established media organizations are closely associated with

the repressive governments, and experts outside political power situate themselves as critics of the state; at least as far as the accessibility and transparency of information are concerned.

In eastern Europe, differences of opinion exist with regard to whether the lack of online media accountability comes down to news organizations' limited resources or their lack of interest in launching them. Basically, the outside experts claim that media organizations should develop their accountability and they would be able to do so, whilst media practitioners agree in that they *should*, but maintain that given their limited resources they could not do so (Głowacki, 2011; Kuś, 2011). Also the journalistic fields in the UK, Germany, and the USA appear to be divided even if in these countries online media accountability practices prove to be more developed and more broadly diffused than elsewhere.

### **Tensions in the Journalistic Fields: The Cases of the USA and Finland**

The relationships within a journalistic field are manifested in ways whereby dominant ideas about journalism and its environment are made sense of in a given news culture. In order to illustrate these dynamics, we try to analyze why the current situation in journalism and online media accountability appears quite different in the USA and Finland. Two factors appear to be significant in this respect: (i) the way professionalism is generally understood in journalism, and how it connects to current features of the media market, and (ii) the ways Internet user cultures are connected to journalism. That is, whether or not Internet users are seen to impose pressure on journalism.

In the USA, ideas of *professionalism* predominantly emphasize the competence and integrity of individual journalists. Thus, the responsibility of ethical conduct is by and large ascribed to journalists and their editorial offices. Newsrooms in general tend to resist the idea of having external or co-regulative bodies to oversee their activities. Therefore, there is no national press council in the USA, and even at the state level only a few press councils have been set up. The emphasis on individualism gives journalists and media organizations room for considering options, how and to what extent journalists wish to be transparent and responsive to their readers and users. Media organizations may, for instance, choose to hire in-house ombudsmen and facilitate their online presence, if they regard this as compatible with their professional ethics and commercial objectives. Should investing work force in transparency and responsiveness not pay off, news organizations may cancel such investments. The latter option tends to gain ground in the current circumstances, and decisions to lay off ombudsmen have been justified by the Internet. American interviewees argued that ombudsmen are becoming obsolete, as every journalist can be personally responsive to his/her readers.

In Finland, on the other hand, professionalism is traditionally collectively organized. Thus, it is assumed that journalists' ethical conduct is to be compatible with a set of principles approved by the profession. In this framework, it is understood that new challenges faced by journalism – for instance in the form of faltering media legitimacy – call for collective solutions: updating ethical guidelines and agreeing principles informing

new practices within newsrooms. In the current situation, such negotiations are taking place, and the fact that Finnish media organizations have been rather cautious in creating new accountability practices online is explained by the fact that they are expecting professional debates to lead the way.

The *media market* in the USA, albeit shrinking in size and profitability, is still vastly bigger than in any other country represented in our study. The relative size of the market explains why media organizations with different positions in the market have been able to adopt different strategies with regard to media accountability practices. *The Washington Post*, as one of the most prominent media institutions, tends to be reluctant to share its internal newsroom policies with their users, assuming that this act of transparency would trigger unwarranted litigation against the paper. At the same time, some news organizations with a less prominent profile, such as National Public Radio and some net-native news projects, regard transparency and responsiveness as promising strategies for acquiring their niche in the media market. While different ideas about media accountability may indirectly yield slightly different types of journalism, their consequences for the practice of journalism will be exposed only through a longer period of time.

Compared with the USA, the media market in Finland is not only smaller but it is also much more strongly dominated by traditional media organizations, operating both offline and online. Thus, the number of actors sharing the market is relatively small, and the prominence of net native news projects has remained very low. This suggests that online journalism is likely to be developed within traditional media organizations as a secondary publishing channel. However, the interviews suggest that a division of interest may be emerging between the proponents of traditional public service news and online journalists. The latter group tends to call for a more prominent role in defining guidelines and practices of news journalism. At the moment, their main interest is in acquiring more independence from their offline editorial offices both professionally and economically. This competition seems to call for shorthand results, and thus media accountability may not be compatible with the objectives of online journalists.

In addition to the endogenous features of journalism cultures, the development of online media accountability practices depends on the characteristics of *Internet user cultures*. In this regard, the situation in the USA and Finland seems similar at first glance. The estimated number of Internet users in the USA has reached 250 million (Internet World Stats, 2010). According to a recent survey, 78% of American citizens use the Internet regularly, with 43% getting their news online on a daily basis (Pew Internet, 2010). American users also tend to be keen followers of blogs: 32% say they read them regularly.

In terms of penetration and ratio of regular use of the Internet, Finland does not appear to be that different. More than half of Finns (56%) use the net regularly, and 69% of regular users get part of their news diet online (Statistics Finland, 2010). Reading blogs constitutes another widespread practice: in 2009, 41% of users said they read blogs, which is 20% more than three years previously.

The ratio of active producers on the Internet in respective countries is obviously much lower than the number of users as audiences. According to surveys, 15% of Americans and 5% of Finns have maintained their own blog. Given the different size of user population this information makes a difference. A rough estimate suggests that there are

potentially 42 million bloggers in the USA but no more than 250 000 in Finland. It can be deduced from this that millions of active producers in the USA constitute a fertile ground for setting up bottom-up social practices, whereas in Finland the limited size of critical mass of producers obviously limits options for this.

The figures for users alone do not say much about how Internet user cultures are connected to journalism. Other empirical evidence suggests, however, that in the USA the blogosphere is exerting influence on politics and journalism. A great deal of this influence tends to be informed by the polarization of American politics (Hargittai, Gallo, and Kane, 2008). Thus, calls for holding the news media to account tend to accuse the news media of either “liberal bias” or “conservative bias,” based on the political views of those who publish their arguments. This may be one reason why media organizations that regard themselves as neutral or detached from politics tend to protect themselves rather than be exposed to this sort of criticism.

Even though a minority of blogs in the USA focus specifically on journalism or media, the so called “watchblogs” have been an influential phenomenon since 2003–2004. Bloggers have forced journalists to cover stories they overlooked, to admit errors in reporting publicly, and in some cases the pressure from bloggers has resulted in resignations of journalists. Some of the active watchblogs have developed into specialized task forces that focus, for instance, on monitoring errors in news reporting, for example, *MediaBugs*<sup>6</sup> and *Regret the Error*.<sup>7</sup>

In Finland, watchblogs are practically non-existent, and the majority of blogs are clearly directed outside politics and news; mainly at fashion and culinary arts (Heikkilä and Kylmä, 2011: 58). This would suggest that users active in the blogosphere are either politically inactive or that they tend to trust the news media to the extent that articulated criticisms of the media have not amounted to sustaining practices. The lack of pressure from Internet user cultures is not necessarily negative for developing media accountability practices, as this situation gives news organizations more autonomy in experimenting with them. On the other hand, it was noted above that online journalists are struggling for autonomy within their media organizations, and this struggle for resources and prestige comes down to economic profitability, not innovations in media accountability practices.

While there is no clear correlation between Internet user cultures and the legitimacy of the news media, we can point out a clear discrepancy with regard to surveys measuring the public trust in the media. In the USA, a Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) survey conducted in 2008 suggested that one-third of Americans trust television news and newspapers (33 and 34%, respectively). In Finland, two-thirds of the respondents said they trust television news (public service), and 62% trust regional newspapers (EVA, 2009). The survey results, of course, cannot be taken as evidence either for the quality of news in respective countries, or for the ethical standards of journalism. What they do seem to signal, however, is a direct or indirect bottom-up pressure toward journalism. This pressure seems obviously stronger in the USA than in Finland.

What remains unclear at this moment is how media organizations are to react to Internet user cultures in their respective countries. Vos, Craft, and Ashley (2010) argued that in the USA, bloggers do not intend to invade the journalistic field but rather demand that journalists keep up their role. This would suggest that bloggers would impose the

core values of media accountability on journalists. That is, asking them to be more transparent and responsive to users. In Finland, such calls have been less articulated, and certainly less connected to practices of blogging. On the other hand, Finnish news media have recently witnessed consumer boycotts that were organized and made effective through mobilization of users of social networking sites, most notably Facebook. These modes of protest may be a new form of online media accountability practice, characterized by their *ad hoc* nature: the pressure groups die out as soon as the problem is resolved or attention fades away.

## Conclusion

Media accountability tends to be of general interest for three reasons. From an ethical and philosophical perspective, it is important to discuss why public institutions such as journalism should be accountable in the first place. In a more pragmatist sense, it is relevant to ask, what are the appropriate means of implementing accountability? What makes it effective? These two questions are the core of normative theories of the press and ethics of journalism. In this chapter, media accountability is treated as an appropriate object for studying changes in journalism, and particularly in online news. Our discussion points to two particular questions related to media accountability: How does media accountability configure in the current developments in online journalism? What sort of practices have been introduced to news web sites and how do these practices differ in varying journalism cultures from the USA to Europe and Arab countries?

These questions relate to change, if we assume that journalism is a contextual creature. Thus, changes in presentation formats, narration, or sourcing routines are not merely news stylistic versions of “good old journalism.” They also pertain to changes in ways of thinking about the social functions of journalism and how these ideas are implemented in the daily practices of journalism (Heikkilä and Kunelius, 2008: 377–378; Nerone and Barnhurst, 2003).

The results of the preliminary explorative study suggest that online media organizations in general have not placed development of media accountability practices as their top priority. In the same way, online news organizations have not taken advantage of their technological high ground compared with offline media to facilitate actor transparency, production transparency, and responsiveness of journalism. In addition, it appears that instruments and practices for media accountability do not easily travel from one journalistic culture to another. There seem to be striking discrepancies with regard to how technically accessible and practically feasible instruments for media accountability (such as profiles of journalists, or links to original sources of information) have been put into use in online news organizations.

Some of the discrepancies are hardly surprising. Given that journalism as an institution and social practice is immensely resource-consuming, it would be misleading to assume that online news organizations in Lebanon or Serbia could afford to do the same as the established media corporations operating in much more affluent media markets, for instance in Germany or the UK. Thus, some of the differences among news cultures



may be analyzed further with reference to what we have learnt from different media systems (see Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

At the same time, it appears that the economic, cultural, and political environments where journalism is practiced and developed can no longer be contained into national or otherwise orderly arrangements, that is, *systems*. It seems more viable to analyze journalism as *fields* wherein practitioners and users negotiate their relationship to external (state and market) and internal forces (other practitioners and users). These relationships call for further analysis nationally as well as cross-nationally.

## Notes

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- 4 See <http://www.mediaact.eu/online.html>.
- 5 <http://www.reportanerror.org>.
- 6 <http://www.mediabugs.org>.
- 7 <http://www.poynter.org/regrettheerror>.

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# Technology and Journalism: Conflict and Convergence at the Production Level

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## Introduction

At a time when new technologies are developing rapidly, the use of the term journalism has undergone various changes. The Internet allows information to “travel” in huge packs and the only restriction lies in the speed of electrons or electromagnetic waves (Osborn, 2001: 1). The Internet has transformed the journalistic profession but technology alone is not enough to further address the significance of these changes. The role of journalism in democracy, political participation, and social integration must be redefined within the framework of a society whose main feature tends to be individualization.

Technology is the first step toward change. Traditional methods can now be combined to create new distribution channels. Despite the fact that similarities can be found between the alternative and dominant media, the extent of the phenomenon has taken on huge dimensions and cannot be ignored on this basis. The production conditions of journalism are changing in order to facilitate the recording of events and their subsequent distribution. Furthermore, access to initial information is now feasible for most citizens, who have become not only recipients but also providers of information. At the same time, new news sources have emerged, which have come to compete with dominant media.

Various issues arise through this combination of technology and journalism. One of these is trust, which, on the one hand, may be the bottom line, but, on the other hand, is extremely difficult to achieve within the new world order. Furthermore, agenda setting and the role of the gatekeeper cannot be excluded from the discussion. Moreover, issues relating to corporate dominance and the method of determining economic factors also raise questions.

Within this framework, we will try to make an extensive analysis of the role of technology in the present day, the changes journalism has undergone during its transition

to the Internet, and the active participation of citizens, as well as looking at the basic characteristics of traditional media that have been maintained during their transition to alternative media. The analysis consists of two parts. The first part relates to online journalism and its main aspects: first, to the traditional role of the gatekeeper, which is challenged, since users have more power in their hands; and second, to the agenda-setting process, which has been affected as people now have access to the initial material and professional journalists share control of news production with users. Next, corporate dominance is examined as it is of great importance as far as democratic participation is concerned. The last sub-section of the first part discusses citizen journalism, its extent, the groups involved, and its use by dominant media.

The second part looks at the example of Television Without Frontiers (TVXS) from the Greek market. TVXS is a news medium in which the aforementioned factors co-exist. Its suitability lies also in its hybrid nature, which, with the help of technology, combines the journalistic schemes of traditional media with the potential of users' contributions.

The analysis of empirical data and further discussion are carried out on the basis of a collaboration between the developers, who explain the technology's limitations and capabilities, and the owner and founder of the portal, who explains its journalistic and corporate function. This conjunction aims at identifying and highlighting the mutual relationship between technology and journalism in daily life, as well as recreating the conditions of production of a participatory news portal.

## **Online Journalism**

According to Hernandez (2010), there must be a differentiation between the terms "journalism online" and "online journalism." In the first case, he refers to traditional media products (newspaper articles, radio and television programs) being available on the web. In the second case, he refers to the exploitation of the latest technology and of the opportunities offered only by the Internet for the improvement and distribution of narration and journalism.

The categorization of online journalism into four forms, as described by Deuze (2003), is one further step to better understanding the route it has followed. The most widespread forms are the dominant media sites. Their content is divided into two categories. The first category includes what has been created exclusively for the web, while the second includes material that pre-existed in a traditional medium and was posted on the Internet. Users' participation in this form is limited and filtered. The second category consists of the index and category sites. In this case, journalists provide links, which refer to other news sites. Usually, they do not comprise original content, but, sometimes, they include discussion forums or areas of news and links exchange. Subsequently, another form comprises the meta- and comment sites, which are sites concerning news media and whose content includes general issues about the media. The contents consist, mainly, of comments relating to the content of other sites on the web. In addition, in most of them, the posting of users' stories is allowed, on the basis of which they can be considered participatory. The last form of online journalism is none other than share and

discussion sites. In this case, one can exploit the possibility offered by the Internet to allow contact between distant people, in real time, in order to exchange ideas and stories.

## The Role of the Gatekeeper

Within this environment, the situation for journalists and the roles they are asked to play can change. A role of major importance in the communication process is that of the “gatekeeper.” The mass communicator, in the conceptual model of Westley and Maclean, plays the channel role (McQuail and Windahl, 2001: 68) and selects, on the basis of the public’s needs, those events to be published. The gatekeeper acts similarly in White’s model, which was the starting point for a more thorough study on the way the selection or rejection of relevant issues takes place. It should be noted at this point that White was the one who started the research on the role of gatekeepers in journalism, when he studied the rejection process of news by the editor of a provincial American newspaper and the consequent importance of his decisions.

The first impression is that the role of the gatekeeper ceases to exist on the Internet. Users are able to find the information they want and, furthermore, they have no need for someone else to choose what is important and what is not. Nevertheless, no one can argue that this is entirely valid (Singer, 2006).

In traditional media, as mentioned previously, the gatekeepers are the ones who decide which issues should be known to the public and which should not. According to Galtung and Ruge (McQuail and Windahl, 2001: 225) there are additional factors related to the news, which are considered at the same time by the gatekeepers, and these determine to some extent whether an issue will pass the gates and will be published or not. What is particularly interesting is that, as Cecay supports, some of these gatekeeper roles are also maintained in online journalism (Harper, 2008: 5). More specifically:

- The *principle of intensity*, according to which an event that is very important is more likely to be published.
- An *unexpected* event is able to attract interest.
- The *socio-cultural values* both of society and the gatekeeper.
- If an event has concerned media once, it is most likely that it will concern them again, a process called *continuity*.
- The *cultural affinity or importance* of an event, which indicates that, if it falls under the public’s interests, then its chances of emerging in the media agenda are increased.

Another perspective is that of Bruns (2004), who states clearly that the process of gatekeeping has been supplemented or in some cases replaced by the gatewatching process. This means in practice that the balance shifts from the disclosure of important information to the disclosure of any content available on the web and the subsequent evaluation of this material (Bruns, 2004: 2). The Internet “hits” the idea of a gateway and the journalist who can or should have limited the information passing through it. At the same time, the volume of information provided, in conjunction with the variety,

in terms of quality, makes stronger the need for the existence of a person who will make the choice and will lend credibility (Singer, 2005: 3). People need help in order to identify those sources that have some legitimacy. Consequently, the role of the gatekeeper remains vital despite technological changes.

## **Agenda Setting**

Apart from those aspects of the role of the gatekeeper that seem to apply also to the Internet, it seems that there are other similarities to traditional media. Agenda setting or topic setting explains why in a democratic society the public is provided with information on certain issues instead of others (Dearing and Rogers, 2005: 20). The three main components of the agenda-setting process are media topics, public topics, and political topics, which are interdependent. The public depends on the media to learn about some events without having direct contact with the same initial incident. When, however, the debate concerns the Internet, things change. People can now have access to the initial material and can seek information from different sources to the extent that they are interested in a topic. Nevertheless, as Pew surveys show (Pew Research Center Publications, 2008), even when people seek news online they turn to a large extent to dominant media. Furthermore, a Messner and Distaso (2008) survey confirms the influence of traditional media on the blogosphere. Blogs seem to rely to a large extent on traditional media for collecting necessary information. On the other hand, it should be noted that, according to the same survey, the influence of blogs on journalism is gradually increasing. These, in turn, are also able to create buzz and to attract the media's attention in this way.

An interesting aspect of the way topic setting is affected by the Internet results from the surveys of Althaus and Tewksbury (2002) and Schönbach, de Waal, and Lauf (2005). Herewith, we will list in brief some newspaper characteristics, since these surveys were carried out in printed and online versions of this medium.

The structure of traditional newspapers is linear and articles are placed on the basis of their importance. This structure leads readers to browse through the newspaper in order to identify that news that is of interest to them. The result is that they often read a story even if they are not interested in it. This is more likely to happen when this news story is in the headlines. On the contrary, the position of news in online newspapers is formed in such a way that the user can refer directly to the publication he/she is interested in. News is divided into groups (politics, international, environment, etc.) and the linear structure gives its position to the structure/order in levels (layers). Moreover, a large volume of information must now fit on the screen and this leaves no room for long titles or lengthy text.

Althaus and Tewksbury's survey has examined whether these differences between printed and online newspapers can lead to a different prioritization of important public issues by the public. The relevant results confirmed this hypothesis. The readers of printed newspapers were able to recall more current affairs topics in more detail than readers of online versions. In a context where users can choose what to read, through a variety of thematic categories, there is the risk of creating personalized information

environments that will isolate the individual from the flow of public topics in society (Althaus and Tewksbury, 2002: 197). However, as people still largely rely on offline media in order to be informed, this risk remains limited.

According to Schönbach, de Waal, and Lauf, it is possible that traditional newspapers will be gradually replaced by the online versions. Their main advantages are that most of them do not charge for content, they are updated throughout the day, and they are easily accessible and visited (Schönbach, de Waal, and Lauf, 2005). Their research hypothesis is that the online versions of newspapers do not inform citizens on such a wide range of public issues as the printed ones and the relevant results confirmed this. The use of an online newspaper can enrich a person's knowledge about current important events, without, however, really broadening the acquired topics. However, the data depict an interesting exception. People of high education level are informed about public issues through systematic reading of online newspapers. The conclusion is that printed newspapers serve an important function in the setting of public topics: they broaden the horizons of people with limited interests. In contrast, online newspapers serve an elite, they form public's topics in different ways and affect different groups.

## Corporate Dominance

Online journalism and communication on the Internet have been treated as elements for strengthening/reinforcing democracy and citizens' democratic participation. At the core of a democratic society it is now deemed necessary to have a field within which different views on everyday issues will be presented and the relevant debate will take place. In this framework, Dahlberg (2005) highlights as necessary the independence from the governmental power which is absent from parts of the mass media. Another factor that should be necessarily taken into account in this process is the economic one and especially funding. The combination of these two factors led in the past to the marginalization of views less powerful but still very important.

The advent of the Internet has triggered a more optimistic perspective. New technology, the change of the role of gatekeepers, citizens' participation, pluralism, and the possibility of having access to a wealth of information at national, international, and global level are some of the features on the basis of which optimism about democratic culture has been developed/cultivated. However, the biggest threat lies in the *corporate colonization* of cyberspace (Dahlberg, 2005: 162). The increasing ownership of content, software, and bandwidth permits the possibility of corporate control of online communication. At the same time, there is the risk, despite the free expression of views, of this type of communication being sidelined/marginalized by the competition for attracting users' attention.

Initially, upon observing the situation, it seems that the variety of sources available on the Internet leads to pluralism. However, when one examines the issue in depth, another dimension arises that shows this is not valid. Many of the news published emerges, as mentioned above, from dominant sources, which include well-known media corporations. This practice not only limits users' access to different views but also leads content to the point where it was before the Internet.



In order to restrict this practice, companies like Google implemented an algorithm searching more than 4500 sources on the web. This service seems to provide the requested diversity; however, a large number of these sources depend on dominant western commercial media (Dahlberg, 2005: 166). This, of course, does not mean that if one makes a search one cannot find a wealth of alternative sources.

Another reason for the dominance of dominant media is simply that they are preferred by many users. An obvious answer for this phenomenon lies in pre-existing familiarity and trust, and sites are designed and planned in such a way that they exude professionalism and objectivity. Building confidence is a process taking place gradually, over time, not instantaneously.

Moreover, corporate dominance often leads to the treatment of people as individual consumers rather than as intelligent citizens (Dahlberg, 2005: 170). The reader is often part of the target audience, a practice which largely remained unchanged during the transition from traditional to online media. Advertising, as one of the basic funding sources, is dominant on many sites and apart from the fact that, in many cases, it occupies a significant space, it often appears in pop-up form, covering the text until the user closes the window. Despite the importance given to advertising revenues, these have failed to return the expected profit. Consequently, many online news media proceed to charging for their services. In this context, another question arising is whether the products resulting from users' participation can be a source of profit for the sites. Despite the fact that in some cases editors have tried to take advantage of this, the commercialization process is rather problematic.

## **Citizen Journalism**

Since the beginning of the use of the photocopier, McLuhan (Bruns, 2004: 1) had already noticed that everyone could become a publisher. Indeed, if not everyone, at least some had made use of this possibility. Today, with the web, this possibility has been multiplied.

According to Tilley and Cokley (2008), in order to better understand the dispute between journalists, academics, and citizens regarding the term "citizen journalism," it is important to make a separate analysis of the groups involved. The first group is the "professional" journalists, whose role is changing, given that their primary work has shifted from searching for a story to narrating a story. Another group are the publishers, mainly those companies responsible for the distribution of information worldwide. Moreover, there are citizen-journalists who have the technical means of digital production and distribution and therefore undermine existing media monopolies. It is assumed that some of them, apart from their desire to contribute to the information process, are people who want to pass from alternative to dominant media and to become journalists (Tilley and Cokley, 2008: 106). We cannot leave academics out of the debate, who have a new field to explore in citizen journalism. Finally, there are the advocates of freedom of expression, who enter the public debate as independent voices, in order to support freedom of speech.

The number of citizens who provide material from events with which editors or journalists do not have direct contact is increasing daily and, in many cases, these

sources override the information that can be provided by a journalist (Tilley and Cokley, 2008). Through the creation of blogs, the power of the public to publish and receive information has increased even more. Today it is estimated that there are millions of blogs and their number continues to grow daily. Blogs take various forms. Some are personal diaries, others are discussion forums, while more still operate as sources of links to other sites of interest. In some cases, they combine all of these three aforementioned functions (Ward, 2006). In addition, blogs are the best-known port of call used by writers in order to begin an online discussion with their readers, who have the ability to send in their comments (Thurman, 2008: 145). The phenomenon's dimensions and the importance that both citizens and professionals have attached not only to citizen journalists but also to their product has gradually led to the widely accepted term "citizen journalism."

Can everyone, though, be called a journalist? What are the characteristics that define who is a journalist and who is not? Someone who becomes a witness at an event and records it with his mobile does not automatically become a journalist, but, on the other hand, his/her contribution should be taken into account. Moreover, a number of issues arise such as the user's identity, often anonymous, his potential immaturity and the protection of intellectual property rights, which have a negative impact on the practice of journalism as far as its reliability is concerned. However, the increase of traffic that user-generated content can provoke in conjunction with the possibility of new information sources, which will form the basis for new stories, is one of the key motives for mainstream media to try to ensure citizens' participation.

Major news organizations like the BBC have staffed special sections to manage the material sent by users. In the framework of the increased need to maintain credibility, the first step is the verification of authenticity, accuracy, and legitimacy of the incoming material. As such, what is sought after, in this context, is to avoid misinformation. A lot of time and work is needed in order to study the material in question and ultimately to take the decision of what should be published and what should not. Furthermore, there is a belief that, in some cases, the material coming from users must be subject to elaboration and adapted to the profession's standards.

Citizens' involvement in the journalism procedure is inevitable. What should be done is to find the best possible method of integration. According to a survey conducted in 2005 at 10 sites of dominant media in the UK, regarding user-generated content, seven basic format of users' participation were depicted: "polls," "have your says," "chat rooms," "Q&As," "blogs with comments enabled," "pre-moderated message boards," and "post-moderated message boards" (Thurman, 2008: 140). Moreover, according to a survey by Paulussen and Ugile (2008), journalists recognize the complementary importance of user-generated content but it seems that they admit that in everyday life they make limited use of the alternatives offered by technology.

Of course, it should be noted that it is not possible for a site to publish all received messages and this can sometimes work at its expense. Furthermore, in some cases the issue of reward for participation arises, which may be a motive for users. It is worth mentioning the OhmyNews.com case in South Korea, which attracted a large following, despite the fact that the remuneration offered for anyone writing (whether it be 10 or 100 pages) is very small (about 85 cents) (Thurman, 2008: 148).

## **Television Without Frontiers (TVXS)**

Online journalistic production is influenced by the technological traits of its field. There are a number of tools available to both journalists and the public, which can be used in the process of journalistic production. Due to technological convergence, readers in an online media environment become viewers and listeners (Picone, 2007: 110). We will now attempt to outline and analyze these characteristics.

The first characteristic is hypertextuality, which makes the connection of one story to other relevant stories, archives, or sources possible, through the use of hyperlinks. The second one is interactivity, which allows the participation of the audience. Interactivity is not exclusively affiliated to the Internet, since there have also been other media of a more or less interactive nature. Multimediality is a factor that we cannot overlook, since it is what allows journalists to choose which format best suits the content at hand. The introduction of technology in a news organization is not so much a matter of applying technological advancements as it is an incentive for the understanding of its potential impact on the formation of journalistic culture (Carr, 2002, as quoted in Deuze, 2003: 213). Finally, another characteristic is the customization of content, which follows the individual interests of the users (Bardoel and Deuze, 2001).

An online medium, in order to find its place in the market, needs to follow well-designed principles and a thought-through financial plan. TVXS was officially launched in November 2008. Its promotion in the then immature Greek online journalism landscape constituted a risky endeavor. Its main goal was the construction of an independent medium for news distribution, which would welcome the public's contribution to news production. Additionally, good use of the interactive nature of the medium was one of the main targets in order to bring forth citizen journalism.

Thirteen to 15 people work on the project – their number varies since approximately 5% of the staff are volunteers. Apart from the volunteers, the group is staffed by professional journalists and technicians. It should be noted that, given its nature, a web site operates 24/7. However, as is also the case with traditional electronic media, for a number of hours every day its operation is limited to simple monitoring or the coverage of breaking news.

According to Pavlik (in Osborn, 2001: 6) the content of online news has so far passed through three stages. The first stage has to do with content deriving from a traditional medium; the second one is about the creation of original content that is enriched with hyperlinks, while during the third stage the content is designed from scratch, intended for the web, which is considered a new medium serving an online community. According to this categorization, TVXS seems to be at the third stage given that it allows interaction between the public and journalists on the basis of hypertextuality, technological convergence, and content customization. These three fundamental characteristics lead to a combination of the professional skills of journalists with the ability of the public to contribute to online journalism.

As far as the financial goals set by TVXS are concerned, these have always been and still are focused on the viability of the site. They have remained the same, although, due to the general financial crisis, some downsizing was inevitable. TVXS is a private media

enterprise and the fact that it was initially backed by equity capital contributes to the independence of the organization. Nevertheless, operational expenses cannot be covered by its profits. An essential source of income, as it is for every other traditional medium, is advertising, which at times reaches or even surpasses 80% of the revenue. Apart from advertising, some extra money comes from selling goods – mainly DVDs of special productions – as well as from small donations and subscriptions from a category of TVXS users, the so-called “members without frontiers,” who are even able to publish their own articles.

The financial data presented above indicate an imbalance in the accounting parameters and the medium is not in the position to cover its operational costs. What this means technically is that given today’s financial crisis, we cannot consider TVXS as a “financially viable” business, but in a medium-term perspective, these data may change thus ensuring its viability. Regardless of its current state, TVXS has not considered so far the possibility of charging for access to its content. This of course does not preclude re-examination in the future, in case new conditions allow the large-scale production of exclusive original content. In addition, the technological parameters should be taken under consideration, since in the existing infrastructure there have been no provisions for charges to access the web site’s content. Important parameters such as the safety of transactions are not compatible with the ease and directness one would wish for low-cost transactions, such as the ones involved in providing online content. Financial restrictions such as these determine a medium’s longevity and their impact on the choices made concerning technological infrastructure lead, in a broad sense, to its success or failure.

### Backend technology

The thesis for the instrumental role of technology in the production process of media is widespread and in general consistent with common perceptions on the use of machines in modern industrial societies. In transition periods, however, such as the time needed for the integration of digital technology in media and especially the use of the web as a key distribution channel, the instrumental role weakens and technology has a much more decisive influence on the production process, leading to conflict phenomena with traditional methods (Küng, Picard, and Towse, 2008). At the operational management level, addressing these conflicts leads either to a positive solution, converging good practices, or no resolution is achieved, which in turn has adverse effects on productivity and, hence, competitiveness, and ultimately the viability of the medium. At the core of these processes lies the backend technology of content production, which, in the case of media produced and distributed exclusively online, assumes a decisive role.

The period of TVXS launching and the first period of its operation coincides with just such a time of transition for Greek journalism, when both production and content distribution begin to be carried out exclusively online. The participation of authors with the development and support team of the content management system of the medium under discussion, allows inside observation and the formulation of views on the role of technology in the journalistic content, which, although they are limited in this case study and cannot be generalized, are hopefully useful starting points for the relevant scientific debate.

It is clear that extensive content on the web, with a satisfactory update rate, which in the case of journalistic content can be multiple updates within a few hours, can only be produced with the use of dynamic technologies, such as primarily server-side scripting languages, and with the support of relational database management systems. The combined use of these technologies has given impetus to the widespread development of content management systems, which are now the key tool for managing web sites with journalistic content, and, in general, every web site with a large amount of information requiring classification and management. Given that during the development of TVXS plenty of good-quality multipurpose content management systems already existed, either commercial or open source and free, the first dilemma to be resolved was the choice between an already existing content management system and the development of a customized system, rigorously tailor-made for the purposes of this medium. The initial choice of the latter option has proven beneficial for the development of the medium in a very clear way: it coped with the difficulties faced by journalists (content producers) in the best possible way. The difficulties in question concern the transition from traditional ways of operating to direct online development and management of content, which means much more work for editors and other members of the editorial team who, through content management systems, assume the role of gatekeepers. In all these cases, the transition from a model of “produce once – consume many” to a process of continual editing and updating, caused unexpected conflicts, which were mediated to a decisive extent by the backend technology.

The main advantage of the tailored system was that the interface of the administration area was designed to ensure as much common ground as possible between the way content producers worked up to then and the way they had to deal with the new exclusively online medium. Those who had satisfactory technological experience, who at the time under discussion made up the vast majority of employees, were familiar with windows environments and WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) interfaces. This fact is a common component for most of the so-called power-users and is one finding taken into account by the developers of content management systems. On the other hand, the efficient use of any software of the content management system type requires a cost in time and training services to allow satisfactory familiarity with the particular environment. The relationship between the features of a content management system and complexity of the options offered (and therefore of the interface itself) is directly proportional. Therefore, the primary method for addressing the conflicts that content producers face at the technological level is to make the management environment as simple as possible, which has visible effects on the speed of journalism practiced online. Creating a custom management environment for TVXS that was adequately simplified in terms of usability was the successful solution to such conflicts during the first period of its operation. This in turn allowed the gradual upgrade to a larger and more complex content management system when the key editors had acquired the necessary familiarity with this kind of working environment. The combination of a high degree of usability of the administrative interface and the in-house support from the team of developers enabled smooth operation of the medium by journalists during the transitional period without technological barriers, and supported the instrumental role of the technological infrastructure over any conflicts arising from either inconvenient environments or the

limited experience of the journalists, who are understandably committed to producing content rather than dealing with the technicalities of management environments.

Apart from the dominant issue of the administrative interface, technology also has an impact on content distribution. This impact is not detected in functionality or in the software but rather in the structure of content and was mainly due to the native hypertextuality of the web and the new distribution channels that Web 2.0 introduced. TVXS, like other media at the time, made extensive use of syndication technologies, with emphasis on RSS feeds and other advanced techniques for sharing in social media and content aggregators.

The effect of this factor on the journalistic content comes from the out-of-context presentation of publications, as happens when the new building block of content, call it post or story, is distributed via syndication in environments with very different contexts from the original, both in terms of text and in terms of aesthetics. In any non-hypertextual medium, the journalist has a standard approach to the content environment into which his or her story will be incorporated. When online journalism is exercised in a hypertextual manner and sharing culture, the production of journalistic work is differentiated and acquires an independent character so as to be adaptable to multiple, yet unknown to the journalist, environments with different contexts.

The impact of the technological factor on the content, to the point that it exceeds its instrumental role, was distinct in the present case study; it offers an explanation of the conflicts caused in a purely online environment, and focuses on production, as far as production in the administrative interface is concerned, and on distribution, as far as the hypertextuality of the medium is concerned. The experience under discussion shows that gradual progress from simpler to more complex interfaces and the familiarity gained by journalists in producing journalistic work with hypertext features allow the resolution of conflicts and the more efficient use of technological tools at the production level.

## Production

As far as content production is concerned, investigative journalism maintains a strong primacy at TVXS, given its staff's prior experience in traditional media as well as the firm position of its founder on the subject. Nevertheless, in certain cases, the high cost of investigative journalism can be a discouraging factor. The content offered online is up to 60% original. A further 30% comes from secondary sources; these are cases of syndication or composition of material from various sources. The last 10% is the product of volunteer work. There are approximately 70 to 90 posts daily, many of which are updated during the day. Every post consists of text accompanied by photographs, while approximately 5% of the posts also contain video.

To illustrate the originality of the work done by the TVXS staff, let us offer a few examples of news stories that were first and exclusively presented on TVXS and were afterward reproduced by other media: on January 3, 2009 the "old lady of Asklipiou street," original video footage from the beating of an old lady by men of the police force (<http://tvxs.gr/node/2801>); on June 18, 2010 the video of the civilians with their faces covered under hoodies at the Exarcheia Police Department (<http://tvxs.gr/node/1919>), which generated an official discussion at Parliament; the arrest of Dimitris

Papachristou, on September 26, 2009 – the broadcaster during the 1973 uprising at the National Technical University of Athens against Junta (<http://tvxs.gr/node/21645>); as well as the violent confrontations at the National Opera House that took place on February 26, 2009 between members of the orchestra and gay activists (<http://tvxs.gr/node/6604>).

Many factors contribute to the agenda setting at TVXS. Agenda setting is of great importance since it is considered to play a role in the way public opinion is formed in respect to certain crucial matters (Demertzis, 2002: 103). The medium's profile, defined by the TVXS producers' past, basically dictates the agenda. The agenda also conforms to the policy announced when the medium was originally launched and is still molded by everyday practice. Furthermore, it is also based upon factors such as content availability and relevant copyright restrictions. The aspiration and effort of TVXS creators to provide space for young people to publish their work is yet another factor in the agenda-setting process. As far as the site's popularity is concerned, let us first note that ratings play an extremely important role in the media world and especially in agenda setting. However, their credibility – in terms of scientific precision – has often been questioned and allegations of unfair competition have been made on the basis of inaccurate data being presented to the public (Downing, 2003: 634). New and rapidly developing mechanisms that measure and analyze web traffic can be useful in remedying some of the “illnesses” endemic in traditional media measurements, even though in certain cases technology may still fail us. In the case of TVXS, it should be noted that the site is identified with the person who founded it, Stelios Kouloglou, a journalist with a long and successful career in the traditional media, which has earned him the respect of the public. His well-established credibility has served as an asset for TVXS; this comes as no surprise, as, according to research conducted by Pew (Pew Research Center Publications, 2008), the public seeking information online usually resort to the sites of known media brands. It is easier for the public to trust a medium with a long history and with which they are familiar, than a “newcomer” whose work they know nothing of. Let us now take a look at some data concerning the portal's popularity.

### Users' participation and journalists

TVXS publicizes traffic metrics recorded by the Google Analytics service, which tends to become the industry standard for online traffic measurements and its credibility is assured by Google's prestige. As far as the measuring technology employed is concerned, using cookies and javascript data almost always gives lower numbers, especially in comparison with recording raw logs. This is mainly due to the fact that Google Analytics focuses on the content requests made by human visitors of the web site, whereas server-side logs record every request for content either from humans or web bots (e.g. search engine crawlers, content aggregators, etc.).

According to Google Analytics, TVXS has a high traffic rate, with a low variance in 18 months of operation, and its viewers usually spend a considerable amount of time on it. More specifically, the average number of daily hits easily surpasses 20 000 (maximum: 67 000), while the average number of daily page views reaches about 80 000 (maximum: 308 000). The figures mentioned above refer to the whole period of time that the site

has been in operation, reflecting a steady course, without the expected seasonal ups and downs in media consumption (e.g. during the summer months). In periods of greater public thirst for journalistic content, TVXS recorded a much higher number of visits. For example, the average numbers for the last four months of 2009, which was an election period, were about 30 000 hits and 120 000 page views daily. It is worth mentioning that almost one-third of the visits can be traced back to links on referring sites; this can be attributed not only to TVXS's content but also to technological factors, given that the site has adopted a content-sharing policy based on the latest technologies (embed code, RSS feeds according to content type).

A quantitative comparison of TVXS with other Greek news portals in terms of page hits or number of visitors is not straightforward, since Google Analytics data or raw log data are not publicly available for other web sites. Using third-party publicly available information (e.g. Alexa rankings or PageRank) for the comparison is not always valid, since such tools analyze data from specific users (e.g. those who have installed the Alexa Toolbar on their browsers) or base their ranking on third-party links that point to the web site and can easily be biased (Du, Shi, and Zhao, 2007).

What differentiates TVXS from other news portals on the Greek web is the active participation of its users who provide new sources of information, send in videos, and, in several cases, contribute to publishing a new story. However, this discussion raises ethical issues concerning the media profession, as rumors and lack of primary research can put credibility at stake. Copyrights and ownership apply to the web as well and it is unethical to have a news story republished without mentioning its original source, even if the time of its republishing is clearly stated (Kelly, 2000 as quoted in Osborn, 2001: 5).

There is a shift of power between those providing the information and those receiving it, whilst the relationship of the journalist with the public is drastically altered. We now experience a horizontal form of communication, between peers, whereas it used to be vertical, beginning at the source, flowing through the media, and ending up with the public. Now the source becomes the publisher, the same individuals may seek and deliver information at the same time and the public is in the position to compare between the original material and the news broadcast. Furthermore, the relationship between the writer and the reader is altered, since they now have the opportunity to communicate with each other, and also comment on the news, and start an interaction between even more users (Trench and Quinn, 2003).

Twitter has emerged as part of the change in the flow of communication; it serves as a key medium in news distribution, since it allows a large number of people to have real-time communication with each other (Hermida, 2010). An example of the way Twitter, as well as other social networking sites, like Facebook and MySpace, operate in Greece are the events of December 2008, when a police officer shot to death a 15-year-old student. This event initially circulated through the alternative media and the demonstrations that followed were to a large extent organized through the use of these media (Lam, 2008).

As far as TVXS is concerned, the contribution of the public to its operation consists of sending e-mails, making phone calls, but basically of posting comments, an opportunity that has attracted users since the launching of the web site and has led to the formation of a virtual community with more than 20 000 registered members with the site itself as



a point of reference. There is a noteworthy average number of comments posted by users, which exceeds 500 daily, in the whole period of time that TVXS has been in operation; there have also been times when more than 1300 comments were posted on a daily basis (one per every minute of the day). However, it should be pointed out that, according to the data collected from the TVXS operation so far, the opportunity of “expression of the public’s opinion” is often reduced to a wording of dogmatic statements in the form of repetition without reasoning.

While the journalistic organizations on the one hand open their doors to the public, at the same time they retain the traditional role of journalists as gatekeepers (Hermida and Thurman, 2008: 12). It is obvious that when the public gets direct access to the original piece of information the role of the gatekeeper must change. The exclusive privilege of the journalist–gatekeeper comes to an end (Bardoel and Deuze, 2001: 98) when the public, supported by technology, can even create channels of news distribution adapted to their own personal interests. This is accomplished through the use of RSS technology, which allows the user to adjust the RSS feeds in such a way that they gather the information he or she wishes to obtain without him/her having to visit a number of different web pages (Briggs, 2007: 16). RSS feeds contain information for the content in question such as the title, date, author, and a brief summary. This facilitates the distribution of titles or a brief summary of content produced by one editor, and at the same time the aggregation of feeds from multiple sources and its republishing without any harm to either party. This process serves a dual purpose; not only it is a form of free publicity, but it also facilitates the circulation of ideas over the Internet (Gill, 2005).

The tools offered to users by technology do not reduce the importance of the role of journalists. According to research conducted by Singer, journalists still consider themselves as interpreters and not as simple distributors of information (Singer, 2006: 1). Furthermore, as pointed out by Bas, the most crucial part of the mission of the gatekeeper takes place within the news organization, and consists of two stages: the first one involves the gathering and the second one the processing of the news. The second stage requires editing and a synthesis of the information in order to achieve an outcome that can be characterized as a “whole product,” suitable to be delivered to the audience (McQuail and Windahl, 2001: 222). Although the first stage involves a process, that of newsgathering, which is potentially open to anyone, the editing on the other hand, even on the Internet, remains a process carried out by professional journalists. We shouldn’t overlook the fact that in many cases the online media content is provided by journalists who are already well-known from their work in traditional media, and this serves as a positive factor for the appeal and credibility of the online media. Within today’s social system and the undisputable technological convergence, the quest for credibility and objectivity falls on the shoulders of the gatekeepers (Osborn, 2001: 7). It is with these responsibilities in mind that the gatekeepers at TVXS handle news, in an effort to always provide the public with a high-quality product.

### The research

The results of a statistical analysis conducted by Giannakoulopoulos and Varlamis (2009), which considered articles by professional journalists on the one hand and comments

posted by the users on the other in view of major national and international events, indicate the existence of an internal connection between social upheaval and the public's commitment to journalism.

Citizen journalism plays an important role within the operational framework of modern media. Journalists themselves have come to trust it much more today than they used to in the past (Cassidy, 2007). Moreover, interactions between the users indicate the level of trust achieved between the medium and its users. During TVXS's first year of operation, a number of serious events were recorded, such as riots, elections, and natural disasters in Greece as well as internationally. These events triggered numerous online articles on which users then commented. The data available for every article are its main topic, its author, the number of hits, and the number of positive votes it received as well as the number of times it was e-mailed by users to their contacts.

The research studied five main topics, three of which fall under the most popular sections of politics, foreign politics, and local news, and were active all through the period of time that the site was in operation, while the other two – national and European elections – attracted the attention of the public, but only for a limited amount of time. The results show that national events generate an immediate rise in the number of articles. Special mention is made of the rise in the number of articles posted during December 2008, following the fatal shooting of a student by a police officer. After the shooting and for almost one month the outburst of riots was the first topic on the agenda.

The research then examined the impact the topics had on the users. The users' interest in a topic is expressed through various actions like reading an article, voting for it, sending it via e-mail to a friend, or commenting on it. Commenting offers users the chance to freely express themselves while at the same time it makes the medium socially cooperative. Statistics showed that the input of the public was much higher during the December 2008 events in comparison with the elections period. Moreover, the difference as far as peaks are concerned shows a larger deviation for users than for journalists. This indicates that the interests of professional journalists and media authors do not always coincide with those of the public; this finding reflects on the choice of topics made by a medium and the public, as well as the interaction between the two parties. The analysis of the data also indicates that factors such as conflict and unexpectedness, as described by Galtung and Ruge, concerning news selection (McQuail and Windahl, 2001), lead to an immediate response by the public.

According to Tilley and Cokley, the golden mean between professional journalism and the participation of citizens in the news reporting process is somewhere between the viewpoint that acknowledges only the work of professionals and the one that considers anything articulated as worth broadcasting. They describe a state where polyphony can be combined with the skills of newsgathering, analysis, validity checking, and presentation of the information in order to offer audiences useful, quality news, that escapes what mainstream journalism dictates (Tilley and Cokley, 2008: 111).

The basic notion behind the audience's commenting on TVXS is to give the editors the chance to control the portal's structure and the content architecture while the audience retains its ability to express its opinion on matters of concern. The truth is that only registered members can comment on the articles. Every comment is attached to an article and the time it was posted, while the member ID of the user who posted is also

available. Besides, users have the chance to publish text and hyperlinks, which may refer to TVXS or another web site, but they cannot upload html codes or photos. The mechanism controlling the message board allows the free expression of opinion on the one hand, but provides the other users with the power to control the quality of the comments posted. It is important to note at this point, that the viability of this kind of media relies, apart from the financial sources aforementioned, on the participation of the audience in the whole process. The result is a sort of hybrid media where the characteristics of online communities coexist with traditional media operational models.

At this point we consider it essential to address the issue of competition with other online news media. Although TVXS was followed by a number of other similar attempts, which according to their format could fall under one category, that of news web sites, as far as competition is concerned (money flow, visit rates) TVXS has not experienced particular pressure. This could be attributed to two factors: the first one is internal and is closely linked to the uniqueness of TVXS, its special characteristics, its overall profile, the reputation and popularity of its founder, but also to its participatory character, which is maintained thanks to its large community of commentators. The second factor is connected to the advertising profits, the main area of media competition. However, given the current financial crisis, where the overall advertising expenditure on the web remains really low – despite its increase in comparison with the traditional media – the financial data available do not allow an evaluation from which one could draw safe conclusions.

The popularity of TVXS and the way it quickly found – and kept – its place in the online news world allows us to be optimistic as to its future, and counterbalances anxiety deriving from its inadequate financial efficacy, which is mainly attributed to the general financial crisis. This sense of optimism is combined with the dedication to the original goals set at the launch of this enterprise and, mainly, a dedication to preserving the credibility of the medium, to a continuous fight for an honest depiction of our everyday life and an operation dictated by the principles of independent investigative journalism in the multiparticipatory environment that the World Wide Web constitutes today.

## **Conclusion**

New technologies relating to the web facilitate the recording of events on an unprecedented scale. Although there are similarities to the traditional media, the size of the phenomenon requires a separate discussion in the light of the technological factor, which redefines the conditions of production. The main advantages of this new medium are detected both in its innovation and the possibility of extending the body of users.

On this basis, the profession of journalism is changing; people are increasingly involved in content production, and the ability to think in online terms is the most important skill a journalist should exercise today. The Internet offers the professional a huge range of resources and technological capabilities to work with. However, if they themselves do not develop a digital culture, digital training alone is not sufficient (Briggs, 2007: 12).

At the intersection of technology and journalism some inherent problems are emerging, the most important of which is credibility maintenance. Absolute confidence in citizen journalists from both news organizations and the public is not considered

safe (Lam, 2008) and the process of gatekeeping is considered essential. There is no doubt that technology imposes restrictions on the operation of the gatekeepers, as described in the traditional models of communication. However, of particular interest is the fact that technology itself lifts the restrictions and facilitates the quest for alternative solutions.

The aforementioned theoretical analysis entails some enlightening approaches. However, examples from the real world are those which offer useful observations concerning the interrelation of technology and journalism, in order to define the parameters that lead to convergence or divergence. As a real-life example, TVXS contributes to a better understanding of the process as discussed on the basis of empirical data obtained at the production level.

The inadequacy of the new hybrid media business model makes it imperative to develop a different operating model that will overcome the contradictions between traditional and participatory media. In this context, within which advertising is looking for new publicity channels and the consumers are also becoming content producers, the new media can survive only if innovation becomes an integral part of their strategies (Lindqvist *et al.*, 2008). Technical solutions can be regarded as sufficient up to a degree, but many issues in online communities, such as trust, remain open for discussion and further research.

One of the conclusions of this analysis indicates economic factors as being of the utmost importance in terms of convergence or divergence of technology and journalism at the production level. This does not seem to be mere coincidence. However, it should be noted that economic factors may be decisive, but, on the other hand, the involvement and commitment of the user leads to optimistic predictions for this new form of social interaction.

At a time when societies are constantly suffering from fundamental problems, the crisis in human relations, both in the public and private sphere, is seen as inevitable. Trust is a concept that tends to be forgotten and journalism could not be left unscathed. In this context, the need to reverse the situation becomes imperative. Technology is always advancing, and if the technological possibilities are combined with the right practices, it may constitute the keystone for building a field in which citizens and professional journalists will work together to produce as comprehensive a journalistic product as possible.

## Note

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# Social Journalism: Exploring How Social Media is Shaping Journalism

Alfred Hermida

## Introduction

Some of the iconic images in journalism at the start of the twenty-first century have come from citizens sharing their experiences of a news event on social media. From the grainy mobile phone video of the July 2005 London bombings, to the 2009 Twitter photo of the airplane in the Hudson River, to YouTube videos of the protests in Egypt in 2011, media has become a space shared by journalists and citizens.

Powerful digital communication tools, often identified by the catch-all phrase of social media, are transforming the way media is gathered, disseminated, and consumed. A generation of Internet technologies, collectively described as Web 2.0, has facilitated the involvement of citizens in the observation, selection, filtering, distribution, and interpretation of events. It has become commonplace for the citizens caught up in the news to provide the first accounts, images, and video of events unfolding around them, sharing their media on services such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

There has always been a degree of social interaction with media. In today's digital spaces, social interaction has become so intertwined with media that it is shaping how people experience the Internet. In just a few years, social networking alone has become what Pew Research describes as a "global phenomenon," (Pew Research Center, 2010: 1). In countries such as the USA, Poland, the UK, and South Korea, almost half of adults say they use social networking sites, and the figure is even higher for young adults (Pew Research Center, 2010).

The range of Web 2.0 services and tools commonly referred to as social media are transforming how journalists and citizens relate to the news. Media organizations around the world have enthusiastically embraced social media as a way to distribute news and connect with audiences. Social media is an evolving field of study and application, with

the rapid development of new tools, features, and uses by people. Initial studies point to the importance of news as a personal, social, and participatory experience for growing numbers of citizens (Purcell *et al.*, 2010), with social media shaping the evolution of norms and practices in journalism.

Social media raises questions about journalism's jurisdictional claim to the news. Journalism has developed as a relatively closed professional culture for the production of knowledge, based on a system of editorial control. Yet social media is characterized by its connected and collaborative nature. Social digital media spaces allow for new relations that disrupt authorial structures. Journalists need to be able to learn and understand how news and information work in a social media ecosystem, instead of simply applying established norms and practices that may no longer be effective in communicating.

From the viewpoint of established journalism practices, social media raises a number of conceptual and practical issues for journalists. It changes the relationship between the producer and the consumer of news, questioning the institutional power of the journalist as the professional who decides what is newsworthy or credible. Social media systems such as Twitter and Facebook have been described as ambient journalism, where the journalism itself becomes fragmented and omnipresent, constructed by both journalists and audiences (Burns, 2010; Hermida, 2010a, 2010b).

This chapter explores how journalists and audiences are navigating social media and considers the implications on journalism norms and practices that have, until recently, been highly consistent. It aims to provide a framework to understand how social media may be impacting the role of the journalist and raising questions about the notion of what is journalism. The chapter seeks to understand the overall context and impact of social media in journalism, identifying trends that Hogan and Quan-Haase argue are "underlying long-term trajectories, persistent social practices, and discernable cultural patterns" (Hogan and Quan-Haase, 2010: 309).

## Defining Social Media

Social media is an elusive term to define as it can refer to an activity, a software tool, or a platform, let alone the fact that all media have a social element. Donath (2004) traces social media back thousands of years, with the advent of letter writing. She acknowledges that digital communication technologies have fostered the emergence of new forms of media designed to enhance communication and the formation of social ties. Donath was prescient in writing that "we are rapidly approaching the time when, for millions of people, mediated sociability will be with them at all times, no matter where they are or what they are doing" (2004: 631).

The intersection of social interaction and digital media is often associated with Web 2.0. Internet entrepreneur Tim O'Reilly used the term to refer to the development of the World Wide Web as a platform that enables dynamic interactions on the web, facilitating the creation, dissemination, and sharing of digital content. O'Reilly (2005) describes Web 2.0 as an architecture of participation that enables people to take part in the production, shaping, and distribution of news and information, rather than passively consuming content that others create. Tapscott and Williams suggest that this "new web



is principally about participating rather than about passively receiving information” (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 37). In other words, Web 2.0 technologies empower users to interact with each other, and participate and collaborate in the making of media, rather than just consuming media.

The use of the term “passive” is problematic, given the literature on how audiences actively make sense of media (Ang, 1985; Fiske, 1987). But traditionally, individuals have had very limited ability to directly affect the construction of media messages or communicate with the producers of the media (Ha and James, 1998). As Harrison and Barthel argue, the newness of social media is not simply the active media user, but rather “new media technologies now enable vastly more users to experiment with a wider and seemingly more varied range of collaborative creative activities” (Harrison and Barthel, 2009: 174).

Social media is defined by the characteristics of participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectivity. Web 2.0 technologies at the core of social media provide an infrastructure for potentially geographically dispersed individuals with common interests to connect and collaborate via the Internet without any central coordination. Tools and services range from blogs, wikis, media sharing services, and social networking sites. Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: 61).

However, any consideration of social media needs to move beyond simply the technology. Hogan and Quan-Haase propose the term social media practice “as a means to overcome the transient nature of the phenomena encountered on social media and identify practices that are stable and universal” (2010: 309). They argue that it is more important to understand the effects of social media, rather than simply getting bogged down in a debate on what social media is. Hardey argues “Web 2.0 is *inherently* social so that users are central to both the content and form of all material and resources” (Hardey, 2007: 870; emphasis in original), with people exercising with a new degree of agency in shaping their engagement with media.

Social media platforms provide spaces for users to share content such as status updates, links, photos, and videos. These social awareness streams provide a mix of news, information, and comment, related to current reality, contributing to what Hermida (2010a, 2010b) has described as ambient journalism. Ambient journalism conceptualizes journalism as a telemediated practice and experience driven by networked, always-on communications technologies and media systems of immediacy and instantaneity. Journalism itself becomes fragmented, omnipresent, and ingrained in the everyday media experiences of users, with contributions from both professionals and non-professionals.

Social media spaces suggest the evolution of the public sphere online, where individuals “construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (boyd and Ellison, 2007: np). Users of these spaces are mediated publics, where the affordances of social media enable individuals to connect and gather publicly through mediating technology. A networked public sphere, where individuals share, discuss, and contribute to the news, subverts media flows based on the idea of a mass media audience. Examining how networked

publics are influencing news flows would contribute to our understanding of the evolving relationship between the journalist and the audience.

## Participation in the News

Social media has fueled an explosion of participation in the news process, from photos shared on Flickr to 140-character eyewitness comments on breaking news on Twitter. However, the desire or capability of users to participate in the creation of media is neither new nor solely linked to the development of digital communication technologies. In their discussion of media production, Harrison and Barthel (2009) stress, “historically, active media users have accomplished radical and community-oriented purposes through the construction of media products organized in support of social movements and community initiatives” (2009: 174). However, they acknowledge that digital technologies are empowering more users to participate in more ways in the creation of media. Tapscott and Williams go further, arguing that participation is the defining characteristic of digital interactions: “Whether people are creating, sharing or socializing, the new Web is principally about participating rather than about passively receiving information” (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 37).

Beyond the rhetoric, social media builds the notion of a participatory media culture, where citizens are viewed as going beyond just reading the news (Dewey, 1927). In a participatory media environment, “rather than talking about media producers and consumers occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands” (Jenkins, 2006: 3). A number of terms are used to refer to audience involvement in news production, such as citizen journalism, user-generated content, and participatory journalism.

Social media is an extension of the ability of news consumers to take part in the gathering, analysis, and dissemination of news and information. No longer do audiences need to rely solely on media institutions to get a message to a wide public. The twentieth century was characterized by the rise and dominance of mass media in western liberal societies. Paid professionals produced the news, and decided what the public needed to know, when it needed to know it, and how it would know it. The role of journalists was as “professional observers and communicators to work full-time to access, select and filter, produce and edit news, which is then distributed via the media to network members” (Domingo *et al.*, 2008: 329). Web 2.0 technologies form an architecture of participation that signals a move away from a one-way, asymmetric model of communication to a more participatory and collective media ecosystem, where jurisdiction for the news is shared between journalists and audiences.

How to share jurisdiction has become a major area of contention for journalists who have long been used to owning the news. The way media organizations have adopted mechanisms to involve audiences in the news process provides a window into the tensions of integrating the participatory and open ethos of social media into traditionally tightly controlled and closed editorial practices. It has become rare not to stumble across an exhortation for a reader to send in photos or videos from a breaking news event,

comment on a story, or share a link on their social network. The tools of participation continue to evolve. For example, the *Guardian* newspaper started with user discussion boards in 1999. More than 10 years later, it was using social networks and a myriad of other tools to enable readers to contribute and to share content with others (Singer *et al.*, 2011).

In principle, the tools for participation allow for users to become co-collaborators in the journalistic process. In practice, studies show that journalists have largely transferred existing norms and practices to new media, rather than taking on the open and participatory ethos of Web 2.0 tools and services. Opportunities for media audiences to participate in the processes of news production have been severely circumscribed, with editorial control retained by journalists (Domingo *et al.*, 2008; Harrison, 2009; Hermida and Thurman, 2008; Singer *et al.*, 2011). Despite a diversity of strategies, by and large there has been a general aversion to opening up significant phases of the news process to the audience. Instead, audiences are framed as “active recipients” (Hermida, 2011), expected to act when news happens and react when the news is published. While this overarching attitude has influenced the integration of social media into established professional practices, there are also indications of how journalists are adapting their news production processes and interactions with audiences.

## Impact on Journalism

### Gathering the news

The Internet has become a part of the newsgathering routine of journalists, who go online for story tips, to research story ideas, and to find sources (Callahan, 2003). Turning to the audience online for news material predates social media but the approach has remained largely consistent with the use of Web 2.0 tools and services. Journalists and editors have largely framed audiences as additional news sources who can provide eyewitness photos, video, or accounts, above all in situations where journalists are not yet present. As a journalist working at the BBC’s user-generated content hub explained:

That first hour before you get your resources to that story: this is where we come into our own. We will have access to people who are there and who are contacting us much quicker than any other news resource we can get there

Quoted in Williams, Wardle, and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011: 92

Social media has reinforced the value of the audience to the media, not just as news sources, but also as news sensors. In the case of rapidly developing breaking news events such as natural disasters, users of the social messaging service Twitter have taken on the role of social sensors of the news (Sakaki, Okazaki, and Matsuo, 2010). Twitter provides a real-time, networked platform for the rapid diffusion of short bursts of information that lends itself to breaking news scenarios. The social messaging services can function as a detection system that can provide early warning of breaking news, and then provide a stream of real-time data as events unfold. Twitter has played a role in the breaking and dissemination of information on major events such as the Chinese earthquake of May

2008, the Mumbai terrorist attacks in November 2008, the Iranian election protests in June 2009, the Middle East uprisings in the spring of 2011 and the killing of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011. In the words of *Guardian* journalist Matthew Weaver, “first the tweets come, then the pictures, then the video and then the wires” (quoted in Bruno, 2011: 7).

One of the reasons why social media has become part of newsgathering is due to the news vacuum that characterizes the aftermath of major events, such as the devastating earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, where there is an absence of journalists on the scene (Bruno, 2011). Real-time messages on Twitter, eyewitness accounts on Facebook, photos on Flickr, or cellphone videos on YouTube fill a need for information from the location until professional journalists arrived on the scene, hours or even days later. Restrictions on foreign correspondents, such as in Iran in 2009, or the breakdown of communications services, such as in Haiti in 2010, leave the news media turning to social media.

Research indicates that news organizations place the most value on audience contributions in the immediate aftermath of major events such as a terror attack or adverse weather events that have broad public impact (Williams, Wardle, and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). As journalists reach affected areas, there tends to be a decrease in the reliance on audience content. In his study of coverage of the Haiti quake, Bruno (2011) found what he called an opportunistic model. After extensively using social media, the three news organizations studied – the *Guardian*, the BBC, and Cable News Network (CNN) – rarely used audience content once they had correspondents on the ground a week after the disaster. Most dramatically, the amount of social media used by CNN in its newsgathering went from 65% to 4%. Bruno concludes that “in order to go beyond such an ‘opportunistic’ model, traditional media will need to fully redesign their operational structures” (2011: 66).

In addition to affecting the flow of information during major events, social media is influencing the pace of breaking news. Speed has always been a factor in news production, whether rushing to meet a publishing deadline or a show on-air time, or to be first with the news and scoop a competitor. The pace of news has accelerated with the development of 24-hour news channels and the Internet, marking a shift toward a continuous news cycle. The speed of news flows has increased, largely enabled, if not driven, by the technological change brought about by the immediacy of social media services. Bruno (2011) uses the term “the Twitter effect” to describe how online tools that facilitate the publication and distribution of user-generated, real-time content are affecting how the news is reported and by whom. He suggests that “the Twitter effect allows you to provide live coverage without any reporters on the ground, by simply newsgathering user-generated content available online” (2011: 8).

### Reporting the news

News organizations themselves have taken up social media as a way to extend and enhance their reporting, particularly to reflect fast-moving, multifaceted events taking place over a period of time and across a broad geographical space. Mainstream media coherently used social media tools to cover a major event for the first time during the

G20 summit in London in April 2009. Journalists from leading news organizations such as the BBC and the *Guardian* provided regular updates from the streets of London as events unfolded. According to BBC News web site editor Steve Herrmann, this approach to reporting “allowed us to build a nuanced, full picture of the protests in real-time on a map” (quoted in Newman, 2009: 32).

The two main services used by journalists by 2011 were Twitter and Facebook, described as “the ‘kings’ in the realm of social media in the newsrooms” by García de Torres *et al.* (2011) in their analysis of 27 Iberian and South American news outlets. In the USA, all but one of the top 198 newspapers and TV stations had an official Twitter account by 2010 (Messner, Linke, and Esford, 2011). In Australia, “where journalists are literally in a Twittering frenzy” (Posetti, 2009: np), Twitter has been used by the mainstream media to help reporting on devastating bushfires and floods. As Farhi (2009) notes, “reporters now routinely tweet from all kinds of events – speeches, meetings and conferences, sports events.” Twitter has even become a factor in court reporting, with tweets from the courtroom offering virtually instantaneous accounts of proceedings.

Both Twitter and Facebook provide journalists with a platform to send out short bursts of text, photos, or video to a broad audience as the story unfolds before them. Instead of fashioning facts and observations into a self-contained packaged story produced and published later in the day, information is delivered in fragments in real-time, combining observations, impressions, and behind-the-scenes remarks. Prominent examples of this type of reporting include *New York Times* journalist Brian Stelter’s tweets from the town of Joplin leveled by a tornado in May 2011. On his arrival in Joplin, Stelter was “trying to tweet everything I saw,” reflecting that in those first few hours, “I think my best reporting was on Twitter” (Stelter, 2011: np). Another *New York Times* journalist, Nicholas Kristof, used Facebook to post updates, observations, or short stories during his reporting of the Arab spring (Lavrusik, 2011). However, journalists are not abandoning more established news products to report the news, rather they are supplementing traditional practices. The two *New York Times* journalists cited were also writing stories for the following day’s newspaper, in addition to their activities on social media.

Newman has suggested “that a new grammar is emerging of real-time news coverage” (2009: 34). While the approach to real-time, disaggregated news reporting is evolving, one commonly used format is the live blog or live page. The online story-telling format is used to aggregate the disaggregated reporting coming via social media, providing a constantly updated stream of text, audio, and video from both journalists and amateurs. There are some indications that the editorial approach for this type of real-time coverage may diverge from established norms. *Guardian* journalist Matthew Weaver suggests that “on a live blog you are letting the reader in on what’s up there, and say: look, we’re letting you in on the process of newsgathering. There’s a more fluid sense of what’s happening” (quoted in Bruno, 2011: 44).

The inclusion of material from the audience alongside reports from journalists is a form of “pro-am” journalism, where media professionals collaborate with users to cover stories or topics, supplementing existing newsgathering and enhancing output. The attributes of social media facilitate the crowdsourcing of the news, where reporting can

be undertaken by a large group of loosely organized non-journalists (Howe, 2009). News organizations can either direct audience actions by requesting text, audio, and video or aggregate existing social media content.

As stated previously, the integration of social media content into the newsgathering process is most important during breaking news, where the first reports are most likely to come from people on the ground caught up in the event. One way this is playing out in newsrooms is a realization that they no longer have a monopoly on being the first to break the news. Instead, the focus shifts to being the best at curating the news. The journalist takes on the role of curator, whose primary function is to navigate, sift, select, and contextualize the vast amounts of data on social media streams such as Twitter.

The most prominent case of the journalist as curator is Andy Carvin, a social media strategist at National Public Radio (NPR) in the USA. He made a name for himself by curating messages on Twitter during the uprisings in the Middle East at the end of 2010 and start of 2011. Farhi noted that “by grabbing bits and pieces from Facebook, YouTube and the wider Internet and mixing them with a stunning array of eyewitness sources, Carvin has constructed a vivid and constantly evolving mosaic of the region’s convulsions” (2011: np). Carvin describes what he does as “another flavor of journalism” (quoted in Farhi, 2011). Rather than creating a definitive account of events, the journalist as curator exposes the tentative process through which a news story is constructed, as bits of information are reported, contested, or verified in a continual cycle. Carvin is an example of how media professionals are negotiating professional practices and rethinking the way they think about and engage in their work.

Social media can facilitate what Stassen describes as “a type of journalism in which the audience is much more involved in the news-creation process” (Stassen, 2010: 13). However, so far, the use of social media to engage and involve audiences in the news-making process appears to be the exception rather than the rule. Numerous studies have found that journalists tend to normalize new communication technologies to fit within long established norms and practices. As O’Sullivan and Heinonen suggest, journalists “welcome the net when it suits their existing professional ends, and are much less enthusiastic about, and unlikely to promote, radical change in news work” (O’Sullivan and Heinonen, 2008: 368).

Research to date suggests that journalists are normalizing social media rather than adapting their occupational culture to what Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton describe as “a new media format that directly challenges them” (Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton, 2012: 1). While some reporters and editors are enthusiastically using social media services to report and share the news, studies show that they are much less likely to take advantage of the conversational modes on Twitter or Facebook.

A study by Messner, Linke, and Esford (2011) on the use of Twitter by the top US newspapers and television stations found that few of them engaged in an exchange with readers. They concluded that “while Twitter facilitates an open dialogue in many areas, traditional news media are not using their main Twitter accounts as a community-building tool, nor are they engaging with their audience on a frequent basis” (2011: 20). An analysis of the use of social media by 27 Iberian and South American news outlets revealed a similar picture, with conversational messages just “a drop in the

ocean,” (García de Torres *et al.*, 2011: 21). The research to date suggests that news organizations and journalists have yet to tap into the full potential of the “social” aspect of social media technologies.

### Recommending the news

Rather, one of the main ways that news organizations have embraced social media is as a mechanism to extend their reach. The prevailing use of social media is to promote content and drive traffic, by sending out a headline with a link back to the news outlet’s web site. García de Torres *et al.* (2011) found that 50% of Twitter messages and 68% of Facebook postings fell into this category. The journalists interviewed for the study spoke of social media as offering “the possibility to reach readers more quickly, to show what we do” and reaching “people living in a faster, more immediate world, and who are technology fans” (2011: 16).

Messner, Linke, and Esford (2011) reached a comparable conclusion in their analysis of the official Twitter accounts of the top newspaper and TV organizations. In some cases, the distribution process was automated, without any editorial intervention. Blasingame (2011) found that more than a third of the messages from newsrooms were automatically generated whenever a story was published on their web site. The use of social media as a promotional tool was not limited to a new organization’s official account, but also prevalent among the personal accounts of reporters and editors. In their analysis of the Twitter practices of US journalists, Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012) found that 42% of the tweets contained an external link, with half of these to the journalist’s own host news organization.

Social media offers news organizations new ways to promote content, increase audience reach, and potentially build brand loyalty. Social interaction has always played a role in the dissemination of news, from conversations in the office to newspaper clippings sent through the postal service. Sharing and discussing news takes place through social networks for a growing number of citizens, who are turning to their networked circles of family, friends, and acquaintances to alert them to news of interest. The sharing of links and recommendations on social networks is becoming a form of cultural currency, extending the reach of news.

A 2010 study by Pew Internet found that 75% of online news consumers in the USA get news forwarded to them through e-mail or posts on social networking sites (Purcell *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, it found that just over half of social networking users say they get their news from family, friends, and acquaintances they follow on services like Facebook. A study of Canadian news consumers also pointed to the growing importance of social recommendation. The study found that 43% of social media users get some of their daily news via links and recommendations from friends and family on services like Facebook (Hermida *et al.*, 2011).

While the news home page is far from obsolete, there is a growing body of data indicating the importance of social media in how people navigate the news. Social recommendation is emerging as a key driver for traffic to news web sites, potentially rivaling direct visits to the home page or visits via search engines such as Google. “Facebook is beginning to join Google as one of the most influential players in driving

news audiences,” concluded Olmstead *et al.* in a 2011 Pew study that analyzed the flow of traffic to 25 of the top US news web sites (Olmstead *et al.*, 2011: np). They found that Google remained the primary entry point for visits, accounting on average for 30% of the traffic to these sites. But Olmstead *et al.* added that social media is emerging as a powerful conduit for visits, particularly Facebook. The popular social networking site was the second or third most important source of traffic for the five top news sites.

A study into the diffusion of news links on Twitter also pointed to the importance of social recommendation. An *et al.* (2011) found that a message from a news organization or journalist received an average of 15.5 retweets. News content is spread through the social messaging network, as users send on a news link to their network. The researchers concluded that social recommendation could increase the audience reach of media sources significantly, by up to a factor of 28.

The use of social networks to share news and information has been embraced by news organizations. They have added social networking functionality to web sites to make it easy for users to share links (Singer *et al.*, 2011). Studies show that the ability to share is important for news consumers. Olmstead *et al.* found that when users leave a site, “share” tools that appear alongside most news stories rank among the most clicked-on links (2011), while Hermida *et al.* (2011) found that being able to easily share content was important to almost two-thirds of social media users.

But social recommendation also poses financial and editorial challenges for established media. While social networks such as Facebook open up new ways for the news media to engage audiences, they also compete for consumer attention and revenues. On its Facebook for Journalists page, the social network promotes itself as a way for news outlets to “reach your readers directly on Facebook, an audience of more than 500 million people around the world” (Facebook, nd). Mass media business models have been based on delivering large, aggregate audiences to advertisers. Using Facebook for posting content or hosting discussions boosts the audience for the social network and for the advertising it sells. So while a media outlet can increase its reach, this does not necessarily result in a financial return as the activity takes place on a third party rather than on its own web space. Newman warns that just as Google became a key intermediary in the news business, “history may be about to repeat itself, with social networks reinforcing the trend towards disaggregation and putting further pressure on the funding of journalism in traditional news organizations” (2009: 49).

Editorially, the traditional gatekeeping function of the media is weakened as a significant proportion of news consumers turn to their family, friends, and acquaintances to alert them to items of interest. Hermida *et al.* (2011) found that news consumers were twice as likely to get links to news items from people they knew than from a news organization or a journalist. Essentially a person’s social circle is taking on the role of news editor, deciding whether a story, video, or other piece of content is important, interesting, or amusing enough to recommend. Social recommendation weakens traditional hierarchical relationships between the mass media consumers and producers of media. It disrupts the authority of the journalist as the professional who decides what the public needs to know and when it needs to know it. By removing a news story from its original context, the user is reframing the message and sending a



signal about the content to their audience. Olmstead *et al.* say that understanding “what content they are likely to pass along may be a key to how stories are put together and even what stories get covered in the first place” (2011: np).

There are concerns, though, about the impact of a personalized news stream where the news is filtered by a social network of friends, rather than by traditional media. The principle of homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001) suggests that people have a tendency to connect with others who will validate their core beliefs rather than be exposed to opposing viewpoints. The presence of homophily in social networks has implications for the news and information users receive and the attitudes they develop.

However, it is unclear to what extent this is taking place on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Purcell *et al.* (2010) observed that news consumers who have the widest range of online sources were far more likely than others to have customized their news experience. Similarly, Hermida *et al.* (2011) found that a significant number of social media users believe they receive a broader range of news and information via their social networks than if they relied solely on traditional media.

Research on Twitter has also raised doubts as to how far social networks foster homophily. In a study of conversations on abortion conducted on Twitter, Yardi and boyd (2010) identified both homophily and heterogeneity. They conclude that “people were more likely to interact with others who share the same views as they do, but they are actively engaged with those with whom they disagree” (2010: 325). In a study of news flows on Twitter, An *et al.* (2011) noted that users tended to receive information from multiple outlets, with people exposed to six to 10 media sources though retweets by friends. “Users are exposed to information they did not know they were interested in, serendipitously,” An *et al.* concluded (2011: 8).

## Editorial and Ethical Challenges

As social media becomes part of the media landscape, it raises a series of editorial and ethical questions about everyday work routines and practices, as well as time-honored tenets of journalism. As Arceneaux and Schmitz Weiss note, media technologies such as Twitter and Facebook “disrupt established concepts of communication, prevailing notions of space and time and the distinction between public and private spheres” (2010: 1266). Numerous studies have looked at how an earlier form of social media, blogs, affected the professional norms and practices of journalists from with mainstream news organizations (Lowrey and MacKay, 2008; Hermida, 2009; Singer, 2005). Some of those same tensions around verification, impartiality, and engagement are playing out on newer social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

### The process of verification

Social media platforms such as Twitter that facilitate the instantaneous transmission of news and information have contributed to an acceleration of the news cycle. The compressed news cycle raises significant questions for news outlets, above all concerning the

key tenet of verification. Even before the advent of social media, Kovach and Rosenstiel (1999) argued that the continuous news cycle was undermining the classic function of journalism to provide a true and reliable account of events.

The rise of social media as a source for breaking news, and the speed at which information is disseminated on the network, poses a challenge to journalism's discipline of verification. Verification is at the core of the journalist's contention to objectively parse reality and claim a special kind of authority and status. Gowing has labeled this as the tyranny of real-time, suggesting that professionals face a difficult choice in deciding "when to take on the tyranny of the time and intervene with real-time information, even if it is incomplete, possibly flaky and probably cannot be verified with 100 per cent accuracy" (Gowing, 2009: 30).

One prominent case that provoked an intense discussion of the appropriateness of Twitter for breaking news involved the shooting of US Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in January 2011. Major news organizations including the BBC, CNN, NPR, and Reuters mistakenly reported that she had died, sending out the news on Twitter. The initial report was later corrected in subsequent tweets, but the original messages had been re-sent by others across the social media network. Safran noted that "for hours after it was reported she was alive, people kept discovering the original tweet that she was dead, retweeting it to their friends without seeing the update" (Safran, 2011: np).

Negotiating the tension between being first and being right is not new. Journalists have long had to find "the right balance between speed and accuracy, between being comprehensive and being merely interesting" (Meyer, 2009: 11). The networked nature of social media can add to these tensions by amplifying the dissemination of information, which travels in as a data fragment and may be divorced from context, as in the Giffords case. Moreover, much of the information on social media comes from the public. Such a scenario is particularly acute in times of a news vacuum, when the initial reports of a breaking news event come via tweets, blog posts, and photos and videos taken on cellphones.

There are indications that the real-time flow of information from the public is changing news practices, with Newman suggesting that "news organizations are already abandoning attempts to be first for breaking news, focusing instead on being the best at verifying and curating it" (Newman, 2009: 2). Such a strategy does have certain risks for the credibility and reputation of the news media. In 2008, the BBC was criticized for publishing unverified Twitter messages alongside reports from its journalists in its live online coverage of the Mumbai bombings. BBC News web site editor Steve Herrmann summed up the difficult balancing act facing news organizations between trying to reflect "the unfolding truth in all its guises" without compromising core editorial principles (quoted in Newman, 2009: 9).

New storytelling approaches are developing in the live coverage of unfolding events that brings together both unverified social media content and authenticated professional reports. During the Iranian election protests of June 2009, major news outlets such as *The New York Times* in the USA and the *Guardian* in the UK published constantly updated accounts that relied on unverified tweets, photos, and videos, alongside updates from journalists in Tehran (Stelter, 2009). There are indications that newsrooms are

applying different standards of verification in the real-time coverage of ongoing, fast-moving events. Comments made at a social media conference organized by the BBC in London in May 2011 suggested that there is “a view within the mainstream media that audiences have lower expectations of accuracy and verification from journalists’ and media outlets’ social media accounts than they do of ‘appointment TV’ or the printed page” (Posetti, 2011).

The extent to which an accelerated news cycle is eroding standards of reliability and verification is an area for further research. An analysis of media coverage of the 2010 Haiti earthquake by the BBC, CNN, and the *Guardian* found that only the BBC consistently sought to verify information on social media before publication (Bruno, 2011). For at least some of the time, CNN and the *Guardian* chose speed over verification. Bruno suggests that this strategy “seems very dangerous for one of journalism’s golden rules: each news story must be verified first” (2011: 66). But he goes on to suggest that the opposing models that pit publication versus verification may combine into a single strategy through a “reporter-curator.” Indeed, the work by NPR’s Andy Carvin in sifting through the social media streams out of the Middle East in 2011 offers a prototype of the journalistic function of curating the news.

### The interpretation of objectivity

Objectivity has long been held up as one of the key values in journalism (Schudson and Anderson, 2008), and journalists are expected to keep their personal opinions out of their reporting (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001). Yet the characteristics and culture of social media platforms facilitates journalists to be candid about their thoughts and share them in public. In the early 2000s, the tension between objectivity and opinion was being played out in blogs, as media outlets integrated blogging into news practices (Hermida, 2009; Lowrey and MacKay, 2008; Singer, 2005, 2007).

The addition of Twitter and Facebook into news routines has renewed debates over the journalistic norm of objectivity in mediums that encourage personal expression. The structures of these platforms may also provide greater leeway for what journalists say. Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012) point out that blogs tend to be published within the structure of a professional news site and are thus often subject to organizational standards and protocols. Platforms like Twitter are outside of these institutional frameworks. As a result, journalists who tweet “operate on a neutral platform (via Twitter.com), and so do not face the same level of oversight nor the same necessity to stay on-topic journalistically,” note Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012: 6).

News organizations have sought to address how their journalists operate on social media platforms by drawing up specific editorial policies. In its advice on best practice guidelines, the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) acknowledged that social media platforms “offer exciting opportunities for reporters to collect information and for news organizations to expand the reach of their content, but they also carry challenges and risks” (Hohmann, 2011: 3). Guarding against any behavior that could harm the reputation of the news organization is at the core of social media policies, including expressions of opinion. *The Washington Post*, for example, advises its staff that “nothing we do must call into question the impartiality of our news judgment” (quoted in

Hohmann, 2011: 4). In its guidelines, the *Los Angeles Times* observed that “just as political bumper stickers and lawn signs are to be avoided in the offline world, so too are partisan expressions online” (quoted in Currie, Bruser, and Van Wageningen, 2011: 2).

An added complication for the media is the practice of retweeting, as sending on a link or comment may be perceived as an endorsement or expression of support. The ASNE advises reporters to offer clear disclaimers that a retweet is not an endorsement of the content. The BBC is one organization that has gone further, telling its staff that a disclaimer may not be enough. Instead it advises staff to “consider adding your own comment to the ‘tweet’ you have selected, making it clear why you are forwarding it and where you are speaking in your own voice and where you are quoting someone else’s” (BBC: nd).

The visible connections formed on social media present an additional dilemma for journalists. The people that a journalist follows or friends, or even the Facebook pages that are “liked” by them may be perceived as indications of bias. Reuters, for example, warns that “a determined critic can soon build up a picture of your preferences by analyzing your links, those that you follow, your ‘friends’, blogroll and endless other indicators” (quoted in Currie, Bruser, and Van Wageningen, 2011: 2). The ASNE guidelines caution against friending sources in Facebook, while noting that there is a lack of agreement among editors about whether accepting or making “friend” requests is acceptable. There are also concerns over how a decision to join a Facebook group or like a page may be perceived. Most news organizations accept that there may be valid editorial reasons to “like” the Facebook page of a politician, for example. In its overview of social media policies in the US media, the ASNE found there was general agreement that journalists need to balance the pages or groups they join (Hohmann, 2011), while the Canadian Association of Journalists recommends reporters “consider joining a wide variety of groups and accepting a range of followers – instead of choosing only a few” (Currie, Bruser, and Van Wageningen, 2011: 6).

The range of social media policies reflects how news organizations are seeking to balance the personal aspect of social media with long-held professional rules designed to protect journalistic reputation. However, just as has happened with blogs, there is some evidence that shows how journalists are going beyond what may be considered acceptable practices on social media. Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012) note that US journalists on Twitter strayed away from traditional conventions of objectivity by offering opinions in their tweets. They conclude that “j-tweeters appear both to be adopting features of Twitter in their microblogging and adapting these features to their existing norms and practices” (2011: 12). Further research into the use of social media by journalists will assist in understanding how far they are adapting it to fit traditional professional norms and practices, and how far it is changing those norms and practices.

### The professional/personal balance

The personal aspect of social media has also raised questions about how journalists manage their identity. As Currie, Bruser, and Van Wageningen observe, “being social means showing one’s personality” (2011: 6). There is an expectation on social media platforms that users will share personal aspects of their lives. Consequently, social networks may

collapse the professional distance that journalists have tended to cultivate with both readers and sources. As Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton explain, “in an emerging communication space like Twitter, which can be used for everything from breaking news to banality, journalists have far greater license to write about whatever strikes their fancy, including the mundane details of their day-to-day activities” (2012: 6). While journalists mostly use social media to report and share the news, they are also asking questions, talking about their job, and making observations about everyday life.

News organizations and individual journalists are in the process of negotiating the blurred line between the personal and professional on social media, figuring out what to say, how to say it, and when to say it. García de Torres *et al.* (2011) found there was no consistent approach in balancing institutional with individual voices in their analysis of social media use by 27 Iberian and South American news outlets. Some news organizations, such as Reuters, advise their staff to set up separate profiles for work and personal activity, while others, like Bloomberg, acknowledge that the ubiquity of social networks makes it almost impossible to draw a line between the professional and the personal (Hohmann, 2011). In any case, even if a reporter tries to maintain different online identities, the public may still perceive them as a representative of their news organization.

Research into what journalists are saying and doing on social media is in its early stages. In their best-practice recommendations for the Canadian Association of Journalists, Currie, Bruser, and Van Wageningen advise that “expressing opinions about certain matters and making light-hearted jokes can humanize one’s profile in social media and build engagement” (2011: 6). There are data that at least some journalists are sharing aspects of both their professional and personal lives on Twitter. Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012) found that 20% of the messages they analyzed were only about a journalist’s personal life. Another study discovered that many of the most followed and most active journalists on Twitter were incorporating humor into their messages. The researchers suggest that injecting a little wit may help legacy news organizations better connect with existing and potential audiences (Holton and Lewis, 2011).

Newman (2009) offers a case study of *Guardian* journalist Jemima Kiss whose Twitter messages switch from technology news updates to minutiae about her pregnancy to her love of tennis. Kiss talks about the “richness of connection” with her readers through social media: “It gives a voice and a face to my audience; it gives me a direct relationship with them,” (quoted in Newman, 2009: 36). Kiss is an example of how some reporters are sending out details that would once have been considered private, blurring the line between the personal and the professional.

The other side of the privacy equation is the public itself. Journalists have access to a broad range of content posted by audiences on social networks. Greenslade noted that “when stories break it is customary for reporters to do all they can to discover as much as possible about the people involved. The willingness of people to place so much material about themselves on the net has made that task much easier for journalists” (Greenslade, 2008: np). Whereas the media would have had to turn to family or friends to find personal details or photos of people who suddenly find themselves in the headlines, much of this information is available online. Since it is digital, it is searchable, easy to copy, and replicate.

The way the media feeds on the personal material on social media sites raises questions about what can be considered public or private in an Internet age. Boyd argues that “just because people are adopting tools that radically reshape their relationship to privacy does not mean they are interested in giving up their privacy” (boyd, 2010: 50). The public availability of personal information does not necessarily mean that it was intended to be publicized. The issue has led to guidelines over the use of social media content. The BBC for instance acknowledges that while content may be considered to be in the public domain, its use by the broadcaster would expose it to a much wider audience. Its guidelines state that the “ease of availability of pictures does not remove our responsibility to consider the sensitivities in using them,” and that “the fact that material has been placed in the public domain does not necessarily give us the right to exploit its existence, disregarding the consequences” (BBC: nd). The disruption to traditional dynamics of privacy due to social media is requiring journalists and news organizations to reconsider professional practices and ethical approaches to privacy.

## Conclusion

Social media tools and services have become part of the daily routines of many journalists, using them to gather, filter, and disseminate the news. As with every communication technology, there is a process of negotiation as new affordances collide with established norms and practices. Research suggests that many journalists are normalizing social media tools to fit in with existing values.

At the same time, the affordances and culture of social media are influencing how newsrooms are reporting the news, leading to discussions on key principles such as impartiality, verification, and professional behavior. In this ongoing process, “guidelines are being rewritten; social media editors and Twitter correspondents are being appointed; training and awareness programs are under way” (Newman, 2009: 2).

Social media may require a rethink of the role of journalists as the traditional regulators and moderators of public discourse. As Deuze has pointed out, “instead of having some kind of control over the flow of (meaningful, selected, fact-checked) information in the public sphere, journalists today are just some of the many voices in public communication” (Deuze, 2008: 12).

Journalists are facing changes in work routines, in occupational culture, in their relationship to the audience, perhaps even in what it means to be a journalist today. They are operating in a digital and networked ecosystem where the traditional distinction between the producer and consumer of media has been eroded. For media professionals, “in a networked world, there no longer is the ‘journalist,’ ‘audience,’ and ‘source.’ There is only ‘us’” (Singer, 2008: 75).

We are in the early stages of figuring out the “us” in journalism. As with the development of earlier media technologies such as radio and television, what we do, how we do it, and who does it will change and evolve. Likewise, while this chapter has discussed the journalistic uses of Twitter and Facebook, these social platforms may wither and be replaced with others, or become a permanent fixture in the media constellation.

The significance of social media lies less in current services and tools and more in how these networked, asynchronous, distributed, and always-on systems enable dynamic interactions that exalt participation over publication, collaboration over individual authorship, sharing over selfishness, and fluidity over stability. Within journalism, new genres are emerging as newsrooms incorporate social media services into daily routines, from live blogging to crowdsourced investigations. Just as social media is reshaping journalism, journalists are themselves engaged in forming and shaping norms of acceptable, and accepted, professional practice of social media.

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Part V  
Contents



# Online News Reporting of Crisis Events: Investigating the Role of Citizen Witnessing

Stuart Allan

Mumbai Blasts: Taj Hotel is a block from my house! Hostages still inside; still burning; smoke is pouring from windows; pics later

Arun Shanbhag, in Mumbai to visit his parents, live-blogging the crisis

Uh oh, now I'm the guy who liveblogged the Osama raid without knowing it

Sohaib Athar in Abbottabad, Pakistan

What role can the ordinary citizen perform in the online news reporting of crisis events? This question goes to the heart of current debates about citizen journalism, one of the most challenging issues confronting the news media today.

More often than not, efforts to formulate a response draw upon a discourse of witnessing – where terms such as eyewitness, watcher, observer, bystander, onlooker, spectator, and the like, figure prominently – to characterize the capacity of ordinary people (that is to say, non-journalists) to participate in newsmaking by sharing what they have seen, felt, or heard at the scene. Recent years have seen the term “media witnessing” emerge as a way to describe how digital technologies are transforming this capacity to bear witness, encouraging a number of productive lines of enquiry. Definitions tend to vary depending upon disciplinary priorities, but in its most general sense, as Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (2009) pointed out, the term refers to “the witnessing performed *in, by, and through* the media. It is about the systematic and ongoing reporting of the experiences and realities of distant others to mass audiences” (Italics in original; 2009: 1). Here they further specify the term’s remit by suggesting it strives to capture simultaneously “the appearance of witnesses in media reports, the possibility of media themselves bearing witness, and the positioning of media audiences as witnesses to depicted events” (2009: 1). In the case of a television news report, for example, it “may depict

witnesses to an event, bear witness to that event, and turn viewers into witnesses *all at the same time*" (italics in original; 2009: 1). This tripartite distinction warrants further scrutiny for reasons I will explore below, but the theoretical – and journalistic – concerns it highlights nonetheless provide a useful agenda for approaches striving to move beyond the scope of more traditional concepts utilized in analyses of media effectivity.

My primary aim in the course of this chapter's discussion is to discern a conceptual basis to formulate an alternative perspective, one intended to help facilitate efforts to challenge prevailing forms of social exclusion endemic to the "us" and "them" dichotomies that tend to permeate western journalism concerned with crisis events. More specifically, this chapter will offer an evaluative appraisal of diverse attempts to think through media witnessing as a problematic by identifying and critiquing several of the organizing tenets at stake with a view to assessing, in turn, certain wider implications for research investigating ordinary citizens' impromptu involvement in online news reporting. In the course of this discussion, I shall introduce the concept of "citizen witnessing" as one possible way forward to overcome some of the familiar difficulties associated with theorizing citizen journalism and its perceived impact on the rapidly evolving forms, practices, and epistemologies of online news.

Beginning in the next section, then, our attention turns to examine several examples where individuals caught up in crisis situations felt compelled to participate in newsmaking. In bearing witness to what they experienced, often under traumatic circumstances, they engaged in unique forms of journalistic activity, generating first-hand reportage – eyewitness accounts, video footage, digital photographs, tweets, blog posts, and the like – that frequently constituted a vital contribution to the ensuing news coverage.

### Eyewitnesses on the Scene

Widely dubbed as "India's 9/11," the attacks – evidently perpetrated by 10 members of a Pakistan-based militant organization – began to unfold in Mumbai on the evening of November 26, 2008. Several different sites were targeted, including the city's main train station, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CRT), where commuters were shot indiscriminately; Nariman House, associated with the Jewish Chabad Luvavich movement, where 13 hostages were taken (five of whom were murdered); the Trident-Oberoi Hotel, where 30 people were killed; and the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, where most of the casualties took place as the assailants moved from floor to floor in a killing spree. In total, at least 172 people died, and over 300 others were injured, over a 60-hour siege that transfixed horrified news audiences around the globe.

During the crisis, the highly sensationalized forms of news coverage provided by the Indian news media – what critics called the "TV terror" of the 24-hour news channels – were widely condemned for reporting "exclusives" that more often than not proved to be wildly inaccurate rumors (Pepper, 2008; Sonwalkar, 2009; Thussu, 2009). Attracting much more positive attention, however, was the surprising role played by ordinary citizens in gathering information, with the micro-blogging service Twitter regularly singled out for praise as a vital source for real-time citizen news (see also Bahador and Tng, 2010; Matheson and Allan, 2010). "At the peak of the violence," a *New York Times* report

observed, “more than one message per second with the word ‘Mumbai’ in it was being posted onto Twitter, a short-message service that has evolved from an oddity to a full-fledged news platform in just two years” (Stelter and Cohen, 2008). Twitter, the report added, represented the latest example of how technology was “transforming people into potential reporters” (see also Allan, 2002, 2006, 2009, 2012; Allan and Thorsen, 2009; Bahador and Tng, 2010; Matheson and Allan, 2009, 2010; Mortensen, 2012; Reading, 2009; Ibrahim, 2010; Tait, 2011).

Vinukumar Ranganathan’s first thought was to grab his digital camera when he heard the explosions outside his home in Mumbai’s Colaba district, he explained afterward. “When I heard two loud reverberating [noises] in the night around 10:45 pm, I picked my camera bag and headed out,” he told Wired.com. “As I was stepping out my sis said there are reports of firing at CST (train station) – but I suspected it was [a] bomb as it was pretty loud. Turns out they were grenades” (cited in Stirland, 2008). Ranganathan, a 27-year-old business development manager, soon determined that the “grenades were thrown by the terrorist from the terrace of the building on to the adjacent gas station. And they have taken some families hostage ... the situation is still not in control. I have heard 5 gun shots in the last hour” (12 hours after start of the incident!), he added. Amongst the 112 images he uploaded to the photo-sharing site Flickr – “a chilling slideshow,” in the words of an Australian news site (Moses, 2008) – an hour and a half later were several documenting the harrowing destruction left in the wake of the attacks. London’s *Daily Telegraph* credited him for providing “perhaps the most amazing and harrowing first-hand account of the Mumbai attacks,” in a report praising his “series of photos showing mangled cars, bloodstained roads and fleeing crowds” (Beaumont, 2008). Andy Heath (2008), in a post on the Demotix: News by You site, noted how Ranganathan’s “atmospheric and moving images emerged before professional photographers could move into action, and received thousands of views as the crisis unfolded.” Further images were posted over the next three days as he continued to walk the streets. “The pictures are blurry and raw, but, taken together, provide a compelling portrait of this week’s chaos and carnage,” Sam Dolnick (2008) of the Associated Press commented. Regarding his motivation to be involved, Ranganathan explained in an interview: “I just felt that there were lots of people I was communicating with who were also my friends, so it was about the personal connection” (cited in Dolnick, 2008).

Arun Shanbhag, visiting Mumbai from his home in Boston, where he teaches at Harvard Medical School, similarly felt obliged to contribute as he watched one of the fires at the Taj Mahal Palace and Tower Hotel burn, as well as ambulances departing from the Nariman House, from the vantage point of a nearby terrace. In order to relay what he saw and heard, he turned to Twitter to describe the “thud, thud, thud” of gunfire, and to his personal blog and Flickr to upload photographs. An image of the Taj ablaze against the night-time sky was captioned:

Dome of the Taj is nearly all burn’t out! Only the central post remains; the base of the dome is still burning! TV Cameras are located on diagonally opposite side of Taj and cannot see the dome; TV coverage only shows glow from burning dome! TV is now saying that shots are heard inside the Taj and all the terrorists are NOT YET cleared!

Shanbhag, 2008

The next image, a close-up of the fire, was captioned:

OMG! One of the domes of the Taj is on fire; It is burning like a bonfire! I can actually see the structs/frameworks under the tiles in full blaze. OMG! NO! This can't be happening!

~ Hand held; rested my elbow on the sill!; Sorry for blurry images from ~ 10:45 pm.

Shanbhag, 2008

Evidently unaware of the term “citizen journalism” at the time, he later told *The New York Times* that it aptly characterized the reportorial role he was performing. “I felt I had a responsibility to share my view with the outside world,” Shanbhag explained (cited in Stelter and Cohen, 2008). *The Times* was not the only news organization to acknowledge the value of this material from well-placed individuals. Agence France-Press (2008), for example, credited him with providing “a gripping and emotional eye-witness view of the events around the Taj Mahal Hotel,” while Canada’s CTV News, in a news report remarking on the “small army of citizen journalists” involved, stated, “first-hand reports from people like Shanbhag gave global audiences a unique, local perspective – something which traditional media reports can never hope to duplicate” (Stuffco, 2008).

Major news organizations in India and around the globe struggled to cope with the amount of “raw data” relayed via Twitter feeds, desperately trying to separate fact from conjecture for their live reports in what was fast becoming a curatorial role being defined under intense pressure. Further examples of “tweets” included the following:

Mumbai terrorists are asking Hotel Reception for room #s of American citizens and holding them hostage on one floor.

@dupree\_

One terrorist has jumped from Nariman house building to Chabad house – group of police commandos have arrived on scene.

anonymous, #mumbai channel

Special anti-hijacking group called Rangers entering Nariman House, at least 80 commandos.

scorpfromhell

Hospital update. Shots still being fired. Also Metro cinema next door. mumbaiattack  
Blood needed at JJ hospital.

acropolowoman

Fascinating. CNN is filling airtime; #mumbai channel is full of tidbits posted by witnesses.

yelvington

At least 80 dead, 250 injured. American and British targeted.

ArtVega

Tagging posts with the hashtag #mumbai made them easily searchable for other users to find. Saad Khan (2008), at the Green & White blog, described a “Tweets frenzy” where



“minute-by-minute updates about the location of the blasts/skirmishes, positions of the security forces, location of the journalists and safe passages for stranded commuters,” amongst other topics, were shared. While agreed details were in short supply, there was little doubt that users gained a keen sense that news was breaking in “real time” in an extraordinarily dynamic, interactive environment.

Belying the steady stream of messages was the fact that very few of the individuals behind them were actually bearing witness to what was transpiring at the scene. Some bloggers, angered by the “ripple effect” of inaccurate, unfounded – or simply outdated – claims being “retweeted” (re-distributed), challenged the notion that Twitter deserved recognition as a news source. Posting in the early hours of the events was Tom on TomsTechBlog.com, for example, who wrote:

The facts ARE THE NEWS. Nothing else is relevant. In fact, the noise that Twitter generates in situations like these is downright cruel and dangerous.

Let me give you the perfect example of what I mean.

If you watch Twitter you’ll see people reporting an attack at the Marriot Hotel in Mumbai. The problem is there was NO ATTACK on the Marriot. The Ramada hotel next door was attacked by several gun men but nothing’s happened at the Marriot.

Now imagine, if you’re someone who has family or friends at the Marriot right now. You’d be scared out of your mind over information that’s completely false.

I’m sorry but it really makes me angry. What you have here are people who simply don’t care if they get the news right. They’re turning the most dire of situations into entertainment by using Twitter to “be involved in the story.” They throw their little tweets out not caring who they scare half to death and then brag about how great Twitter is for “beating the mainstream media at reporting the news.”

TomsTechBlog.com, November 26, 2008

Blogger Tim Malbon of “Made by Many” described how his positive impression of the coverage on Twitter soon gave way to alarm:

I was awestruck by the live feeds provided at #Mumbai and others (such as Twitter Grid). Having looked around elsewhere, my initial reaction was that the main old-school news agencies like Reuters, CNN, and the BBC just weren’t providing the coverage, in contrast to the truly MASSIVE volume of tweeting going on. But as the evening continued my feelings changed about this, and I started to see [an] ugly side to Twitter, far from being a crowd-sourced version of the news it was actually an incoherent, rumour-fueled mob operating in a mad echo chamber of tweets, re-tweets and re-re-tweets. During the hour or so I followed on Twitter there were wildly differing estimates of the numbers killed and injured – ranging up to 1,000.

Made by Many, November 27, 2008

In the hours following the early reports, the majority of tweets were either relaying secondary observations taken from mainstream news reports, correcting previous messages, or offering links to online sources for fresh perspectives. Examples of the latter were links to sites such as Google Maps, which documented the location of the attacks, as well as Wikipedia and Mahalo, which constantly updated known details. Videos in the dozens were being uploaded to YouTube, while Flickr displayed users’ photographs (“Vinu” posting particularly

grisly images). Sites such as Metblogs Mumbai, GroundReport, Global Voices, NowPublic, Poynter.org, and iReport.com, amongst countless others, were busy aggregating citizen reports. Meanwhile major news organizations were moving swiftly to gather insights. In addition to using tweets as source statements, several news organizations endeavored to interview users for exclusive insights. Reuters drew upon blogging posts, such as one from Dina Mehta's blog ("I've been tweeting almost all night, too, from Mumbai. Upset and angry and bereft"), to supplement its coverage (cited in Lee, 2008). *The New York Times*, via its blog "The Lede," asked its readers in the city to e-mail photographs or to insert a written description of events in the "comment field" on its web page.

In the case of BBC News Online, the site's running account supplemented information provided by the corporation's correspondents with details from news agencies, Indian media reports, official statements, blog posts, e-mails, and Twitter messages – "taking care to source each of these things," as Steve Herrmann (2008), editor of BBC News Interactive, explained. In his words:

As for the Twitter messages we were monitoring, most did not add a great amount of detail to what we knew of events, but among other things they did give a strong sense of what people connected in some way with the story were thinking and seeing. "Appalled at the foolishness of the curious onlookers who are disrupting the NSG operations," wrote one. "Our soldiers are brave but I feel we could have done better," said another. There was assessment, reaction and comment there and in blogs. One blogger's stream of photos on photosharing site Flickr was widely linked to, including by us. All this helped to build up a rapidly evolving picture of a confusing situation.

Herrmann, 2008

Despite these advantages, however, Herrmann and others were aware of the risks associated with using material when its veracity could not be independently verified. One instance of false reporting, repeatedly circulated on Twitter, claimed that the Indian government was alarmed by what was happening on the social network. Fearful that the information being shared from eyewitnesses on the scene was proving to be useful to the attackers, government officials – it was alleged – were urging Twitter users to cease their efforts, while also looking to block Twitter's access to the country itself. On the BBC's Mumbai live event page, it was reported:

1108 Indian government asks for live Twitter updates from Mumbai to cease immediately. "ALL LIVE UPDATES – PLEASE STOP TWEETING about #Mumbai police and military operations," a tweet says.

The BBC was widely criticized by some commentators for reporting a claim that was later revealed to be untrue. Speaking with the benefit of hindsight, Herrmann responded to questions regarding the decision to post it:

Should we have checked this before reporting it? Made it clearer that we hadn't? We certainly would have done if we'd wanted to include it in our news stories (we didn't) or to carry it without attribution. In one sense, the very fact that this report was circulating online was one small detail of the story that day. But should we have tried to check it and then

reported back later, if only to say that we hadn't found any confirmation? I think in this case we should have, and we've learned a lesson. The truth is, we're still finding out how best to process and relay such information in a fast-moving account like this.

Herrmann, 2008

Bearing these constraints in mind, he believed it was justifiable for the BBC to be sharing what it knew as quickly as possible, even before facts had been fully checked, as a general principle. In this way, users gain an insight into how a major story is being put together, even when it entails having to accept some responsibility for assessing the quality – and reliability – of the information being processed.

In assessing the implications of what had happened for online journalism, several commentators – despite misgivings about the quality or reliability of much of the information being conveyed – recognized that some sort of transitional moment, if not a major tipping point, had occurred. “Mumbai is likely to be viewed in hindsight as the first instance of the paradigmatic shift in crisis coverage,” Alexander Wolfe (2008) of *Information Week* declared; “namely, journalists will henceforth no longer be the first to bring us information. Rather, they will be a conduit for the stream of images and video shot by a mix of amateurs and professionals on scene.” Jeff Jarvis (2008), in his assessment of the news coverage of the crisis, concurred. “The witnesses are taking over the news,” he argued. Reports from witnesses relayed via Twitter, blogs, Flickr, Wikipedia, and the like – as well as citizen-powered sites such as GroundReport, Global Voices, and NowPublic – proved vital. People’s “urgent need to share what they knew” compelled them to get involved, adopting “journalistic functions – reporting, gathering, organising, verifying – that anyone can now take on.”

Twitter, time and again, won plaudits for capturing the rawness of the tragedy in reportorial terms. “Last night,” Claudine Beaumont of the *Daily Telegraph* pointed out, “the social web came of age” (*Daily Telegraph*, November 27, 2008). Stephanie Busari (2008) of CNN agreed: “It was the day social media appeared to come of age and signaled itself as a news-gathering force to be reckoned with.” This was not to deny its limitations as a trustworthy news source, but rather to acknowledge the potential of social networking for first-hand crisis news, and thereby an important dimension to digital war reporting (see also Matheson and Allan, 2009). “It was Twitter’s moment,” wrote Brian Caulfield and Naazneen Karmali (2008) in *Forbes.com*, the service having been transformed from one specializing in “distributing short, personal updates to tight networks of friends and acquaintances into a way for people around the world to tune into personal, real-time accounts of the attacks.” The challenges to make the most of this resource were formidable, they pointed out, not least with the blurring of professional and amateur roles. “In other words, we’re all journalists now,” they added. “Let’s just hope none of us wind up being combat reporters, as so many in Mumbai did this week.”

## Witnessing in a Digital Era

Social networking’s rise to journalistic prominence continued in the days and months ahead. When street protests broke out in Greece several days later, many of the young people demonstrating against state institutions, not least the police, called upon social

media to shape the articulation – and coordination – of their dissent. While their actions were widely condemned by the authorities, the eventual success of their intervention – its ethos spelled out in banners such as “Stop watching, get out into the streets” – was such that then Conservative Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis conceded in a speech to parliamentary colleagues: “Long-unresolved problems, such as the lack of meritocracy, corruption in everyday life and a sense of social injustice disappoint young people” (cited on BBC News Online, December 17, 2008). Few had anticipated the scope and intensity of the student outrage, nor their conversancy in new forms of digital communication. Journalists were as surprised as anyone else, a point underlined in a headline from the Reuters (2008) news agency: “Protestors rule the web in internet backwater Greece.” More to the point, the crisis provided evidence that every citizen could be a front-line correspondent, a prospect which called into question the viability of the mainstream news media to lead on breaking news – as well as their capacity to set the news agenda (see also Morozov, 2008). New media – ranging from blogs and forums to “radicalised” Facebook pages – “directed the flow of information” in the larger “struggle for meaning,” Maria Komninos and Vassilis Vamvakas (2009) argued, leaving the major news organizations, especially the commercial television channels, “obliged to report on and to follow, basically, the information originating in the internet.”

Further instances of young people’s use of social media for organizational and newsmaking purposes – sometimes dubbed a “Twitter protest” or “Twitter revolution” – attracted periodic attention in the mainstream media over the following months. In Moldova in April 2009, for example, young protestors took to the streets to condemn what they regarded as election fraud involving members of the Communist Party. “We decided to organise a flash mob for the same day using Twitter, as well as networking sites and SMS,” explained one of the organisers; “we expected at the most a couple of hundred friends, friends of friends, and colleagues,” she added. “When we went to the square, there were 20,000 people waiting there. It was unbelievable” (cited in Stack, 2009). Violent clashes ensued, with tweets relaying images and video clips of confrontations with police, as well as the destruction of windows and furniture in the Parliament building. Shortly thereafter, then-President Vladimir Voronin relented, agreeing to a recount of the votes.

Social networking strategies proved similarly indispensable during the G20 summit in London the same month. Amongst the estimated 35 000 people demonstrating peacefully were a small number of protestors, some involved with anarchist groups, intent on violent confrontations with the police. “Amateur” stills and video imagery, much of it shot using mobile telephones, recorded several clashes in shocking detail. One incident, in particular, ignited a major controversy, namely the actions of a police officer knocking passer-by Ian Tomlinson to the ground. Tomlinson, a newspaper seller, collapsed and died after being hit by a baton. The Metropolitan police’s initial denial that an officer had been involved was flatly contradicted by evidence revealed by the *Guardian* six days later, namely a video clip documenting the assault handed over to it by an American visitor to the city. For journalist Nik Gowing (2009), the citizen bystander who “happened to bear witness electronically” represented a telling example of how non-professional “information doers” were “driving a wave of democratisation and accountability” redefining the nature

of power. “The new ubiquitous transparency they create,” he observed, “sheds light where it is often assumed officially there will be darkness.”

June of that year saw major public demonstrations in the aftermath of Iran’s disputed presidential election, with many young Iranians performing roles akin to citizen journalists in order to document what was happening (western journalists having been barred from reporting the protests). Amongst the images assuming an almost iconic status were those taken from grisly mobile telephone footage of 27-year-old Neda Agha Soltan bleeding to death on the street (she had been shot in the chest, reportedly by a Basij paramilitary). Relayed to the world’s news media, this “amateur” footage captured by a bystander and uploaded to the web transformed Neda into a symbol of the opposition, galvanizing support in Iranian diasporas as well as focusing international attention (see also Ghanavizi, 2011; Khiabany and Sreberny, 2009). “The killing of Neda Agha-Soltan, the grisly images of blood spreading across her face, have become perhaps the defining sequence in the 10-day uprising against the regime in Tehran,” Robert Tait and Matthew Weaver (2009) of the *Guardian* observed at the time. “Like much of the footage that has emerged from Tehran in recent days, the authenticity and circumstances behind the video could not be verified,” they added. “But Agha-Soltan was quickly lionised by an engaged online community inside and outside Iran,” effectively “mythologised as a martyr to the opposition’s cause, a rallying call for a protest movement in need of a hero.”

In July, demonstrations by Uighur protestors (a Turkic-speaking Muslim group) in the western region of Xinjiang, China were met by police officers wielding fire hoses and batons, sparking “ethnic riots” that reportedly left 156 people dead and more than 800 injured. The central government, in the words of a *New York Times* reporter, took “the usual steps to enshrine its version of events as received wisdom: it crippled Internet service, blocked Twitter’s micro-blogs, purged search engines of unapproved references to the violence, saturated the Chinese media with the state-sanctioned story” (Wines, 2009). Nevertheless, once again young people’s use of social media succeeded in offering real-time personal updates, even though official censors were moving swiftly to respond. “When we heard that something had happened in Xinjiang, we all went online to try to find some information,” one Beijing-based writer, Woesser, stated. “There were some people posting their own personal accounts of what was happening on [social media sites, such as Youku and Fanfou, as well as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and MSN messenger: see RSF, 2009]. But these were often removed very soon after posting. I’m talking about a matter of minutes,” she said (cited in RFA, 2009). Within hours of the protests getting underway, the flow of news and information had been reduced to a trickle by the authorities. “It just goes to show that the government has a very advanced capability when it comes to controlling information online. They are very fast and efficient,” Woesser added. “[After these accounts] were removed, the only voice that could still be heard was the official line” (see also HRW, 2009).

These are a small number of examples drawn from a myriad of alternatives which, taken together, highlight some of the ways in which ordinary individuals are engaging in what I am electing to call “citizen witnessing” (see also Allan, 2012). In order to draw out its precepts for purposes of elucidation, we first turn to consider pertinent aspects of citizen journalism’s guiding tenets, norms, values, and priorities. Despite its

ambiguities, the latter term appears to capture something of the countervailing ethos of the ordinary person's capacity to bear witness, thereby providing commentators with a useful label to characterize an ostensibly new genre of reporting. In the years since the South Asian tsunami of 2004, when it was appropriated into the journalistic lexicon (for better or otherwise in the view of many news organizations), the significance of its role in crisis reporting has been effectively normalized – that is, to the extent that what was once regarded as an unusual, exceptional contribution has now become conventionalized into an almost routine feature of breaking news. It is described variously as “grassroots journalism,” “open source journalism,” “participatory journalism,” “hyperlocal journalism,” “distributed journalism,” or “networked journalism” (as well as “user-generated content”), among other terms, but there is little doubt that it is recasting crisis reporting's protocols in profound ways (see also Allan, 2006; Allan and Thorsen, 2009).

While this process of consolidation continues apace, our attention turns to considering a key feature of these emergent reportorial dynamics that warrants closer scrutiny than it has typically received in academic scholarship to date. For understandable reasons, researchers have stressed the importance of investigating what counts as “journalism” in this context (and thereby who is entitled to lay claim to the mantle of “journalist”), namely because the professional–amateur divide has proven to be so fiercely contested across a range of contexts. In the remaining portion of this chapter, however, it is citizen witnessing – that is, the capacity of the ordinary citizen, who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, with the presence of mind, even courage to bear witness to crisis events – that will be centered for discussion.

## Here and Now

The value of “being there,” on the scene as events progress, has been recognized since the earliest days of journalism. Viewed from the perspective of the news media, the capacity of the journalist to serve as a trustworthy, reliable witness in the heat of a crisis – and also, crucially, to negotiate the terms delimiting the eyewitnessing of others – underpins the discursive legitimacy of first-hand reporting, both for those who are there, and for those at a distance (for whom the ensuing coverage is likely to shape perceptions, possibly in decisive ways). This is a formidable challenge, not least because eyewitnessing is as conditional as it is provisional, and as such is fraught with difficulties. The authority of presence, a situational imbrication of “here and now,” is a precarious achievement, one always at risk of coming unraveled, such are the tensions besetting human understanding, interpretation, and memory. Somewhat paradoxically, however, it is this very appeal to eyewitness subjectivity that throws into sharp relief the codified strictures of journalistic impartiality. The proclaimed capacity of the journalistic gaze to be impersonal, detached, and dispassionate in its purview is a tacit, yet telling feature of the professional ethos.

Indeed, Barbie Zelizer (2007) suggests that the most salient feature of eyewitnessing – namely, “its ability to convince publics of the distant experience or event in a seemingly unmediated style” – goes to the heart of its centrality to newsgathering (2007: 424). In tracking the evolution of “eyewitnessing” as a keyword of journalistic practice in the

USA, she helpfully discerns four stages in its development as a means to validate certain preferred norms in the accounting of reality collectively recognized by members of the journalistic community to be appropriate (see also Zelizer, 2002, 2010).

In the first period, broadly aligned with journalism emerging as a recognizable craft centuries ago, the idea of the eyewitness report appears as a means to express personal experience of public events, Zelizer maintains. Typically they were furnished by “nonjournalistic individuals,” whose personal accounts tended to emphasize “romanticized, overtly subjective and stylistically elaborate features” in keeping with the highly emotive – and rather colorful – tenor of most chronicles of the time. The second period, underway by the mid-1800s, signals the expansion of this role to include a more diverse array of participants, not least journalists themselves, self-consciously acting as eyewitnesses. The style of their reports, Zelizer argues, “became more concrete and reality-driven,” that is, more reliable in their rendering of facts in response to public skepticism about their trustworthiness. Eyewitnessing’s closer alignment with realism was not without its problems, but increasingly it was being regarded as connoting the mark of authenticity as a value in its own right – news photography, in particular, offering “an alternative way of claiming eyewitness status that offset the limitations of verbal narratives” (2007: 417). The expansion of technology in the early twentieth century characterizes a third period, where alternative kinds of eyewitnessing are made possible to lend credibility and authenticity to a report’s claims by virtue of the journalist’s enhanced capacity to represent on-site presence. By the end of the Second World War, “eyewitnessing had become a default setting for good reportage,” she maintains, with news organizations speaking of it “as if it had almost a mythic status” (2007: 421). And, fourthly, the contemporary period is discernible on the basis of the journalist’s absence, that is, his or her frequent replacement by technological relay (where forms of “unmanned” live coverage have “moved style, subjectivity and person from eyewitnessing, leaving it seemingly unedited and disembodied”), on the one hand, or by the private citizen acting as a “non-conventional” journalist performing the work of eyewitnessing, on the other. Concerns about issues such as reliability, accuracy, verifiability, even excessive graphicness, are not being adequately offset, in turn, by journalistic mitigation, including contextualization, the way they were before. To the extent eyewitnessing is being “outsourced,” Zelizer fears, it risks undermining journalism’s cultural authority in public life.

While each of these periods would reward closer critique in a broader study, here they usefully signal the importance of attending to the evolving, socially contingent nature of the imperatives shaping witnessing in a manner sensitive to historical and cultural specificities. Delving into these matters, however, it soon becomes all too apparent that questions regarding precisely what this process of witnessing entails, especially where online journalism is concerned, invite a reconsideration of the conceptual vocabulary typically brought to bear in discussions of news reportage and its proclaimed influence on the perceptions of distant readers, listeners, and viewers.

In his book *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty*, John Ellis (2000) places the concept under sustained, thoughtful scrutiny in a manner that chimes with our purposes here. “The twentieth century has been the century of witness,” he suggests, a claim informed by what he regards to be a profound shift in the way that we perceive the world existing beyond our immediate experience (2000: 9). As he explains:

During this century, industrial society has embarked upon a course that provides us as its citizens with more and more information about events that have no direct bearing upon our own lives, yet have an emotional effect upon us simply by the fact of their representation and our consequent witness of them. The fact that the representation, on the news, is necessarily skimpy and inadequate, snatched from the living event, makes our role as witnesses all the more difficult. The events cannot be poignant because they are radically incomplete: they exist in almost the same moment as we do when we see them. They demand explanation, they incite curiosity, revulsion and the usually frustrated or passing desire for action. We need, in other words, to work them through.

Ellis, 2000: 80

This Freudian inflection of “working through” is important to Ellis because it helps to highlight how the media process forms of visual evidence – effectively worrying them over until they are exhausted – when striving to explain the witnessed world in all of its complexity. Television, in particular, “works over new material for its audiences as a necessary consequence of its position of witness,” he writes. It “attempts definitions, tries out explanations, creates narratives, talks over, makes intelligible, tries to marginalize, harnesses speculation, tries to make fit, and, very occasionally, anathemizes” (2000: 79). For Ellis, then, it is the ensuing “sensation of witness” that is a crucial, yet largely unexplored, dimension of this process of mediation, only part of which is expressed in the familiar phrase “seeing is believing” so often used to characterize this dynamic of perception.

Media images, it follows, draw us into the position of being witnesses, where what is rendered visible in front of the camera becomes undeniable. We know about genocide; we know about the calculation of death in millions, Ellis maintains. “We know about famine and absolute poverty. We know because we have seen the images and heard the sounds which convey them,” which makes it impossible for us to claim ignorance as a defence (2000: 9–10). By this logic, we are necessarily implicated as “accomplices” in the events in question, namely because we have seen what happened when they transpired (or, more typically, their distressing aftermath) in the media reportage. Our “complicity” is engendered by this relationship to what is seen, Ellis argues, because knowledge of an event implies a degree of consent to it. Even though we may be witnesses in another time or a different space, the event depicted makes a silent appeal to our conscience: “You cannot say you did not know.” Still, he cautions, this is not to suggest that to witness an event “in all of its audio-visual fullness” is the equivalent of being present at the scene in question. “There is too much missing, both in sensory evidence (no smell, no tactile sense) and, more importantly, in social involvement” (2000: 11). At stake, Ellis contends, is the way in which the audio-visual, as a form of witness, offers what he terms “a distinct, and new, modality of experience.” This feeling of witness may be one of separation and powerlessness (events unfold, regardless) or, alternatively, the opposite. “It enables the viewer to overlook events, to see them from more points of view than are possible for someone physically present: to see from more angles, closer and further away, in slow and fast motion, repeated and refined” (2000: 11). Television news, to the degree it affords the viewer a sense of co-presence with the event it seeks to document, turns the act of witness into an everyday, intimate act in the private home.



In the years since the publication of *Seeing Things*, a number of theorists have sought to further elaborate similar lines of enquiry. John Durham Peters (2001), taking his cue from Ellis, proposes that witnessing “is an intricately tangled practice,” one that “raises questions of truth and experience, presence and absence, death and pain, seeing and saying, and the trustworthiness of perception – in short, fundamental questions of communication” (2001: 707). Whilst concurring with Ellis in the main, Peters places greater emphasis on the positive aspects of this “common but rarely examined term” of “witnessing,” briefly highlighting how three different domains – law (“the procedures of the courtroom”), theology (“the pain of the martyr”) and atrocity (“the cry of the survivor”) – have endowed it with “extraordinary moral and cultural force.” In seeking to clarify matters, he points out that in journalism “a witness is an observer or source possessing privileged (raw, authentic) proximity to facts,” a commitment it shares with law, as well as literature and history. “A witness,” he writes, “can be an actor (one who bears witness), an act (the making of a special sort of statement), the semiotic residue of that act (the statement as text) or the inward experience that authorizes the statement (the witnessing of an event)” (2001: 709). As a verb, he adds, to witness signals a double quality: it can be a sensory experience, involving one’s own eyes and ears in the witnessing of an event, as well as a discursive act, where one’s experience is stated for the benefit of an audience elsewhere. “Witnesses,” in this latter regard, “serve as the surrogate sense-organs of the absent” (2001: 709). Nevertheless, he readily concedes, this proclaimed “presence-at-a-distance” is fraught with difficulties, which warrant much greater attention than they have typically received. “In media events,” he writes, “the borrowed eyes and ears of the media become, however tentatively or dangerously, one’s own. Death, distance and distrust are all suspended, for good and evil” (2001: 717).

A continuum of sorts is thus apparent between Ellis, with his emphasis on the ordinary, even mundane everydayness of witnessing via television, on the one end, and Peters, who underlines its extraordinariness, involving “mortal bodies in time” quite likely to be in “peril and risk,” on the other. Tamar Ashuri and Amit Pinchevski (2009), while aligning themselves with the general position adopted by Peters, proceed to elaborate an alternative stance. Different events, they suggest, “give rise to different modalities of witnessing,” namely because “the ontology of witnessing is dependent on its context” (2009: 133). Being a witness, it follows, “is subject to constant struggle, not privilege; it is something to be accomplished, not simply given” (2009: 136). In theorizing witnessing as a practice “entangled with conflict and power,” they succeed in accentuating the importance of attending to the “contested ground of experience” in a manner that complicates rationalist, reason-based models in advantageous ways. Carrie Rentschler (2004, 2009) similarly stresses the need to think through questions of experience, maintaining that to witness “means far more than to just ‘watch’ or ‘see;’ it is also a form of bodily and political participation in what people see and document that is often masked by their perceived distance from events” (2004: 298). In proposing that witnessing be regarded as a form of participation necessarily implicated in the pain or suffering of others, then, she draws out of the concept of mediation of certain tensions associated with complicity highlighted by Ellis (2000) above. “Witnessing needs to become part of a larger political and ethical mobilization towards the eradication of violence,” she argues, which will demand a “different kind of media documentation, one

that can help teach people how to act as responsible citizens, with a commitment to social justice, through acts of witness” (2004: 302; see also Ellis, 2012).

Few would dispute the globalization of media is crucial in this regard, even if attendant public spheres, as John Keane (2003) argues in *Global Civil Society?*, “are still rather issue-driven and more effective at presenting effects than probing the intentions of actors and the structural causes of events” (2003: 169; see also Papacharissi, 2010). Anticipating Rentschler’s point above about the teaching of citizenship, he suggests that global audiences are frequently being taught lessons in “flexible citizenship,” where boundaries between “native” and “foreigner” blur, just as a sense of ethical responsibility converges with a cosmopolitan affectivity (2003: 170). In his words:

By witnessing others’ terrible suffering, at a distance, millions are sometimes shaken and disturbed, sometimes to the point where they are prepared to speak to others, to donate money or time, or to support the general principle that the right of humanitarian intervention – the obligation to assist someone in danger, as contemporary French law puts it – can and should override the old crocodilian formula that might equals right.

Keane, 2003: 171

Issues associated with “distant suffering,” a recurrent theme in pertinent scholarship, assume an added complexity when considered in relation to how journalistic mediations of witnessing encourage (as well as dampen, or dissuade) a shared sense of pathos – the “politics of pity,” as Hannah Arendt (1990) described it – amongst those looking on from afar (see Moeller 1999, on “compassion fatigue,” as well as Boltanski, 1999; Butler, 2009; Campbell, 2007; Cohen, 2001; Cottle, 2009; Frosh, 2006; Hesford, 2004; Kurasawa, 2009; W. Mitchell, 2011; Sontag, 2003; Tester, 2001; Zelizer, 2010). Lilie Chouliaraki (2006, 2010) suggests that “an economy of witnessing” is consistently evident in the journalistic presentation of suffering, “an economy that controls the boundaries of taste and decency and the linguistic practices of display in ways that are politically, rather than morally or aesthetically, motivated” (2010: 522). Of concern to her is the relative space afforded to the questioning of the “truth” of the reported event, and the extent to which reporting invites a particular moral response as “authentic” – or not, as the case may be – such that the boundaries “between us and the Other” are subtly policed in ideological terms.

Considered from the vantage point of the citizen journalist undertaking to bear witness to traumatic events, then, issues concerning truth, morality, and authenticity assume a complexity otherwise overlooked by bold, celebratory assertions about “global citizenship” in digital public spheres. In rounding out this chapter’s discussion, our attention turns in the next section to consider one further example of crisis reporting with a view to discerning additional contours of what I am describing here as citizen witnessing.

### **“Accidental Journalism”**

The arrival of a low-flying helicopter above Sohaib Athar’s quiet suburban neighborhood in a small town in northern Pakistan was unusual, not least because it was the middle of the night. Unusual enough to warrant a tweet, in any case, so he promptly

reported “Helicopter hovering above Abbottabad at 1 AM (is a rare event)” on Twitter. Self-described on his @ReallyVirtual account as an “IT consultant taking a break from the rat-race by hiding in the mountains with his laptops,” Athar typically tweeted about his daily concerns, ranging from his family to views on technology, politics, and coffee (he and his wife manage a café) in the hope that his musings would be appreciated by his 750 or so followers. On this occasion, however, he decided to share his growing irritation with the helicopter’s noisy intrusion when to his astonishment a sudden explosion cut through the night. “A huge window shaking bang here in Abbottabad Cantt. I hope its not the start of something nasty :-S” he tweeted, before turning to process further points of information rapidly emerging from his online network of friends in the local community. In the tweets that followed, Athar relayed assertions – gathered primarily from friends on Facebook – that more than one helicopter was involved, they appeared to be non-Pakistani, the explosion sounded like one of them being “shot down near the Bilal Town area” (a link to a Facebook map pinpointed the area), and a “gunfight” had erupted that “lasted perhaps 4–5 minutes,” whether fact or rumor, he could not be certain. “Report from a taxi driver: The army has cordoned off the crash area and is conducting door-to-door search in the surrounding[s],” he added, followed soon after by “Report from a sweeper: A family also died in the crash, and one of the helicopter riders got away and is now being searched for.” Little did Athar know at the time that his efforts to offer a first-hand description of what he aptly termed in one tweet a “complicated situation” would resonate around the planet in the hours to follow.

Elsewhere on Twitter, rumors were swirling that an impromptu White House press conference was being organized, with much of the conjecture revolving around the possibility that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi had been captured or killed. Official confirmation that a televised statement was being prepared appeared at 9:45 pm when White House communications director Dan Pfeiffer tweeted “POTUS to address the nation tonight at 10.30 pm eastern time” (POTUS being President of the United States, Barack Obama) on Sunday, May 1, 2011. Speculation regarding possible reasons for an announcement intensified even further before Keith Urbahn, a former political aide to ex-defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld, passed along a tip at 10:25 pm from an inside source, stating: “So I’m told by a reputable person they have killed Osama Bin Laden. Hot damn.” Urbahn promptly cautioned against getting ahead of the facts, tweeting “Don’t know if its true, but let’s pray it is” and “Ladies, gents, let’s wait to see what the President says. Could be misinformation or pure rumor.” Evidently within minutes, anonymous sources at the Pentagon and the White House began contacting major news organizations with the same information, leading the ABC, CBS, and NBC television networks to interrupt their programming with the news (Stelter, 2011). When at 11:35 pm, more than an hour after Urbahn’s unconfirmed tweet, Obama addressed his television audience, he announced “justice has been done” in response to Osama bin Laden’s responsibility for orchestrating the vicious attack of September 11, 2001. “The death of Bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation’s effort to defeat Al Qaeda [...]” he stated. “So his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity” (Obama, 2011).

While media commentaries focused on assessing the wider implications of the US intervention for national security in the main, questions regarding how the news had

come to light in the first place also attracted attention. Proving particularly contentious, in the eyes of some, was whether Twitter's role signalled a victory for social media networking over established media where covering breaking news was concerned. Amongst those heralding the microblogging service's "scoop" were those enthusing about how it was transforming into the preferred medium for "people in the know" to bypass traditional channels altogether. Others, closely scrutinizing how the process proceeded so swiftly, emphasized the converging factors involved. "Keith Urbahn wasn't the first to speculate Bin Laden's death, but he was the one who gained the most trust from the network," computer analyst Gilad Lotan (2011) pointed out. "And with that, the perfect situation unfolded, where timing, the right social-professional networked audience, along with a critically relevant piece of information led to an explosion of public affirmation of his trustworthiness." Here it seems likely that Urbahn's perceived credibility was due to the presumption that Rumsfeld had supplied the information in the first place, when in actuality Urbahn had been called by a "connected network TV news producer" (as described in a later tweet) hoping to gain his insight into Rumsfeld's reaction to the raid's outcome. Interestingly, where Sohaib Athar was concerned, he readily acknowledged that several hours had passed before he realized – courtesy of a tweet making the connection – that he had been documenting aspects of the US military's top-secret strike some 250 yards from where he lived. "Uh oh, now I'm the guy who liveblogged the Osama raid without knowing it," he tweeted. Deluged by requests from journalists for an interview, he resisted efforts to overstate the significance of his actions. "I am JUST a tweeter, awake at the time of the crash. Not many twitter users in Abbottabad, these guys are more into facebook. That's all."

Others weighing into the debate over the journalistic role of social media made a much stronger argument for its importance. "Twitter just had its CNN moment," Matt Rosoff (2011) of *Business Insider* boldly declared in the immediate aftermath.

Remember CNN when the Gulf War started in 1990? Before then, it was watched mostly by obsessive news followers – people in finance and government, political science professors, insomniacs. Then Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and suddenly CNN was everywhere. Even in bars.

That's what's going to happen with Twitter after tonight's announcement that U.S. Special Forces killed Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, a Pakistani city about two hours from the capital Islamabad.

Rosoff, 2011

In crediting Twitter with being "faster, more accurate, and more entertaining than any other news source out there," Rosoff underlined the importance of speed in redefining news priorities. Steve Myers (2011a) of The Poynter Institute appeared to concur to some extent, especially in light of how the number of Athar's followers had leapt from 750 to 86 000 within 24 hours. This suggested to him that the reason this unwitting "ear witness" to bin Laden's death became so influential so quickly was because of Twitter's capacity to facilitate bridging networks, in this instance between those with Pakistan connections, on the one hand, and those with media connections, on the other. The emergent chain of information – consisting of overlapping social circles of like-minded tweeters sharing their thoughts and observations – served to turn "one man's

offhand comments about a helicopter in the middle of the night into an internationally known work of citizen journalism,” in Myers’s opinion.

Dan Mitchell (2011), writing for *SF Weekly*’s blog, begged to differ. While conceding that Athar’s real-time tweets about the events may have temporarily made him a journalist “in a small way,” there was little evidence that his efforts actually mattered. “Wondering on Twitter why there are helicopters flying around your neighborhood isn’t journalism,” he argued. “The world learned that bin Laden had been assassinated after the U.S. government told several big news organizations that that would be the subject of Obama’s forthcoming announcement” (D. Mitchell, 2011). Twitter’s value is in its role as a real-time headline service, in his view, with little prospect that its use will lead to the demise of traditional news media anytime soon. Myers (2011b), writing in response to Mitchell’s skepticism, stressed that Athar was a citizen journalist “because when he came across an unusual event, he acted in a journalistic manner.” More specifically, he pointed out that not only did Athar tell others about the event in question, he answered questions from others seeking further details, acted as a conduit for information as he gathered it, identified whether claims were rumor or linked to sources (“taxi driver,” “sweeper,” and so forth), shared links to accounts from local news sources, contributed to collective efforts to determine precisely what was occurring, and offered his own analysis. “Any one of these activities may simply amount to conversation among friends,” Myers maintained. “Taken together, it looks like journalism.” Moreover, in the days following the raid, Athar used Twitter as a “distribution network” to post photographs of the compound, near-empty Abbottabad streets (traffic having been shut down), and the media arriving on the scene to cover the story. All aspects considered, “Athar added to the body of knowledge. We know more about the raid, and about how people share information, because of him. That’s a good thing,” he concluded.

More than a passing dispute over semantics, then, thorny questions begin to emerge over the relative status to be granted to “accidental journalism,” as some perceive it, or the ad hoc sharing of impressions, opinions, and observations of nominal significance, as others would insist citizen involvement in newsmaking recurrently represents. Still others would contend that it is a blending of the two that typically produces such remarkable forms of coverage, with those who played a pivotal part in bringing Athar’s real-time dispatches to the attention of major news organizations being a case in point.

Chris Applegate (2011), self-described on his personal blog as a “geek and wannabe polymath,” was widely credited with making the connection between Athar’s tweets about the helicopter above his neighborhood and the bin Laden raid. As he later explained on his blog, Maha Rafi Atal, his journalist girlfriend, had shown him a retweet about a “low-flying heli” in Abbottabad, which made him wonder whether anyone in Pakistan had been covering the raid as it unfolded. Using Google Realtime, he searched for tweets with the word “Abbottabad” appearing prior to Obama’s speech, almost instantly discovering Athar’s tweets. He promptly tweeted to his own followers: “Wow. Turns out at least one person, @ReallyVirtual, inadvertently live-blogged the raid in Abbottabad earlier today <http://bit.ly/IU5b4s>,” thereby playing a decisive role in breaking this dimension of the story for the world’s media. In Applegate’s view, the “whole episode shows how transformative Twitter can be,”

enabling someone like Athar to assume “the role of citizen journalist, becoming a correspondent of sorts” as the news story developed:

The key thing that made Sohaib’s liveblogging from earlier in the day so compelling was that it was completely unwitting, mirroring our own disbelief that Bin Laden had been quietly residing in the Pakistani equivalent of Tunbridge Wells all these years, without any of us knowing. The story chimed perfectly with our own emotions. And because the story had been unwitting, it was also candid and honest, cutting through the hype and speculation that the 24-hour news stations were resorting to.

Applegate, 2011

Modestly describing himself as “one small factor that sparked the process off,” Applegate expresses his admiration for how Athar proceeded to engage in diverse forms of journalistic activity – conducting interviews, taking photographs, reporting on the mood in the town – as “the story matured and his fame rose.” Athar’s efforts, in his view, were “a far cry from the cynical caricature of Twitter as an echo chamber – a place where nothing new is said and everything is relentlessly retweeted” (Applegate, 2011).

Interestingly, Applegate’s girlfriend, Maha Rafi Atal (2011), a New York-based freelance journalist and Forbes blogger, responded to his blog post. After adding a few further details about how she came to share with him the tweet that piqued his curiosity to investigate (crucial here, she points out, was how she happens to “sit at the intersection of two networks: the network of people who follow news on Pakistan, and the network of American journalists, media critics and wonks”), she offered her own views about Athar’s status as a citizen journalist. In her words:

At least for me, the power of Athar’s story was as a reminder that “war zones” are also people’s homes. It brought to life the mundane details of daily life, and the poignant struggle of trying to live daily life – in Athar’s case, just to have a quiet work night – in one of the most dangerous and maddening countries on earth. As Athar told me when I interviewed him for Forbes, he moved to Abbottabad a few years ago from Lahore precisely to shield his family from the violence then engulfing the city.

She continues:

What we saw in his tweets was a man who had run from the madness only to have it running after him. What we witnessed was the moment he realized it had caught up with him. That tension between what people really care about in Pakistan and the violence that prevents them from moving on with their lives, the bitter irony of life there, is something I’ve written on often. Yet no matter how much reporting I do, it doesn’t cease to affect me emotionally. And when, after the news about bin Laden had broken, Athar realized what had happened, and began to receive an avalanche of requests from journalists, he tweeted, “Bin Laden is dead. I didn’t kill him. Please let me sleep now.” For me, that’s an absolute punch to the gut.

Atal, 2011

Like Applegate, she proceeds to express her appreciation for the way Athar took on the role of citizen journalist under such trying circumstances. “I think this is very

much the ideal of how social media and citizen journalism is meant to work,” she wrote. “Not everyone can grow into their new status as a one-person-broadcast-network with such speed and grace, which is why I’m so often skeptical of how it will evolve as a model, but Athar’s transformation is nothing short of a triumph” (Atal, 2011).

## Conclusion

In seeking to elaborate the concept of what I am calling “citizen witnessing,” this chapter has endeavored to disrupt the conceptual purchase of the familiar binarisms associated with the professional versus amateur debate by closely scrutinizing several examples of crisis reporting that bring these tensions to the fore. The emphasis placed on discerning the subtle dynamics of witnessing has been shown to be advantageous, in my view, not least because it encourages us to attend to issues otherwise at risk of being glossed over in ongoing disputes over who is entitled to lay claim to “journalism” when characterizing the lived materiality of their activities. The ensuing discussion has highlighted the varying degrees of investment individual citizens were prepared to make in defining their contributions in reportorial terms. Equally noteworthy, however, has been the extent to which the desire to bear witness, to document “being there” on the scene, informed their commitment to share what they experienced first-hand with distant others.

Confronted with crisis situations, major news organizations tend to mobilize certain preferred, ritualized strategies and procedures to determine what to report – how best to do it, and why – which necessarily implicate them in a discursive politics of mediation. This chapter has sought to identify a number of the ways in which citizen witnessing is helping to reconfigure this geometry of informational power, namely through the evolving capacity of individuals to reclaim the discursive terrain of the “the field of media witnessing,” as Ashuri and Pinchevski (2009) designate it. Professional decision-making concerning the priorities of witnessing – routinely enabled and constrained by appeals to impartiality – prove open to contestation when the normative criteria giving shape to tacit rules of inclusion and exclusion are recast by citizen-centered perspectives rendered by mobile digital technologies harnessing the power of social networks. Bearing witness consistently encounters formidable difficulties, however, not least because incidents deemed “witnessable” will always prove unruly, disruptive, and frustratingly elusive. “Witnessing traffics in pieces, parts, and circumstantial details,” Peters (2009) points out, “not in stories with beginnings, middles, and ends (which are the province of active witnessing, of saying rather than seeing)” (2009: 45). And yet, paradoxically, it is the invocation of storyness – news storyness – that underwrites the journalist’s imperative to narrativize the fleeting realities of traumatic events. The challenge for online journalism, it follows, is to create spaces for citizen witnessing with the capacity to foster points of human connection, and in so doing affirm principles of trust, responsibility, and emphatic engagement to counter the forms of social exclusion endemic to the “us” and “them” dichotomies otherwise permeating so much news reporting of crisis, pain, and suffering.

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# Contribution to an Online Journalism Language: Multimedia Grammar

João Canavilhas

## Introduction

The recent history of journalism is irrevocably mixed with the history of the Internet. The major changes that have occurred over the last few years are connected to the success of the Internet's best known service: the World Wide Web. The massive amount of information available, the development of applications that have great utility for the journalistic profession, and the ability to create global information projects in a simple and inexpensive way changed the web into something that journalism cannot afford to ignore.

In 2007, the "Innovation in Newspapers World Report" anticipated that in 2012 the Internet would be the major source of information. The latest data seem to confirm that trend, as in June 2009<sup>1</sup> the number of Internet users was close to 2 billion, with a diffusion rate of 29% worldwide.

Even though all media are actually present on the Internet, most of them are still in the shovelware era, that is, each medium places exactly the same content that is produced for their traditional counterparts on the Internet. This situation is especially serious in those cases in which media groups include newspapers, radio, and television stations, as multimedia contents exist within the group but synergies do not work at all.

Thus, the great potential of the web results from the usage of its characteristics. Initially, Salaverría (2005) identified three such characteristics: hypertextuality, multimediality, and interactivity. Bardoel and Deuze (2001) added a fourth: customizing content (or personalization). To these four characteristics, Machado and Palácios (2003) added memory (or archiving), Díaz Noci (2002) and Hall (2001) further included instantaneity (or continuous update), and Zamith (2008) added ubiquity. Even though different characteristics are attributed to web journalism, all authors agree on the presence of at least three of them: hypertextuality, multimediality, and interactivity

(Salaverría, 2005; Baldessar *et al.*, 2009). Though this chapter aims to describe a multimedia grammar that works at the hypertextual, multimedia, and interactive levels, a brief explanation of all the characteristics listed above is also given.

Hypertextuality is the possibility of linking two stacks of information using hyperlinks. This feature allows the reader to surf within a story and gives him the feeling of being in charge, which might be reflected in the reader's satisfaction and the web site's sense of trustworthiness (Berger, 2001).

Multimediality is the ability to include diverse contents such as video or audio as part of a news story (Salaverría, 2005). The simultaneous use of these types of content influences both understanding and satisfaction levels of the readers (Zerba, 2003).

Interactivity is the ability of the reader to build up a relationship with the contents of the news story. Jensen (1998), based on Bordewijk and van Kaam (1986), identified four levels of interactivity: transmission (unidirectional communication process: the user is limited to a receiver function and the information is produced and distributed from a central element), conversation (the opposite of the above-mentioned: bidirectional communication where the user produces and distributes information), consultation (emission produced and distributed by a provider, although the user controls when and what information is to be delivered), and registration (the provider controls and processes the information produced by the user). The consultation level is the one that most interests us, because this level of simple interactivity (the use of hypertext) increases the remembrance of news contents (Mesbah, 2005).

Customizing content (or personalization) is the possibility of splintering information in such a manner that the user can dictate his personal usage according to his own interests. This fragmentation can be intentional (e.g. choosing reading paths) or automated (e.g. cookies or geolocation).

Memory (or archiving) is understood as the capability of creating a permanent accessible stock of information for Internet users. This is one of the features more commonly used in journalism, mainly in the investigative phase, but it also has a huge potential for contextualizing information, always associated with hypertextuality.

Instantaneity (or continuous update) is the opportunity for continuously refreshing a news story with no previously set time periods. This is a characteristic of most online publications; however a significant part of the information is made available through news agencies, thus not allowing noteworthy distinctions between publications.

Finally, ubiquity is the capacity to make some content available at a global scale and accessed simultaneously from any place connected to the Internet.

Although strongly argued for in the literature, these features are scarcely used by online media, thus frustrating the user who wants a news story tailored to web expectations, that is, with more use of hypertext and multimedia content (Vector21<sup>2</sup>; WSJ<sup>3</sup>), which allows users to choose their own reading path (Canavilhas, 2006). Also, academic research argues that the systematic use of hypertext (Hall, 2001; Marco, 2003; Paul, 2005), multimedia content (Edo, 2002; Bryant, 2006), and interactivity (Fredin, 1997; Rosales, 2006) is fundamental to the improvement of web journalism.

In a study conducted in 52 countries, Nielsen (2010) found that consumers are prepared to pay for access to online contents as long as its quality is superior to the currently available contents (71%) and is not freely available on another site (79%). Gratuity is

associated with shovelware, the mere transcription of contents from their traditional support to the web (Chyi and Sylvie, 2001) or republishing by news agencies, a type of content that does not tempt consumers to pay for access to online information: “so far, anyway, that they will not pay for information that they are accustomed to getting for free” (Kaye and Quinn, 2010: 35). This means that editors need to do two things primarily: (i) improve the quality of contents to answer the audience’s information needs, and (ii) develop programs of permanent innovation following new technological trends (Kaye and Quinn, 2010: 2). In this sense, the great challenge of web journalism is to identify a hypertextual and multimedia language (Edo, 2002) that allows differentiation from journalism in traditional media.

To describe how to explore the three characteristics (hypertextuality, multimediality, and interactivity) that have the most consensus among researchers, it will be explained first why web journalism needs to identify a proper language. This will be followed by a characterization of the different writing techniques proposed for web journalism, highlighting the tumbled pyramid technique argued by Canavilhas (2006), and proposing roles for links between text in the web news. Next, a multimedia grammar that identifies how, when, and where contents such as photos, video, sound, and graphics should be used will be explained. The chapter finishes with a brief explanation of possible ways to use the other web journalism characteristics mentioned above (memory, instantaneity, customizing content, and ubiquity).

## **A Language for Web Journalism**

One of the major obstacles for web journalism development is the absence of a unique language especially created for this medium. As mentioned above, only by following this unique language will web journalism be different from models of shovelware and thus generate revenue to empower online business: “quality creates value, and value creates demand, something of which newspapers could use more” (Sylvie, 2008: 27).

This situation is not new in the history of media: radio journalism started by using press language and later television mimicked radio news stories – just adding images to it. It is only after a period of remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 1999), defined as the recoding and adaptation of old contents to the characteristics of new media, that a new language is born. It is in this period of adaptation that web journalism finds itself nowadays. As Edo says:

The new language, not yet defined nor established, is one of the major goals of 21<sup>st</sup> century journalism. It must include text, audio and video, use the interactive possibilities of the Internet and facilitate the permanent refreshing of news in such way that is attractive to readers.

Edo, 2002: 32

Although the investigation in this field upholds the need to identify and establish a new hyper-multimediatric language, the success of this language is strongly dependent on the technology supporting it. Internet access speed can be an obstacle to the use of

multimedia contents in news stories (De Wolk, 2001) because uploading takes too long with a low-speed Internet connection. Whilst broadband connections continue to grow, in 2010, only 24.88% of the population in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries had a broadband connection. This far, the continuous rapid evolution of online technology and the development of new contents requiring the installation of plug-ins to be read have prevented the stabilization of universal standards in the field of online news (Wolton, 1999).

In almost 20 years of web journalism, several models have been tried by newspapers around the world. In the case of hypertext, an intervention at the text level is intended, organizing the data related to each news story. Lowrey and Choi (2006) stated that a lot of researchers argued that “online news stories should be less linear, more interactive, and more connected with other websites” (2006: 101). The opportunity of using hypertext to create several reading paths opens up a set of new possibilities and answers the expectations of its global heterogeneous audience, because “readers with specific search goals tend to create their own reading patterns, whereas readers without specific goals tend to be guided by the structural qualities of the format itself” (Lowrey and Choi, 2006: 113).

Despite all the possibilities offered by hypertext, the influence of the print press has extended itself to the field of writing techniques, conditioning the development of writing techniques native to the web. Initially, the technique used was the inverted pyramid, thus following the theory argued by authors such as Nielsen (1996), Alvarez Marcos (2003), and Stovall (2004). However, others quickly started arguing for specific techniques for journalism on the web (Canavilhas, 2001; Garcia, 2002; Salaverría, 2005; Bradshaw, 2007; Martinez and Ferreira, 2010), and other authors argued for the adoption of different techniques depending on the type of news (Rich, 1998).

In the specific techniques area, the so-called champagne effect (Garcia, 2002) states that information must be provided in a single text, but the lead must be distributed along the story: in each 21-line segment (average amount of text visible on-screen), the journalist should include an interesting element (who, when, where, etc.) that makes the reader want to continue reading.

The Bradshaw diamond model is primarily about workflow rather than writing techniques. In this case, the story is not just a text but a set of texts connected by a process in which the “story might move through a number of stages from initial alert through to customization” (Bradshaw, 2007: np). In this model, blogs, social networks, and users begin to play a role that complements and supports the work of the journalist.

Salaverría (2005) also argues for a story composed of various information chunks connected by links. The hypertext structure (linear, tree, parallel, reticular, or mixed) varies with the characteristics of the news story.

The Black’s wheel model (Martinez and Ferreira, 2010) suggests that two elements must be considered: the architecture of information (links between information nodes that share the same background but each element of the wheel – spoke or center – is independent) and writing for the web (disposal of contents). This is the model that most closely matches the tumbled pyramid (Canavilhas, 2006), which proposes a news story organized by levels of information chunks connected by links that allow the user to follow different reading paths (news architecture) according to his/her particular interests.

Unlike the previous model, this one maintains a hierarchy of importance, simultaneously offering a free reading path. The model also proposes a multimedia grammar (how, when, and why use multimedia contents at different levels).

Thus, the stabilization of a set of hypertextual writing techniques is an important goal to create routines that will allow the readers to overcome the difficulties attached to non-linear reading. The linearity of the alphabet imposed its logic on western thought in an A-Z format, which contrasts with the digital nature (McLuhan, 1968). In fact, when someone reads a text he/she seeks to interpret it in connection with what they've read above (Sperber and Wilson, 1986). In the case of hypertext, information is fragmented into chunks which, according to Landow (1994), become autonomous, less dependent on background and subsequent chunks in linear succession. Nevertheless, the problem mentioned in the studies related to the use of hypertext is that it generates disorientation (Batra, Bishu, and Donohue, 1993; Hammond, 1989; Marco, 2003), making it necessary to create rules to help the users understand how to find their own reading path.

Attempts to integrate multimedia are aimed at the style level, referring to when, how, and where to use the various types of content, which is strongly dependent on technical questions. The adaptability of the different types of contents to the message is essential to respond to user expectations (Vector21; WSJ; Nielsen, 2010). For now, this kind of information add-on is cumulative with the text information, which happens to be a simple repetition. Its appropriate use must be complementary, enriching the informative character of a news story, making it necessary to identify a multimedia grammar.

## **Writing Techniques with Hypertext**

“Radio says, television shows and the press explains.” This sentence, heard so many times in journalism classes, tries to highlight the differences between media languages, emphasizing that newswriting is strongly influenced by the medium of the text. On radio and television, ethereal and linear media, news stories have text, but the most powerful contents of these media are sound (to listen) and image (to see), so journalist texts are shorter. In the case of newspapers, text is the main content so the news is longer and, because it is a nonlinear medium, users have the possibility of rereading the text, something that is not possible in traditional radio or television.

The web allows creators to use any type of content, thus making text, video, or sound its native element. Text has turned into a natural element for two reasons: during the 1990s some electronic edition software allowed the export of contents in HTML format, which led the press to be the first medium with online editions. In addition to this, in the first years of general usage, Internet access speeds were very low, limiting access to more demanding contents, such as video, while also giving text an initial advantage as the structuring element of information on the web. With link integration, text became the connecting thread of the news story, allowing multiple ways of reading the same news story.

The apparent advantage that is offered by the ability to surf within a story using weblinks opens up new perspectives, but can also represent a problem, as the absence of rules tends to generate some problems for readers (Batra, Bishu, and Donohue, 1993; Hammond, 1989; Marcos, 2003). The solution might be to identify and stabilize a set

of construction principles to help the reader (Hall, 2001), using the links in their documental or narrative functions (Salaverría, 2005). Documental links function to extend and expand information, while narrative links have a stylistic function and provide writing support.

In their documental function, links operate as connecting elements between some specific points within the story, providing a connecting thread that allows the reader to know more about the context of specific parts of the story. In their narrative function, links work as a guide offering different alternatives of reading paths. These two functions point to a news architecture in which information sets connected by hyperlinks have different informative layers: the more information, the higher the semantic resolution of the news story (Fidalgo, 2004), meaning that the news stories present deeper levels of information that go further into the subject. This concept of deepening points with a writing technique structured into layers is inspired by Robert Darnton's work (1999). Although applied to academic publications, the author refers to the potential possibilities of the web as an alternative for publications for which there is no space in print. Darnton suggests a pyramid-like structure divided into layers of information, which evolves from the issue summary to a last layer composed by the readers' reactions and their discussion with the writer.

Some readers might be satisfied with a study of the upper narrative. Others might also want to read vertically, pursuing certain themes deeper and deeper into the supporting essays and documentation. Still others might navigate in unanticipated directions, seeking connections that suit their own interests or reworking the material into constructions of their own.

Darnton, 1999: np

Canavilhas (2006) has applied this architecture to journalism in a study about reading paths on online news. To perform this investigation, a news story with four reading levels was created. The first set had only one link to the next level. The second stack contained several links to a third level with four sets of information further explored. These sets included links to four sets of the last level of information, making it 10 sets of information included in the story. Links were embodied in the words of the text (in-text links) when they led to the following layer, or appeared in a menu when leading to the same or the preceding layer.

This experiment, undertaken with 39 students, identified different reading paths. The first-time readers were faced with several links, five different paths were identified. At the next level the number of reading paths rose to 11 and on the last level it reached 22. The analysis of these paths showed different reading patterns: a small group (23%) made readings level by level, that is, when links were presented they read the linked information set and went back to the original level, repeating this action until each set was concluded. The rest (77%) followed different reading paths with the same pattern: they clicked on the links connecting specific issues of the story until they reached the deeper levels of information. These results confirm Li's findings: "the way that a story is accessed is undergoing a fundamental change from a simple linear route to a nonlinear route" (Li, 2006: 275).

The online users' behavior shows that the organization of online news information designed by journalists might not match the readers' interests. According to Pavlik,



“each audience member can receive personalized news that places each story into a meaningful context to her or him” (Pavlik, 2001: 4).

This aim is highly problematic because it does not include subscribers and readers who go to a newsstand to buy their chosen newspaper, or readers who have a strong relationship with a particular newspaper, but only readers who surf freely on the web looking for information, readers who are spread at a global scale and with particular interests related to their social, cultural, and professional contexts. The opportunity to follow a certain path is a function of the interests, choices, and decisions of each user (Holtzman, 1997), but that means journalists must adopt different newswriting techniques for the web:

Breaking the news down into granular bits of information and then organizing those bits to create (1) an overarching, constantly updated narrative/visualization of the story that elucidates the connection between those bits and (2) a basic-to-complex progression of information that users can jump in at whichever level best fits their familiarity with the issue.

Zhu, 2010: np

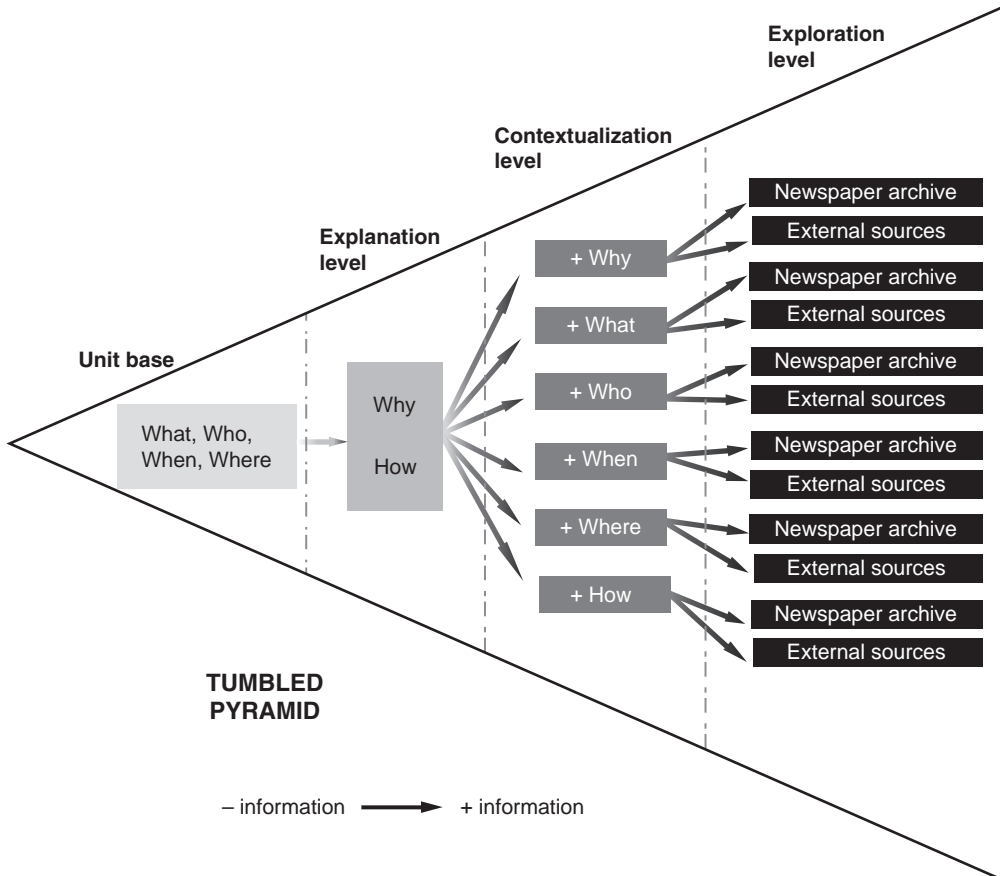
Journalists live in a permanent state of tension, trying to balance the size and scope of an article (amount of text, photos, etc.) and its distribution in the media (news architecture). The correct handling of these variables depends on the characteristics of each medium. For the press journalist, dimension is an important factor, as the available space in the newspaper sheet is limited, thus making necessary the use of style techniques that allow the presentation of information within the pre-set space. The web journalist prioritizes “distribution,” as space is almost infinite. This kind of organization should answer the expectations of a very heterogeneous audience, thus Canavilhas (2006) suggests a general architecture of online news that allows the reader to decide his own reading path. Instead of using the inverted pyramid (information organized from the most to the least important, according to the journalist’s understanding), a new technique is suggested in which information is organized from a first level with less information to a fourth level with more information about each unique subject within the story. This logic supposes a paradigm change, from a qualitative perspective (the most important, according to the journalist) to a quantitative one (more information that allows the reader to make his own choices).

In this new architecture, quantity (and diversity) of information available is the key factor, with the news story developing from a level with less information to successive levels of more profound and diverse information about the reported issue.

The increase of information amount offered by each ‘W’ (why, what, who, when, where, and how) turns the graphic representation of web news into a horizontal pyramid, where the larger width of its base means more information (Figure 19.1). I call it the tumbled pyramid, and its use allows each reader to build their own story, according to their information needs.

In this new architecture, news stories are presented in four levels:

*The base unit* answers the essential, what, when, who, and where questions. This information set, the lead, includes a link of informative amplification (Salaverría, 2005) to a set with more data on the issue. The base unit is very often breaking news, so this level uses only two kinds of content: pictures and text. Since this is the introduction to the



**Figure 19.1** Information levels in the tumbled pyramid.

story, journalists should include the story keywords. Moreover, if the story is also found in other media, it is likely that will attract readers looking out for more information, thus making online searches by keywords. Thus, attention to the choice of words might represent an increase in the web site traffic.

The *explanation level* seeks to answer the why and how questions, completing the essential information of the news story. At this level text and photo contents are still preferred, and links fulfil a narrative function with the purpose of offering several reading paths. At this level both definition and documental links can be used (Salaverría, 2005): definition links lead to more information on specific details of the story, documental links to context data of the next level. For example, in a news story about an airplane crash, a definition link could connect to text about the airplane model involved in the accident and a documental link to a text about similar crashes.

At the *contextualization level* the semantic resolution of the story increases (Fidalgo, 2004). The aim of the informative sets at this level is to fulfil one of the distinctive features of web journalism: contextualized information. “Contextualized journalism

incorporates not only the multimedia capabilities of digital platforms but also the interactive, hypermedia, fluid qualities of online communications and the customizable features of addressable media” (Pavlik, 2001: 218). Beyond text and photos, other types of content should also be used, like video, sound, or graphics, enabling the reader to engage in personalized consumption of information. At this level links of definition can be used to answer specific questions about the subject: using the previous example, this kind of link could connect to text about the airline business, airplane industry, sites of airplane crashes, the usual errors that cause this kind of accident, and so on.

The last level of the story is the *exploration level*, which deepens certain details, trying to provide the most demanding readers with some answers. This set must be connected to internal and external databases by documental links (Salaverría, 2005), which gives readers the opportunity to explore information both inside and outside the publication. The connection to internal databases improves the image of the publication, because it shows that the approach to the subject is rooted in previous knowledge from past coverage. Typically, this is the level that connects texts with external sites: in this case, with a list of victims published on the site of the airline company, the airplane model sales on the aircraft company web site, an expert’s forum about aircraft crashes, the National Transportation Safety Board, or previous news about the same kind of crashes.

Further than the news architecture presented before, that is, the way in which the chunks that make the story are organized, the dimension should also be considered. A chunk should be short, concise, and scannable (Nielsen and Morkes, 1997; McAdams, 2003) in such a manner that promotes faster reading, because computer screen reading is 25% slower than paper reading (Nielsen, 1996).

The amount of information in each set is equally important for the fields of image and sound. Video and sound, which complete the story, should not exceed 1 minute 30 seconds for the former or 30 seconds for the latter. This recommendation is due to available bandwidth, which does not always allow a fast download, but also to the fact that users do not like to wait for file loading (Savoia, 2001). As mentioned in the introduction, despite the increase in broadband connections, only a quarter of the population in OECD countries have them, and a growing number of users have access from mobile devices with lower access speeds.

The connection between information sets and multimedia integration within text transforms the news story into a complex system that can make reading difficult. To avoid readers’ confusion, journalists should use narrative links, setting different reading paths. This might help readers who access the information sets via search engines. This is the reason why journalists must write text in such a way that each information set is autonomous (Ward, 2002), that is, each set should make sense regardless of the context provided by the rest of the information sets.

### Link usage and marking

The goal of any journalistic language is to provide the reader with a quick and efficient understanding of its message, which is obtained with a clear and concise writing style (Martinez Albertos, 2004). For web journalists, the news architecture presented in

information sets connected by hyperlinks is a new challenge, because they need to know how to manage hyperlinks. Thus usage is important:

1. Because we owe it to our readers to give them as much information as we have at our fingertips.
2. Because linking to sources and resources is the key gesture to being a citizen of the Web and not just a product on the Web.
3. Because it is the best way to connect directly with the online community in our town.
4. Because we absolutely do not know everything, but we know where to find out most of what we don't know.
5. Because it will make your job easier.

Sholin, 2009: np

Although hyperlinks might be placed within the text or as a menu, this work only considers in-text links as these are assigned the task of leading the news reading (Codina, 2003).

Usually, linked words are typed in different colors, like a graphic mark. Knowing that on the web there is a trend for skim reading, links should be placed homogeneously along the text, working like anchors (Nielsen and Morke, 1997). However, using different colors is not the only way of highlighting a hyperlink, nor the most complete one. Complementing the different color with an icon revealing the type of the connected content might be important to a large amount of readers. In addition, the available local connection speed may act as a reading limitation. A reader with a slow connection is less interested in video contents since downloading will take too much time. A reader in a public library with no headphones will avoid links to videos or sounds so as to not disturb anyone else. The two ways to mark links are icons and labels, but there is no consensus regarding the best way to indicate the type of linked contents because graphic language presents more limitations than written language (Edo, 2002). For example, the approval of an icon for an operative system requires a first-trial identification by 95% of those surveyed. Until a global iconic system for the Internet is created, it is suggested that a mixed way of identifying the links, combining verbal elements – text labels indicating the type of content – with non-verbal elements – icons – should be used. Anyway, the combination of verbal written (text) and non-verbal elements (icons) leads to greater user satisfaction (Guastello, Traut, and Korienek, 1989).

A link is a reading clue, so readers tend to click as they find them along the text. This situation might cause some disorientation (Batra, Bishu, and Donohue, 1993) for the reader, thus it is recommended to use only one link for each paragraph, placing it preferably at the end of the last sentence. It is also suggested to reserve the external links for the end of the news, because readers can then leave the text and never come back.

It also should be stated that links are a tool for the construction of meaning. Links should be written in the active verbal form, acronyms or words with strong semantic connections to the linked information set, searching for coherence in the text (Storrer, 2002).

## **Integrating Multimedia Contents**

Like hypertextual writing, the integration of multimedia contents in the story should also obey a set of rules. Multimediality can occur in two ways: by accumulation or by integration. Accumulation refers to the simultaneous use of two or more types of content

that perform an informative repetition in different formats. In multimediality, two or more types of content are combined by integration into an informative unit (Salaverría, 2005). Multimedia usage in web news is included in integration: videos, sounds, and graphics complement the text information, adding new data to the story, which can only happen by integration. Duplicating information in diverse formats can drench the reader, decreasing the value of multimediality. To avoid this situation, each element should be used in specific situations that make the most out of their characteristics.

### Fixed images (photos/illustrations)

Photography is the still imagery most used both in traditional and online press. According to Vilches (1984), press photography can be studied analyzing the functions of three kinds of actors: immobile (motionless visual elements, like trees or mountains), mobile (natural or artificial elements that move, like rivers or transportation), and living (people and animals). The hierarchy of these actors determines the composition of the picture, with relevant and secondary elements. On the web this hierarchy loses meaning because the small size of the pictures used in online papers forces the exclusion of some actors, therefore highlighting the more important elements. Exceptions occur in publications where it is possible to expand picture size, or in photo galleries.

Although in the traditional press there is a certain balance in the usage of the three kinds of actors, in web journalism strengthening the connection to living actors is recommended. Pictures should be used to illustrate the “who” of a news story, thus justifying a link placed on the name of the main news character. Illustrations may be used instead of photos: graphical representations of people should be used in a similar way to photography.

### Moving images (video)

If most press images are informative, on television informative images are only a small part of everything shown. However, while photos occupy just small portions of newspaper pages, where the text is dominant, images use all the available space on television, reducing the amount of text and subtitles (Vilches, 1984). This image supremacy turns information into a more spectacular content because it reproduces reality more accurately. However, video used as a complementary feature cannot reproduce a complete story, as is done on television, but is used as a fragment adding to the news story.

Thus, motion pictures should be used in situations where a written explanation of events would be too long. Its use is also recommended when there are doubts over interpretation: a video showing a discussed football play might be linked to the minute of the game. Thus, the story is more objective, giving the readers the freedom of interpretation.

Video can also be associated with interviews, but only when the emotional or physical conditions of the interviewee might represent an important element of the story. In any other case the use of sound is recommended, as it guarantees faster downloads. Finally, spectacular footage, such as natural catastrophes, or funny footage, makes good video content, because in those cases, a picture is worth a thousand words. How, who, and why are the elements that are advised to be associated with videos, placing links upon a name, verb, or adjective related to each one of them.

## Sound

On the radio, sound is words, music, sound effects, and silence. In the news, its function is to inform (as it adds information to the text), to make the story trustworthy (when it confirms extreme situations), and to add value to the informative rhythm. When used as a complement to written text, sound assumes the form of the spoken word in its functions of information and reliability, appearing as legitimating by giving confirmation to the written text. In longer statements, journalists can summarize the interview, placing a link to the interview sound file.

How and why are the elements associated with sound files; because they are paramount elements of the news, they need more text to be explicit. The links must be placed upon active verbs that denote action and awaken the reader's interest, or on quotes from people involved in the news because this allows the user to hear all of the statements summarized in the citation.

## Graphics, infographics, and maps

As well as the non-textual contents already referred to – photos, motion images, and sound – “graphics” represent another visual element used in several formats in the press.

Graphics are the visual representation of a relation between variables. The objective is to ease the comprehension of data. Economics information often employs this type of content, exploring the potential of graphics in its relational and analytical conception. Links should be placed upon words referring to values, data, or percentages.

Infographics can be static, multimedia, and/or interactive. It is an autonomous genre in web journalism, but can also work as a text add-on. Infographics is a way to visualize information in a graphic form, an abstract representation that tries to show through icons and drawings the relations between the different parts of an event, system, or object. Its use in web news is advised to describe the works of systems or mechanisms, to show the evolution of situations, or to exemplify changes occurred or still happening in some place or device. It might also be used to anticipate or re-enact events. In these cases, the link to an infographic should be placed upon the how element or on the device's name.

The third visual element in this group is maps, straight representations of space. Although they can sometimes be confused with infographics, a map is a simpler representation and its function is to place the information in its geographical setting. When the image is a map, it must be associated with the where element, helping the reader to place the event.

## How to Use Other Features

Beyond the features most referred to in this chapter – hypertextuality, multimodality, and interactivity – another four characteristics were also mentioned, which should be used by web publications: memory, personalization, instantaneity, and ubiquity.

### Memory (or archiving)

The connection of a news story to the archive of the publication or to external web sites allows the contextualization of the matter in an informative cloud with constant updates, which with everyone's contributions, may work as a universal memory. This contextualization adds value to the news because it differentiates a news story from weak journalism that goes no further than stating facts without contextualizing them. Isolated facts lack interpretation: it is history that allows their decodification, thus the importance of using all contextualization resources available.

### Instantaneity (or continuous update)

One of the most characteristic features of traditional journalism is its periodic quality, something not relevant for the web. If events are happening all the time and the medium allows following their developments, it is not justifiable to withhold information until the newspaper's publishing time.

Beyond that, instantaneity cannot be used just to publish brief breaking news, just repeating the information received from news agencies. The possibility of permanently refreshing information with a simple computer connected to the Internet is one of the greater advantages of web journalism. This awareness of information updating contributes to strengthening the image of the publication and increases web site traffic because it holds the reader connected to the newest developments in the information.

### Customizing content (or personalization)

Further than the reading possibilities offered by hypertextual writing, online publications should try to include the readers, creating long-lasting bonds. This objective can be attained using application software, many of which are free.

First of all, there should be a place for readers' participation: writing comments, participating in an Internet forum, or sharing the story in blogs and social networks are ways of making people feel closer to the publication, allowing the creation of a feeling of belonging to a community: "the sharing of thoughts turns people who live near one another into neighbors" (Ye and Li, 2006: 2). The creation of these communities has three consequences: first, by publishing a link to a story in the blogosphere or on social networks, the users are acting as gatewatchers (Bruns, 2003: 35), suggesting reading matter to their friends/followers, by linking to stories. The media profits because this user behavior creates a network of free information redistributors increasing news site traffic. Second, the feedback given to the stories allows the journalist to have an image of his readers, and facilitates the choice of topics for news and the kind of approach that best suits them. Last but not least, the comments may be used to update the news itself, giving rise to what is called "interactive journalism," a situation in which the author himself encourages participation from readers (Lawrence, 1993).

At the same time, the publication should also offer the possibility for readers to keep on following the news story, which can be done using RSS feeds, e-mail alerts, or SMS.

Another way of personalizing information is to use cookies that record readers' interests or give the reader the possibility of creating their own newspaper, choosing

their personal preferences. A cookie is a piece of information generated by the web server and installed on the user's computer, often without his knowledge. This information lets the web site know which pages were visited by the user previously. In the case of newspapers, on a second visit, the browser itself can lead users to the news section presumably preferred because it was visited before. This apparent help can also be interpreted as an invasion of privacy to the point that an external entity is following our steps on the web: however it should be noted that most browsers already avoid the installation of cookies and the information can be deleted.

The user's preference is another indicator that lets you customize your reading and so almost all newspapers offer the online news topics "most read," "most commented," and "most rated," a model inspired by Digg, an icon site of Web 2.0, a movement grounded in collaborative web user participation.

Finally, online publication should be prepared to explore geo-localization, a form of personalization, using LBS (location based services). This technology allows news stories to assign geographic coordinates, linking content to a specific zone. This means that when a user is driving in a particular place he/she can access information related to that area. The growing number of users accessing journalistic information via mobile devices opens up a world of opportunities in this audience segmentation by geographical criteria, offering information related to the locale where the consumer is at any given time. In fact, according to the report "State of News Media 2011" (Pew Research Center for Excellence in Journalism, 2011), 47% of American adults use their mobile devices (smartphone or tablet) to get local news, and 37% use these devices to get information about local businesses, traffic, public transportation, and so on. The same report highlighted that around half of the owners of a mobile device have an app to get news stories about their local community. This tendency indicates that hyper local news sites have great potential and could be a source of revenue.

### Ubiquity

Ubiquity is an added value because it "takes everything everywhere, including for disporic populations, the sense of place" (Hall, 2001: 213): the global presence simultaneously opens a new scenario for the news business and allows newspapers to have readers who can participate, commenting from the places where the event happened. But it also brings up some concerns when writing the stories. The fact that the information is available simultaneously around the globe and in every time zone forces the journalist to use time references prudently. Words like "today" or "tomorrow" have different interpretations, so they should be replaced by the day of the event. The use of local examples to show some proportion only makes sense in the country from where the reference originated.

### News Goes Mobile

The "Future of Internet III" (Pew Research Center for Excellence in Journalism, 2008) revealed interesting data: in 2020, mobile devices will be the major means of accessing the Internet. These data, together with the "Innovation in Newspapers World Report"



prediction that in 2012 the Internet will be the major source of information allows us to say that the future of journalism is online.

According to Tomi Ahonen's *Almanac* (2010) there are 4.25 billion cell phones around the world, representing a diffusion rate of 62%. This same study states that 76% of these devices are equipped with an Internet browser and 17% of them are smartphones.

The motivations for using a cell phone are related to its communication function: staying connected to family and friends (Wellman and Tindall, 1993), reducing isolation/anxiety (Fisher, 1992), or giving a sense of personal security (Dimmick, Sikand, and Patterson, 1994). Aside from this, its multimedia features provide an entertainment function (Williams, Dordick, and Jesuale, 1985), and the design can convey fashion status (Leung and Wei, 2000). By concentrating all these features, the cell phone crosses the strict boundaries of speech technology to become part of data access technology (Aguado and Martínez, 2006). The importance of cell phones in the media ecosystem is also enhanced by telecommunication providers, who increasingly offer data rates associated with a range of smartphones, and the applications (apps) developers, who produce apps for all purposes and sell them at very low prices.

Smartphones and tablet computers are increasing their market share. In 2010 alone, 19.5 million units were sold and, according to Gartner,<sup>4</sup> these numbers will rise to annual sales of 208 million units in 2014. Deloitte,<sup>5</sup> the consulting company, presented a research paper predicting that in 2012 smartphones and tablets will outsell personal computers. The reason for this change is related to the profit margins of computing manufacturers. While the profit for producing personal computers stays at about 10%, it rises to 40% for smartphones and 60% for tablets. Software and tablet apps are also more profitable (12%) than traditional computer software (10%).

The mobile app economy is growing fast and in 2010, sales of smartphone apps worldwide generated 1.6 billion Euros. At the 2011 Mobile World Congress, held recently in Barcelona, Vision Mobile, a market analysis and strategy firm, confirmed that app stores are an emerging market with potential in the field of journalism.

Ubiquitous, personalized, and permanent access to news stories transforms the relationship between content and user and opens a window of opportunity for the media. Even SMS, a primitive format in the smartphone's world, is more than adequate to deliver breaking news, thanks to its "push" character (Fidalgo, 2009). That's why Ahonen (2009) presents the cell phone as the medium of media because "it can efficiently offer all of the main content types of all previous media" (58–59).

Zhang (2007) argued "that enabling access to adaptive, personalized, and context-aware information and service is crucial to fully take advantage of the pervasiveness and convenience of mobile devices" (Zhang, 2007: 79). Because mobile users are used to paying for content (ringtones, music, alerts, apps), this could mean a boost for the news industry (Ahonen, 2009). Following on from this, in April 2009, the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) recognized mobile devices as platforms of great potential to buy news information, daring the newspapers to be prepared for this challenge as a way to surpass the crisis.

Multimedia and personalization capabilities, portability, ubiquity, permanent access, and the user's habit of paying for contents on cell phones open up new perspectives identifying business models for Internet information.

## Notes

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- 3 *Wall Street Journal's* inquiry, available at: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB114717839352947700.html> (last accessed September 17, 2010).
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# The Paradox of Personalization: The Social and Reflexive Turn of Adaptive News

Neil Thurman and Steve Schifferes

## Introduction

In its short history, the Internet has generated much debate and speculation about how profound an effect it would have on individuals' consumption of information. Early pioneers argued its effect would be revolutionary. This was predicated on the belief that users would no longer be passive recipients of information, but would, instead, use the tools and interactivity available online to become producers rather than solely consumers of information. In its early days, the Internet was conceptualized not only as a means of providing information, but also as a means of mobilizing communities (Negroponte, 1995). Those communities could share common interests or be interested in common outcomes (such as social change); in either case, they were envisaged as working outside the established mass media. In effect, the Internet was posited as a medium that would allow users to bypass conventional channels of information and create something close to direct democracy.

This notion of disintermediation – the bypassing of the distorting editorial lens of the mass media – is exemplified by Nicholas Negroponte's (1995) prediction that newspapers could be replaced with a "Daily Me," where individuals shaped the news to their own tastes and preferences by creating customized news sites, each different from the other. This utopian idea came under fierce attack from those who argued that leaving the choice of news solely to readers could have negative consequences both for individuals and for society. Cass Sunstein (2002) posited "The Daily Me" as a threat to democracy because individuals would only be exposed to viewpoints they already agreed with, and would lose the "collective commons" or free marketplace of ideas where different points of view could be openly debated – a function he believed was vital to democracy and best served by an active free press. More recently, Eli Pariser (2011) has suggested that it is

the passive and hidden personalization of information by search engines and aggregator sites, rather than the active filtering of news stories by individuals, that is limiting diversity and stifling creativity, as well as narrowing space for democratic debate.

One of the most common formats for the publication of online news content outside the mainstream media has been the blog – and the rise of this format seemed to confirm both the hopes and fears of commentators. Blogs appeared to be a way of bypassing journalists and other gatekeepers, enabling common citizens to create content that could reach a wide audience (Gillmor, 2004). However, some suggest that blogs may not be so different from the mass media others hoped they would, in part, replace. Hindman (2009) has shown that the blogosphere is even more concentrated than mainstream online news publications, with a relatively small number of blogs reaching a wide audience. What's more, the majority of successful blogs are written not by ordinary members of the public, but by experts who in some ways constitute a parallel gatekeeping elite to journalists. The sale, in February 2011, of the Huffington Post (which began life as an aggregator of blogs) to mainstream media organization, AOL, for \$308 million (Peters and Kopytoff, 2011) demonstrates how blogs are becoming absorbed into the established media universe; and the line between blogs and the mainstream media has become progressively more blurred since reporters' blogs became a common feature on mainstream news sites (Thurman, 2008; Thurman and Hermida, 2010).

A rather weaker version of the participatory democracy thesis is that what has been characterized as “conversational interactivity” (Jensen, 1998: 201) – where users can interact with journalists and other users – could play a role in democratizing established news media. However, “conversational interactivity” – via the mainstream adoption of user-generated content initiatives – has not so much transformed news on the web as expanded traditional news coverage of controversial events and personalities and very high profile news events. Some editors suggest that just 10% of audiences regularly look at user-generated content, and only 1% actively participate in interactive conversations (Matthew Eltringham, BBC News UGC Assistant Editor, personal communication, 2008).

Just as the mainstream news media adapted user-generated content to their purpose, they also developed, as they migrated their content to the web, novel ways of presenting news that reflected both the style and navigational possibilities of the medium. Initially, news organizations provided “navigational interactivity” (Deuze, 2003: 214), which allowed users to choose by selecting categories of news, or particular items that were highlighted by editors on the front page. This was in contrast to the linear pattern of news presentation in a broadcast news bulletin, and has resulted in very different patterns of audience consumption. Although the lack of space constraints online makes it possible to present stories that might never have appeared on radio or television news bulletins or in newspapers (Schifferes, 2006), the number of people who read just one or two top stories, or skim the front page for news, is very high (Pew, 2011). This is, in part, a reflection of the limitations of having relatively static navigation and layout and limited space to promote special stories on the front pages of news web sites.

Personalization – or customization – constitutes a third form of interactivity, one that has been growing rapidly on news sites in recent years. It promises to overcome the limitations of navigational and conversational interactivity by dynamically adapting news selection and presentation, and helping users find the most relevant stories, thereby increasing



page views. It may also allow for a greater variety of news to appear by allowing users – as well as editors – to make decisions about which stories to feature, and by using computer algorithms to scan a much wider range of sources than humans could in any given time frame. Contemporary examples include Yahoo’s announcement, in February 2011, that they would launch a digital magazine – Livestand – that would “deliver personalized content results from various publishers ... based on a user’s selected interests, location, and time of day” (Yin, 2011). Google has long had a feature called iGoogle, which allows users to create their own homepage, and in June 2010 Google News added a section called “News for You,” consisting of “a stream of headlines users can tailor to their interests” (Gohring, 2010: np). Despite their conservative tendencies (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009), traditional news providers too have increasingly developed user-centered approaches to news selection, delivery, and presentation. Examples include the *Los Angeles Times*’ NewsMatch, “a visual quiz users take that learns their personal tastes and interests and creates a personalized page of content that they are likely to be interested in” (Lavrusik, 2010: np); and *The Washington Post*’s Trove, a site that “aggregates news and enables users to personalize their news stream based on their interests” (Lavrusik, 2011: np).

Given the long history and growing presence of personalization, the lack of attention it has received from journalism scholars is surprising. Barbie Zelizer (2009: 36) writes that “work has yet to address fully the more contemporary trends towards ... personalization.” To address this gap this chapter develops Neil Thurman’s (2011) framework of the different types of news personalization features and extends his tracking of how these features have been adopted at major national news web sites. We revisit his original exploration of why editors have adopted different strategies of personalization and what they hoped to gain from them, ending the chapter with an original discussion about how the actual deployment of personalization strategies on web sites fits into the concerns of early Internet theorists and some of the more recent academic and popular debate about the role of interactivity in the development of web-based media. It will become clear that personalization has developed in a more complex way than envisaged by early advocates and critics, and its relationship to both polarization and disintermediation is more ambiguous than originally postulated.

## Defining Personalization

One of the weaknesses in the academic study of personalization on news web sites has been the inability to define precisely what is meant by the term, which can be applied in many different ways. Although personalization<sup>1</sup> is often mentioned in passing as a characteristic of digital networked media, attempts to operationalize it are frequently rudimentary, with limited examples given in the literature (see, for instance: Deuze, 2003: 214; Gunter, 2003: 68; Meikle, 2009: 178; Singer, 2003: 147). Where it has been studied, personalization tends to be considered as part of surveys of “interactivity.” The features – including “moving images,” “audio,” and “hyperlinks” (Gerpott and Wanke, 2004: 242; Spyridou and Veglis, 2008: np) – that many such surveys consider to be “interactive” are a long way from the “adaptive” (Deuze, 2003: 214) or “registrational interactivity” (Jensen, 1998: 201) that this chapter addresses.

Even when studies do touch on personalization, they provide very limited guidance on what sort of content and functionality might be included in a survey of personalization at news web sites. Categories like “customized topics on news,” used by Chung and Yoo (2008: 385), do not reflect the variety of personalization options at modern news sites.

Building on the work of Bucy (2004), Deuze (2003), Jensen (1998), and Stromer-Galley (2004), we define personalization as:

A form of user-to-system interactivity that uses a set of technological features to adapt the content, delivery, and arrangement of a communication to individual users’ explicitly registered and/or implicitly determined preferences.

As the discussion has already pointed out, our approach excludes Stromer-Galley (2004) and Bucy’s (2004) concept of interactivity between people<sup>2</sup> – for example, chat room discussions, message boards, and blogs – which has been thoroughly studied in a news context (see, for example, Thurman and Hermida, 2010) and raises a different set of issues. It also excludes navigational interactivity because this is a universal feature of all news web sites.

The approach adopted by this chapter makes a very important distinction between two different types of personalization. Explicit personalization uses direct user inputs; implicit personalization infers preferences from data collected, for example, via a registration process or via the use of software that monitors user activity (Gauch *et al.*, 2007). Tables 20.1 and 20.2 set out the categories defined by this study. They are based on earlier work by Thurman (2011), but have been developed to include new categories recorded by our 2010 content survey.<sup>3</sup> Tables 20.3, 20.4, and 20.5 record the adoption of these categories at the 11 mainstream news sites included in that survey. Those sites are listed below with their country of origin and parent news organization:

- FT.com. *Financial Times*, UK “quality” newspaper.
- Guardian.co.uk. the *Guardian*, UK “quality” newspaper.
- Mirror.co.uk. *Daily Mirror*, UK “tabloid” newspaper.
- News.bbc.co.uk. *BBC News*, UK broadcaster.
- News.sky.com. *Sky News*, UK broadcaster.
- NYTimes.com. *The New York Times*, US “quality” newspaper.
- Telegraph.co.uk. *The Telegraph*, UK “quality” newspaper.
- theSun.co.uk. *The Sun*, UK “tabloid” newspaper.
- TimesOnline.co.uk. *The Times*, UK “quality” newspaper.
- WallStreetJournal.com. *The Wall Street Journal*, US “quality” newspaper.
- WashingtonPost.com. *The Washington Post*, US “quality” newspaper.

This study makes comparisons between organizations, national contexts, and also over time. This approach is justified for a number of reasons. First, although the depth of analysis in a study that includes data from multiple sources – 11 news organizations in this case – is less than is possible in a single or comparative case study, the larger sample size counters the generalizability problem inherent in the classic case study approach. Second, the three US news web sites were included because of their considerable

**Table 20.1** Taxonomy of explicit personalization functionality at news web sites.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Definition</i>
“E-mail newsletters”	Registration of individual users’ e-mail newsletter preferences. Variables include: format (HTML/plain text); delivery schedule (daily, weekly, event-triggered, etc.); and choice of predetermined content categories and/or key word/stock–symbol triggers.
“One-to-one collaborative filtering”	Registration of preferences for content recommendations from individual journalists or other users.
“Homepage customization”	Registration of content and/or layout preferences on the homepage. Differs from “homepage editions” in the complexity of preferences that can be registered.
“Homepage editions”	Registration of preference for an alternative version of site’s homepage. For example, between regional or industry-specific editions.
“Mobile editions and apps”	Preference registration on sites’ mobile editions and apps. Variables include: availability of external RSS feeds; customization by user-determined location and/or key words or stock symbols; number of internal content modules offered; implicit preference registration and adaptation; and possibility to save stories for repeated reading.
“My page”	Registration of content preferences for a personalized page (other than the homepage). Variables include: number of internal content modules and/or stock portfolios offered; layout customization; and inclusion of external content/RSS feeds.
“My stories”	Ability to save stories to a personalized “clippings” page for repeated viewing.
“Non-linear interactives”	Embedded applications that immediately adapt their content and presentation to users’ input at a level deeper than navigational control. Usually associated with, or relevant to, a specific news event, and authored using Adobe Flash. Audio-visual slide shows and other forms of non-linear information presentation that only provide temporal and/or navigational control are excluded.
“Other explicit”	System adaptation – for individual users – of content, its delivery or arrangement, based on explicitly registered preferences, not recorded elsewhere in this table.
“RSS feeds” <sup>a</sup>	RSS feed availability. Variables include: number offered; format (text, video/audio); length restrictions (full and/or limited to headline and standfirst); and customization (based on user-defined key words or combinations of predetermined categories).
“SMS alerts”	Registration of individual users’ preference of content category and/or key word trigger for text message delivery.
“Twitter feeds” <sup>c</sup>	Twitter feed availability. Included as a technology that enables users to register to receive specific content feeds to their Twitter account.
“Widgets”	Applications for users’ desktops or for third-party sites. Examples range from the provision of specific content feeds (e.g. personalized sports results) to truly adaptive applications that allow users to locate an apartment for rent using a number of variables. <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>RSS feeds are included as a technology that enables users to register to receive specific content in their personal RSS reader.

<sup>b</sup>Only “official” widgets published by the news sites surveyed have been included.

<sup>c</sup>This category was not found in the previous survey.

Source: Developed from Thurman (2011), reprinted by permission of Sage.

**Table 20.2** Taxonomy of implicit personalization functionality at news web sites.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Definition</i>
“Contextual recommendations/aggregations”	Contextually related content (including textual stories/blogs, videos, photo galleries, and tweets) and links to such. Content may be internal or external. Recommendations and aggregations may be generated by software written, owned, and hosted by other organizations.
“Geo-targeted editions”	Content adaptation, most commonly on the homepage and key index pages, based on the geo-location of the user, determined by IP address or other means.
“Aggregated collaborative filtering”	Selections of news stories or other content (such as readers’ comments) automatically filtered by popularity. Variables include most: read/watched/searched/e-mailed. Selections may be further refined by content category (e.g. “politics”), user location (e.g. “South America”), or time (e.g. “last 24 hours”).
“Multiple metrics” <sup>a</sup>	Adaptation of news content and presentation based on multiple, implicitly determined, metrics.
“Social collaborative filtering” <sup>a</sup>	Content recommendations based on the behavior of a user’s social network.

<sup>a</sup>These categories were not found in the previous survey.

Source: Developed from Thurman (2011), reprinted by permission of Sage.

experience with personalization over a number of years, to a level beyond that found in the UK titles studied.

Looking at the categories in Tables 20.1 and 20.2 in more detail, it is clear that there is a vast variety of approaches to personalization, particularly in the category of explicit personalization. Users can get special e-mail newsletters with information of interest to them, syndicated feeds that cover particular categories of news, SMS alerts on their mobile phones, or widgets to put on their home or office computers that flash up breaking news. In addition, they can shape their own news homepages, save stories of particular interest to themselves, or get special editions either on their home computer or cell phone. This list provides a bewildering range of possible options which might prove intimidating to the casual users who make up a large part of the online audience. There has, therefore, been an ongoing search among news providers to find the most effective types of explicit personalization – balancing the need for precise matching of content to users’ interests with the need to make the process of setting up explicit personalization as easy as possible. The very size of Table 20.1, and the changes that have taken place since Thurman’s (2011) earlier survey in 2009, suggest that the search is still going on.

What does become clearer by looking at Table 20.2 – on implicit personalization – is how few options there are, relatively speaking, and yet how attractive this approach could be for users and publishers alike. In particular, it contains one of the most popular recommendation services on web sites, “aggregated collaborative filtering,” where the web site tells its users which are the most popular stories (refined, for example, by the most read, most searched, or most e-mailed). What these approaches have in common is a

reliance on software that analyzes individual or collective user behavior, using the results to dynamically adapt news selection and presentation.

Two points emerge clearly from this taxonomy of personalization. First, that a much wider range of explicit personalization strategies has been introduced by news web sites than implicit ones, and second, that within the explicit category there are two opposing strategies, one of partially reshaping the existing news web site, and the other of selectively sending material out to another user interface or device – such as an RSS reader or an SMS inbox – where it competes with news and information from other sources. Neither fully reflect Negroponte’s idea of a “Daily Me,” where a single “interface agent” constructs a personalized newspaper “printed in an edition of one” (Negroponte, 1995: 153).

Search is absent from our classification because we have concentrated exclusively on innovations adopted by news publishers. Although the sites we studied do offer internal search facilities, most search-driven news personalization originates from Google and other externally hosted search providers.<sup>4</sup> The editorial integrity of mainstream media web sites has also been disrupted by manually aggregated news portals. Such sites – Drudgereport.com and Fark.com are two of the most significant US-based examples – publish links to stories in other publications and are an important source of visitors for news sites. For example, Drudgereport.com alone refers 25% of the US visitors to British news web sites (Thurman, 2007: 292).

## Key Debates

In examining the growth of personalized news, we will be touching on some of the key debates in media and communication theory. First, the rise of personalization raises the question, as we have seen, of how active mass media audiences are in the consumption of news, or whether they are just passive consumers, happy to accept content determined by editors. Second, why do mass media news organizations adopt such strategies? Are they profitable and consistent with their normal ways of doing things, or have they required organizational change and new thinking? And third, to what extent does personalization challenge the widely accepted theory that journalists act as gatekeepers for the public, limiting their access to news?

### News consumption and content diversity

Personalization, in its explicit form, requires that users exert themselves. And over the last few decades, audience research has increasingly characterized audiences as, in certain respects, dynamic, demonstrating a marked propensity to question the information they receive, and prompting some – the “active audience theorists” – to emphasize “the power of the audience” (Williams, 2003: 201). But the nature of this power is largely to do with the audience’s ability to actively analyze mass media messages (Morley, 1993) and not with their willingness to interact directly with the way those messages are transmitted. Despite the frequent references to the audience’s ability to make “decisions about how and when to access news content” (Meikle, 2009: 141), and to power shifting “away from the professional and towards the layperson” (Singer, 2003: 147), significant

doubts remain about the extent to which established “passive” (Neuman, 1991: 42) patterns of media consumption are changing.

A 2008 Pew survey revealed that 15% of Americans reported receiving news via e-mail, 7% via an RSS reader, and 22% via a customizable web page. However, these forms of personalization were used relatively infrequently, with more than half of respondents going online for news less than two days a week (Pew, 2008). Such figures seem to confirm the view that the acquisition of news is “still by and large a passive affair,” with the audience able to bear only “minimal and easy-to-use levels of interactivity” (Harrison, 2006: 207).

Much of the technical computer science literature on personalization also assumes audience passivity. Gauch *et al.* (2007: 56) maintain that personalization systems which implicitly determine user preferences are “more likely to be used and, in practice, perform as well or better than those that require ... explicit feedback to be collected.” Explicit systems, according to Gauch *et al.* (2007), are held back by the time required to use them, by inaccurate reporting of interests, and by the failure of profiles to reflect the fact that users’ interests often change over time.

There is widespread agreement that the mass news media are relatively homogeneous in their output (McNair, 2009: 46). It is possible that an increased incidence of personalization may, by eroding some of the control that journalists have over news selection, lead to an increase in content diversity in online news. However, if audiences are, as Neuman (1991) suggests, “passive,” and “remarkably homogeneous” in their tastes, it may be that such a change is more likely to be effected by implicit forms of personalization, than by explicit.

### Institutional and economic context

Traditionally, it has been argued that “economies of scale push in the direction of common-denominator, one-way mass communications” (Neuman, 1991: 42), particularly, as is the case with most online news, where advertising provides the primary means of support (Neuman, 1991: 162). An additional potential constraint on the adoption of personalization relates to how, according to Becker and Vlad (2009: 66), news providers in commercial systems develop brands for their products using a “news philosophy” that shapes the type and mix of stories covered. Brand characteristics are usually tightly controlled and, as a result, personalization may be seen as reducing the control that news organizations have over their brand, or as promoting rivals.

On the other hand, Boczkowski (2004: 174) argues that there have been remarkable cumulative changes as print newspapers have developed non-print products and services in their attempts to defend against new entrants into the digital media arena (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009). Although only mentioning it in passing, Boczkowski (2004: 54) does include “customization” as one of the information practices that have contributed to these changes. As he points out, there are commercial advantages to customization, as it can provide rich data on audience interests and demographics, thus enabling more precise targeting of advertising.

These opposing forces are likely to be experienced to differing degrees depending on “organizational and institutional contexts” (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009: 566),

meaning, at a micro level, the occurrence of personalization could vary considerably between the individual sites studied.

### Journalists' roles and gatekeeping effects

The role of journalists as “human information filters” is at the heart of the substantial body of work within journalism studies on gatekeeping (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009: 434). Gatekeeping studies attempt to reveal the gates through which information has to pass to reach the audience, who controls those gates and how, and the effects of gatekeeping decisions on audiences' understanding of what the world is like. Although there is recognition that gatekeeping has been “explicitly affected by technological developments” (Quandt and Singer, 2009: 134), much of the recent work has tended to concentrate on “users as content producers” (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009: 571) and how their presence may be shifting news work from traditional gatekeeping tasks toward “gate opening” (Boczkowski, 2004: 166), where news workers foster user participation.

Many of the forms of personalization described in this chapter have gatekeeping effects, but the functioning of these forms is independent, largely, both of users as content producers and journalists as filters. The journalism studies literature “treats the process of gatekeeping predominantly as a selection mechanism” (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008: 1496) and barely addresses the complex interactions that exist between computer algorithms and those behind their logic, data about individual and aggregated user behavior, decisions on classification and indexing, explicit user choices, editorial and journalistic decisions, and user profiles, demographics and location. Recent work by Barzilai-Nahon (2008: 1498) has tried to better formulate gatekeeping in a networked environment, emphasizing “user interaction,” “localization,” and “customization,” but, as she says, there has been very little empirical observation of these gatekeeping mechanisms.

## Personalization Features on News Web Sites

For this chapter we have undertaken some of that empirical observation Barzilai-Nahon calls for, by continuing Thurman's (2011) longitudinal study of the personalization features at news web sites. The results, described in this section and in Tables 20.3, 20.4, and 20.5, show that the provision of personalization features on news web sites increased between 2009 and 2010. In 2010, the 11 top news web sites we studied provided between 8 and 16 different forms of personalization, up from between 5 and 13 in the previous survey. In interviews with the editors<sup>5</sup> of these news web sites, respondents were broadly supportive of the move toward more user control, citing the following factors as drivers of change: the demand for more choice among users; a wish to exploit underused content by offering more options; and a desire to align themselves with web culture.

However, there have also been changes in the types of personalization features offered since Thurman's (2011) last survey in 2009. First, there has been a sharp increase in the provision of personalization features that use recommendations from social networking

**Table 20.3** Implicit personalization functionality at a selection of news web sites, Oct–Dec 2010.

<i>Web sites</i>	<i>Geo-targeted editions</i>	<i>Multiple metrics</i>	<i>Social collaborative filtering</i>	<i>Contextual recommendations/aggregations</i>	<i>Aggregated collaborative filtering</i>
FT.com	Y				Y
Guardian.co.uk		Y		Y	Y
Mirror.co.uk				Y	Y
News.bbc.co.uk	Y			Y	Y
News.sky.com				Y	Y
NYTimes.com	Y		Y	Y	Y
Telegraph.co.uk			Y	Y	Y
theSun.co.uk				Y	Y
TimesOnline.co.uk					Y
WallStreetJournal.com	Y		Y	Y	Y
WashingtonPost.com			Y	Y	Y

Source: A more detailed version of this table is available in Thurman and Schifferes, 2011.

sites, and a growing trend toward providing personalization options on mobile phones – reflecting the rapid spread of these two media. Four sites are now offering “social collaborative filtering” through Facebook modules and nine of the 11 news sites now offer personalizable “mobile editions and apps,” with the range and functionality increasing significantly. Android, Blackberry, iPad, iPhone, and Palm Pre devices are now all catered for and apps show increasing sophistication, with five sites using reading habits and user location to help determine content preferences.

Second, there has been a continued development and elaboration of types of implicit personalization that suggest links to readers or dynamically adjust news presentation using algorithms and registered or aggregated information about users’ preferences. “Aggregated collaborative filtering” continued to be the most commonly implemented form of implicit personalization, recorded at all 11 sites, with an increased range of choices offered. In addition to the ubiquitous “most read,” nine sites offered a selection of stories based on social use – such as “most e-mailed.” Selections could be further refined by time (“most popular today,” “yesterday,” etc.) at six sites and by content category (“politics,” “Business,” etc.) at eight sites, three more than in the previous survey.

“Contextual recommendations/aggregations,” another form of implicit personalization, were used by nine of the sites surveyed. A mixture of internally developed and externally provided technology was used to automatically generate contextually related links from individual stories to other content appearing within sites or on other sites. Some web site editors, though generally keen on implicit personalization as the way forward, did express some doubts about the appropriateness of recommending other sites to users. A web editor at *The Sun* said that “I can’t see a position where we are going to give free advertising to the BBC or Sky News” (Webber), while others said they were worried about potential damage to brand reputation. “We want to offer choice and diversity, but it’s got to be done in a way that we can control in terms of quality,” said Steve Benedick of Sky News.



**Table 20.4** Explicit personalization functionality at a selection of news web sites, October–December 2010.

<i>Web sites</i>	<i>Homepage editions</i>	<i>RSS feeds</i>	<i>Twitter feeds</i>	<i>One-to-one collaborative filtering</i>	<i>SMS alerts</i>	<i>My stories/clippings</i>	<i>Widgets</i>	<i>Non-linear interactives</i>	<i>E-mail newsletters</i>	<i>Homepage customization</i>	<i>My page</i>	<i>Other explicit</i>
FT.com		264	34			Y		Y	50+	Y		
Guardian.co.uk		∞	70+		4	Y	Y	Y	17			
Mirror.co.uk		250	Y		Y				4	Y		
News.bbc.co.uk		46+	Y		1		Y	Y	97	Y		
News.sky.com		63	55+		4		Y	Y	4	Y		
NYTimes.com	Y	10 000+	100+	Y	∞		Y	Y	100s	Y	Y	Y
Telegraph.co.uk		2 377+	25+				Y	Y	20			
theSun.co.uk		12	27+		7+	Y	Y		9			
TimesOnline.co.uk		200+	65+	Y		Y		Y	11	Y		Y
WallStreetJournal.com	Y	237	64			Y	Y	Y	120+		Y	
WashingtonPost.com		150+	Y		6		Y	Y	200+			Y

∞ = Too many to count.

Source: A more detailed version of this table is available in Thurman and Schifferes, 2011.

**Table 20.5** Personalization functionality in news web sites' mobile editions and "apps," October–December 2010.

<i>Web sites</i>	<i>Personalizable mobile (web) edition</i>	<i>Personalizable "app"</i>				
		<i>Android</i>	<i>Blackberry</i>	<i>iPad</i>	<i>iPhone</i>	<i>Palmpr</i>
FT.com	Y	Y		Y	Y	
Guardian.co.uk	Y		Y	Y	Y	
Mirror.co.uk	Y					
News.bbc.co.uk				Y	Y	
News.sky.com		Y			Y	
NYTimes.com	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Telegraph.co.uk		Y		Y	Y	
theSun.co.uk				Y		
TimesOnline.co.uk	Y			Y		
WallStreetJournal.com	Y		Y	Y	Y	
WashingtonPost.com			Y		Y	

This table does not necessarily show personalization functionality available via sites' mobile editions and "apps" already reported in Tables 20.3 and 20.4.

Source: A more detailed version of this table is available in Thurman and Schifferes, 2011.

### Explicit personalization features

Although "Twitter feeds," which allow users to register to receive specific content to their Twitter account, appear in the survey results for the first time – and at every site – the other forms of explicit personalization are now fairly well established, and are developing less quickly. Indeed, some such features are being cut back by editors who are either reluctant to cede too much control to viewers, or believe the features have proven insufficiently popular or insufficiently capable of generating increased page views.

Among the explicit personalization tools, "RSS feeds" were found on every site, although their range and utility varied greatly. As RSS is a relatively established technology, changes in adoption between surveys were generally small. The same can be said for "e-mail newsletters," the next most frequently found form of explicit personalization. Numbers offered varied considerably from four to over 200, with two sites – FT.com and NYTimes.com – allowing users to register for e-mail alerts based on any keyword(s). FT.com offered the most flexibility, with users also able to personalize format and delivery schedule.

Other common explicit personalization features found on news web sites include "widgets," which allow users to put news feeds on their desktop computers, and "SMS alerts," which send key headlines to users' mobile phones. These technologies seem to have reached the apex of their adoption cycle with, in both cases, only small changes since the previous survey. They are likely to be superseded as greater numbers of people acquire smart mobile devices that support more sophisticated forms of news consumption away from the desktop.

Perhaps surprisingly, although all the sites studied offered RSS feeds, their quality was questioned by the editors and they were reported to be driving little traffic. The BBC put

a figure of “3 percent” on the level of traffic being driven by RSS feeds (Clifton). Jim Brady of *The Washington Post* estimated “8 percent,” calling it “pretty small.” Neil McIntosh of the *Guardian* thought that most ordinary consumers did not need the sort of service RSS provides.

### The future of personalized homepages

Contradictory trends have been occurring in the evolution of the most explicit form of personalization, the ability of users to create their own version of the front page of a news web site. About half the sites (six of 11) offered users a chance to customize their homepage, continuing the growth observed in the previous survey. This feature was pioneered by the BBC News web site, which allows users to view a limited set of personalized news headlines, weather, and sports results. Other providers argued, however, that only the BBC had the depth of local news content such a service requires, and that their newspaper rivals would struggle to offer something similar. A minority of providers with regionally or nationally dispersed audiences also provided GeoIP homepages, which adjust automatically to user location.

However, our latest survey has shown no reversal of the declining appetite among news web sites to provide the more sophisticated “my page” category which takes the idea of “homepage customization” a stage further, increasing the options available and allowing the user to create a personalized page rather than just to customize a small part of the homepage. Since July 2007, “my page” functionality has been removed from WashingtonPost.com, theSun.co.uk, and Telegraph.co.uk, and is being phased out by NYTimes.com and WallStreetJournal.com.

### The limits of personalization

Despite their positive attitudes toward some forms of personalization – particularly the implicit variety – web editors found their enthusiasm tempered by two strong factors. First, they worried that too much personalization would undermine the journalist’s role in selecting key stories, and second, they questioned how much real demand there was from users for active personalization, suggesting the actual demand was even lower than audience research suggested.

A key issue was preserving the trust of the audience in the integrity of their journalists. Editors felt theirs were trusted brands that users came to for accurate and reliable stories that gave them “the big-picture, wide-angle view of the world” (Montgomery). The belief that personalization could conflict with the editing function provided by news sites was strongly in evidence. The *Guardian*’s Neil McIntosh believed that readers “want someone to do some of the filtering work for them.” The competition between newspapers in the UK showed, he believed, that there was “a huge appetite for [generic] packages that filter in a slightly different way.” The fear that personalization might reduce the editorial role struck at the core of some journalists’ sense of professional identity: “if there’s anything we have it is our judgement about what people are interested in,” said the editor of TimesOnline.co.uk, Anne Spackman.

In addition, a majority of editors expressed doubts about the extent of demand for explicit personalization from readers. TimesOnline's Anne Spackman said that readers' "interests are probably not as narrow as we imagine [they] are." The BBC's Steve Herrmann thought that the "time and effort to personalize something" would put off all but a "relatively small number of people." Many editors also suggested that reader surveys indicated little appetite for the more demanding and complex forms of personalization, and that when these forms were offered the uptake was low, with less than 10% of the audience using any of the explicit personalization tools.

Doubts were also expressed about whether users actually knew what they wanted and, by implication, how well they could personalize news. Rich Meislin thought that "if you determine in advance who 'The Daily Me' is ... then you may well miss some of the important things that you didn't know you were." James Montgomery said that "people think they want it but perhaps don't know themselves as well as they think they do."

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that "personalization" is a fluid rather than fixed concept in the online news environment. Media organizations have been adopting different strategies of personalization, reflecting user experience and responses and the rise of new ways of social interaction online. The data in this longitudinal study demonstrate the evolution of personalization strategies from active to passive, reflecting a more general reflexive turn in online news provision.

Media organizations face a number of different pressures in deciding whether – and how – to deploy personalization features on mainstream news web sites. One driver is the fear of being left behind by rapid technological change. It is clear that the growing adoption of powerful mobile devices, and the increasing use of social media sites like Facebook, are forcing news web sites to adopt new forms of presentation – including personalization – at a rapid rate. This pace of change is unlikely to slow down, and will be a continuing factor in the development of personalization strategies. It is certainly likely that recommendation by "friends" will become a more powerful tool of implicit personalization in the future. However, there are currently limits to the use of social media as a means of driving traffic, notably the fact that there are relatively few news recommendations made by one's friends on a daily basis – with the news agenda changing rapidly, people do not always keep up with it in real time (see Thurman and Schifferes, 2011). In the future, the development of this "social turn" in news will be one of the big challenges facing the online news media.

As well as trying to meet the needs of their audience, editors have a desire to maintain their editorial judgment and integrity as a unique selling point in an online environment where news is increasingly commodified. Their unique editorial proposition – the front and section pages that carry their editorial selections – is increasingly challenged by personalization; by the ubiquitous nature of search, which allows users to go directly to stories; and by the rise of aggregating sites, like Google and Yahoo, which take news and process it through algorithms without much regard to source. And organizations like Google present another threat to traditional media organizations in that they have the

ability to tailor searches to individual preferences, thus bypassing the personalization provided by news sites, which is based on collective experience and influenced by those sites' editorial direction.

In the face of the threat posed by organizations such as Google, news organizations hope their own deployment of personalization features will encourage viewers to look at more stories on their sites and stay on their sites for longer. Which is why "aggregated collaborative filtering" is such an attractive tool for editors. It increases page views, but in doing so usually reinforces editorial judgments as many of the stories recommended have already been selected on the front and section pages (Steve Herrmann, editor BBC News web site, personal communication, August 2008). In contrast, linking to other content – and therefore sending people away from the organization's own web site – is a much more controversial strategy which may produce good will, but not page views.

The evidence that readers prefer to follow others' recommendations rather than shape their own news agenda has influenced the balance between explicit and implicit personalization. The idea that most people will want to build their own homepage has fallen by the wayside, although the simpler idea of sending people a selection of alerts or stories on topics they explicitly declare an interest in is still seen as useful. In terms of increasing page views, however, it appears that implicit recommendations are likely to have a bigger effect, while RSS-type feeds may slightly improve the "long tail" of little-read stories. In a world where there is a strong imperative to increase site visits and dwell times, these are important considerations. It should not be forgotten that, with the migration of newspaper readers to the web, ramping up the size of an online audience is crucial in trying to maintain revenue, particularly through advertising. It is also crucial because it is becoming clear that as network effects and the economies of scale take their toll, the online landscape will increasingly be dominated by only a few news web sites (see, for example, Noam *et al.*, 2003 and Pew, 2010).

There are, however, other commercial factors that drive personalization – cost reduction and targeted advertising. First, "collaborative filtering," "geo-targeted editions," "profile-based recommendations," and "contextual recommendations" all automate editorial processes, allowing news sites to reduce labor costs or do more without increasing staff overheads. This point is made by Daylife, the provider of "contextual recommendations" to two of the sites studied, who sell their service as providing "unlimited, high-quality, and advertiser-friendly news and content for your website . . . all with little or no staffing" (Daylife, nd: np). An algorithm, essentially, is cheaper than an editor. Second, the explicitly expressed and implicitly determined preferences captured by the processes of personalization provide the means to target advertising very precisely. The link between content personalization and advertising is made by the eight external companies that our survey found to be involved in personalizing content. On their web site, Taboola promise to "automatically direct users towards that higher CPM<sup>6</sup> . . . content while maintaining recommendation quality and user engagement" (Taboola, 2010: np). The deployment of the kinds of personalization mechanisms recorded in this study is not necessarily inconsistent with editors' concerns about personalization, in particular their perceptions of: users' aversion to choice-making, change, and excessive complexity; loss of opportunities for serendipitous discovery; users' inability to accurately predict their content preferences; personalization's potential

to erode one of journalists' core professional functions – news judgment; and the value audiences place in editorial decisions made on their behalf.

Personalization has, to a large extent, been adopted in ways that provide a high degree of continuity with existing editorial practices. Users are never forced to choose, and changes are subtle and carefully introduced. Although opportunities to personalize are numerous, and have been increasing, the sites studied still predominantly offered edited selections of material with multiple opportunities for serendipitous discovery and for journalists to demonstrate the “value” their core editorial function provides. In contrast, search engines and aggregator sites that engage in implicit personalization do so in a much less explicit manner, leading critics such as Pariser (2011) to argue that they are a far greater threat to democratic dialogue. The reflexive turn can have different meanings dependent on the context in which it is applied.

To what extent can this study of a selection of leading news web sites be generalizable to the development of news web sites more widely? Even within our sample, there was a substantial difference between some of the quality newspapers, particularly those with paywalls, which were providing a wide range of personalization tools, and the tabloids, which provided relatively few. This dichotomy is likely to persist, with popular web sites like that of the *Daily Mail* – which concentrates on celebrity news and pictures – having relatively few personalization features. On the other hand, aggregator sites that collect news from elsewhere are increasingly using passive forms of personalization. This study's implication that personalization can help build audiences and loyalty may not apply to less well-known news web sites that are especially dependent on referrals from search engines and aggregators.

Personalization is here to stay on news web sites, and certain forms of it will grow because growth has both commercial logic and audience support, which are factors that encourage innovation. However, the forms it is likely to take could diverge radically from the predictions of early Internet analysts who suggested each individual would make a unique selection of daily news. In fact, we may be moving toward a world where news choices are increasingly determined by a combination of algorithms and automated systems, and where there is a new form of editorial selection driven by the collective recommendations of fellow users, “friends,” or peers. Whether this world more closely resembles the manipulated media landscape of 1984, or the flowering of the “wisdom of crowds,” it is a far cry from the “Daily Me.”

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## Notes

- 1 There is no universally agreed name for the phenomenon under investigation. “Personalization” is preferred here because relatively frequent use in the context of news has given it a degree of

familiarity. Synonyms such as “customization” or “individuation” may more accurately describe the processes involved.

- 2 Although two categories defined in the content analysis – “one-to-one collaborative filtering” and “aggregated collaborative filtering” – could be considered a form of user-to-user interactivity, they are included because the content recommendations they enable replace editorial decisions traditionally made by journalists, and the communication is one-way.
- 3 The new content survey conducted for this study took place between October and December 2010. Results have been benchmarked against a previous survey – fully reported in Thurman (2011) – which took place between September and December 2009.
- 4 For the web sites of *The Scotsman* and *The Times* – and they are not untypical – Google’s search engine is the biggest referrer after people’s bookmarks (Thurman, 2007: 294).
- 5 The interviews reported in this study were conducted, face-to-face, between June 2007 and April 2008 and are fully reported in Thurman (2011). The participants were: Steve Bennedik – Editor, Sky News Networked Media\*; Jim Brady – Vice President/Executive Editor, WashingtonPost.com\*; Pete Clifton – Head of BBC News Interactive\*; Steve Herrmann – Editor, BBC News Interactive; Almar Latour – Managing Editor, WallStreetJournal.com\*; Neil McIntosh – Head of Editorial Development, Guardian Unlimited\*; Rich Meislin – Associate Managing Editor/Internet Publishing, *The New York Times*\*; James Montgomery – Editor, FT.com\*; Steve Purcell – Editor, Mirror.co.uk\*; Ed Roussel – Digital Editor, Telegraph Media Group; Anne Spackman – Editor, Timesonline.co.uk\*; Marc Webber – Assistant Editor, News, The Sun Online\*. The use of an asterisk shows those known to no longer be in post as of February 2011.
- 6 CPM (cost per mille) is a measure used in internet advertising to describe the cost of displaying a banner advert 1000 times. Here Taboola are promising that their personalization technology will make recommendations to areas of web sites that publishers, for commercial reasons, want users to go to.

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Part VI

Global Contexts



# Brazilian News Blogs and Mainstream News Organizations: Tensions, Symbiosis, or Independency?

Olga Guedes Bailey and Francisco Paulo Jamil Marques

Journalism as it is, is coming to an end. The boundaries between journalism and other forms of public communication – ranging from public relations or advertorials to weblogs and podcasts – are vanishing; the internet makes all other types of newsmedia rather obsolete.

Deuze, 2008: 4

## Introduction

The technological dimension of the practice of journalism has received great attention from journalists and academics in the last few decades (Postman, 1985; Gillmor, 2004; Merritt and McCombs, 2004). The numerous possibilities for content creation using ICT, which has changed the face of journalism, have been the focus of examination by academics and professionals, looking at the influence of these technologies both on new production processes and on news consumption.

However, when investigating in more depth the interface between journalism and technology, there are other elements to be considered beyond the improvement of communication tools. For example, what are the consequences of the cheapening of access of news to readers? It is cheaper and easier than ever to get instantaneous information about events happening around the globe (24/7) without much of the effort required in the past. It could be suggested that the ease of access to information and news for ordinary people on a daily basis might have contributed to the improvement of their cognitive repertoire, that is, their individual ability to obtain, decode, and interpret information.

In turn, the increase of access to information might have a series of effects not only on the convenience of receiving news, but also on producing and publishing the news. As a result, the role of journalists as primary providers of information becomes somehow

minimized, and the news market tremendously competitive. This gives the news audience/readers the opportunity to choose the type of news they want to consume as well as, in most cases, to demand greater quality of content.

The social consequences of the changes in the practice and ethos of journalism created, in part, by the new ICT are still not fully understood, and it is difficult to make generalizations in this regard. The academic debate on the social influences of digital technologies has been characterized by a division between what Dahlgren (1996) termed “cyber euphoria” and “digital dystopia” approaches.

On the one hand, the “euphoria” view suggests that digital media would provide people with the opportunities to become active agents in the communication process enhancing democratic practices, rather than being just spectators. On the other, the “dystopian” view underscores “the use of new technology by the various power elites to maintain their positions but with ever more effective control” (Dahlgren, 1996: 59). In line with this approach there is also an argument regarding the pernicious effects of technology on different spheres of society, ranging from personal resistance to the changes and demands of the contemporary world, to a general skepticism regarding the effective transformation of the traditional social structures. For example, the potential isolation – ghettoization – of political groups who would be circumscribed into communities whose social capital would be of the “bonding” type (Putnam, 2000) without a great deal of engagement with the wider society. A third argument in the debate suggests that digital media are intrinsically neither positive nor negative. In reality, some authors argue that ICT is a tool that is both socially shaped by the uses people define for them and society shaping<sup>1</sup> (MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999; Misa, 1988; Lemos, 2009).

This chapter examines some of the possible effects that ICT has on journalism practices, in particular on news. To that end, the chapter explores some of the most reliable and influential Brazilian journalistic blogs to establish what are the characteristics of news blogs that might be reshaping the relationship between bloggers and the mainstream news media.

Our argument is that there are other relevant factors beyond the technological to explain the dynamics of production and consumption of news blogs, such as the integrity of some of the big media organizations as well as the trustworthiness of those journalists responsible for the most accessed blogs, and the ability to attract a new readership by marketing a blog in different media channels.

The chapter first presents trends of blogs in Brazil and analyzes the short history of the use of blogs by Brazilian news organizations. The second part discusses the redefinition of journalistic production practices and news consumption brought about by the blogs, and the third part examines the tensions and symbioses observed in the Brazilian case of news blogs.

## **Context of Blogs in Brazil**

The creation and use of blogs by independent journalists and news organizations has become a popular alternative in their endeavor to reach a vast audience. One of the reasons for the adoption of blogs might be that they are easy to use, thus allowing

journalists to give instantaneous visibility to their articles. One can create blogs with little technical knowledge, linked or not to a main news organization or mainstream platform, allowing for interaction with readers who can contribute or comment on the content. In that sense blogs are what Howard Rheingold called an ecosystem of subcultures where:

there is no such thing as a single, monolithic, online subculture; it's more like an ecosystem of subcultures, some frivolous, others serious... At the same time, activists and educational reformers are using the same medium as a political tool. You can use virtual communities to find a date, sell a lawnmower, publish a novel, and conduct a meeting.

Rheingold, 2000: XVIII

The fact is that blogs have become a media phenomenon with an audience that cannot be ignored (Pew Research Center, 2004; Singer, 2005). Blog popularity can be illustrated by results produced by Technorati, a search engine specifically for blogs; by the end of 2008 it had registered 133 million blogs worldwide, with an average of 900 million daily posts (De Zúñiga, Puig-I-Abril, and Rojas, 2009).

In the Brazilian case, media commentators have pointed out the importance of blogs during the last Brazilian presidential election (2010) in allowing people to obtain information beyond the views of mainstream media. An article published in March 2011 by the *Folha de Sao Paulo* newspaper<sup>2</sup> suggested that, according to a report by the comScore company:

one of the reasons for the popularity of blogs in Brazil in October 2010 ... was the presidential election. The months of October and November showed record numbers of people accessing blogs (39.3 million in November). These users visited 2.25 billion blog sites during that period. The number of people using blogs increased in 2010 also when looking at the global trend; 71% of the Brazilian online users accessed blogs, while the global average was 50%.

The relevance of the blog as a platform that attracts huge audiences has been noticed by a variety of organizations interested in establishing closer contact with their users by offering updated information while also maintaining their visibility to increase profits. Organizations developing such initiatives believe blogs are useful in bypassing, to a certain extent, the role of news mediator exercised by traditional news organizations, thus generating new forms of public spheres of communication. In 2009, the Brazilian Federal Senate, for instance, launched a blog to provide news about the politicians' work, to respond to news and information published by the mainstream media which, according to the Senate House's public relations department, are not always accurate, and to provide an archive and hyperlinks to the Senate portal (<http://www.senado.gov.br/BLOG/>).

In the same year, a similar initiative was taken by Petrobras<sup>3</sup> when it created a blog aiming to publish the answers to journalists' enquiries via the public relations department. This was a way of contesting the mainstream media coverage of the company, which tends to portray Petrobras in a negative light or to select and publish information that is not beneficial to the company's interests.

The blog generated controversy, including criticism from the National Association of Newspapers, but it was later recognized as a successful experience when Petrobras received the Gold Quill Awards (2010) offered by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC).

These examples highlight particular effects blogs are having on mainstream journalism activities. Every so often, news organizations perceive blogs as a threat – news provider or not – because they might become potential competitors. This is the case with the blogs of the Senate House and Petrobras. On other occasions, the competition is among news organizations that attempt to attract readers using their existing credibility offline. The dispute over hosting a well-established independent blogger on a specific platform, for instance, changes the relationship between news organizations and professional journalists. There are cases in which conflict happens because of the editorial independence demanded by a professional journalist-blogger, which might clash with the interests of the news organizations where the blog is published. We can observe thus not only the ordinary day-to-day changes in the production and consumption of news but also the tensions in the relationship between blogs and the traditional ethos of journalism.

In this context, the role of Brazilian mainstream news media needs to be taken into account when assessing the success of the majority of Brazilian news blogs, in particular of those based in the main news portals. The almost symbiotic relationship between mainstream news blogs and the main media platforms seems to challenge the initial view that those platforms would serve to publicize alternative views of the world. The trend in Brazil seems to suggest a consensual colonization of news blogs, in which the mainstream news organizations offer space for the blogs of acclaimed professional journalists with the opportunity to hugely increase their readership.

## **History of Blogs and Journalism in the Brazilian Case: From Resistance to Colonization**

The initial phase of the popularization of blogs in the journalism landscape had an optimistic tone which, in most cases, just reflected the academic debate emblematic of the end of the twentieth century. The argument at that time suggested the use of blogs would bring a set of fundamental changes to the media and journalism logic, such as a new dynamic in terms of news coverage that would allow for the practice of citizen journalism; that is, independent blogs would offer data and opinions on topics important to local communities that were not discussed in the mainstream news media. As result, there would be potentially an increase in democratic participation resulting from the creation of alternative public spheres (Habermas, 1989); interactive features – the likelihood of establishing a dialogue between journalists, bloggers included, and audience would allow perhaps the “redesign of the basis for online journalism credibility as many blogs not only adopt the existing traditional journalism criteria used by journalists and accepted by the public but also make use of other creative forms to appeal to their readers” (Christofoletti, 2007: 11); co-created content – the potential contribution of readers to blogs’ content resulting in a negotiation between producers and users as well as in potential fragmentation of narratives, which has altered the way news is



produced and consumed; and the use of multimedia and hypertext facilities to encourage a wider understanding of the events published.

These and other elements have reinforced the advantages of news blogs over traditional forms of news coverage,<sup>4</sup> in line with the continuous debate on the decline of traditional journalism generated by the new ICT or the “classical communication and journalism in transition debate” (Dahlgren, 1996).

In Brazil, the optimistic discourse on the potential of news blogs was reinforced by an extra factor: the discussion of blogs as potential alternative spaces to encourage diversity of news (viewpoints) in the Brazilian media landscape. This mediascape is characterized by the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few families. Some authors suggested (Lima, 2001; Ramos and Santos, 2007) the criticisms suffered by the mainstream media regarding the frame and focus of their news coverage – lack of plurality of views and minority voices – would compromise the legitimacy of the news content of these media. From this perspective, blogs as alternative news spaces would minimize the power of mainstream news organizations.

However, a closer analysis of the most accessed news blogs in Brazil shows that blogs have not developed as expected. While Alex Primo (2009) was analyzing the conventional classification lists used to measure the relevance of Brazilian blogs, he identified a number of distortions caused by problems related to, for example, the classification system based on users’ votes or even the influence of economic interests in establishing a reliable ranking. In order to clarify which blogs are the most accessed in the Brazilian blogosphere, Primo created a different methodology,<sup>5</sup> which has been widely accepted by experts in the technology/computer field. He used blogs ranking information available on Google page rank, the backlinks of Google and Yahoo, and information on users on Feedburner, Alexa, and Blogblogs, to find his own method of listing the national blogs.

To illustrate the argument that the Brazilian blogosphere is colonized by new media conglomerates, we used Primo’s classification of the 100 most prominent blogs to establish which of those are what we consider as journalistic blogs and which ones are based on news media conglomerate platforms. This resulted in the following ranking list, which considers only news blogs<sup>6</sup> (Table 21.1).

The classification of blogs into journalistic blogs and non-journalistic blogs relates to the adoption or not of the ethos and values of what constitutes journalism (Hallin, 1992; Schudson, 1995; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001). In general terms, news blogs are considered journalistic when they subscribe to the traditional ethos and values that reinforce the link between news production and public interest. The technology does not necessarily change the social function of journalism, although there is a change in the way news is produced and consumed. According to Mark Deuze:

What a journalist does is guided by distinctly different ideas and factors of influence than what informs the work of a game developer, television producer, or advertising creative – and vice versa. One thing all these fields have in common is the fact that journalism, advertising, broadcasting, film, and game development are all examples of the production of culture... This does not mean that a news report on CNN and a Nike advertisement produced for the soccer World Cup are equally important or valuable in informing and thus sustaining people’s sense of community.

Deuze, 2008: 6

**Table 21.1** The main Brazilian journalistic blogs based in news media conglomerate platforms.

<i>Ranking position</i>	<i>News weblogs</i>	<i>Linked to mainstream</i>	<i>Address</i>
4	MacMagazine	Yes	macmagazine.com.br/
5	Gizmodo BR	No	gizmodo.com.br/
14	Ricardo Noblat	Yes	oglobo.globo.com/pais/noblat/
28	Miriam Leitão	Yes	oglobo.globo.com/economia/miriam/
29	BR-Linux	No	br-linux.org/
30	Imprensa Marrom	Yes	interney.net/blogs/imprensamarrom/
35	Meio Bit	No	meiobit.com/
57	Google Discovery	No	googlediscovery.com/
58	De primeira	Yes	interney.net/blogs/deprimeira/
70	Augusto Nunes	Yes	veja.abril.com.br/blog/augusto-nunes/
72	Blog do Juca	Yes	blogdojuca.blog.uol.com.br/
74	Radar on line	Yes	veja.abril.com.br/blog/radar-on-line/
84	Josias de Souza	Yes	josiasdesouza.folha.blog.uol.com.br/
87	Balaio do Kotscho	Yes	colunistas.ig.com.br/ricardokotscho/
92	Reinaldo Azevedo	Yes	veja.abril.com.br/blog/reinaldo/
97	Diogo Mainardi	Yes	veja.abril.com.br/blog/mainardi/

The analysis shows the majority of news blogs are, in various ways, associated with the major mainstream media platforms – some are journalists with exclusive contracts, others occasional columnists, or a client of the platform where the blog is available by paid subscription. These finds are illustrated in the Table 21.2. Of all the blogs classified as journalistic in the sample (16 out of the sample of 100 most relevant), 75% are connected to mainstream online portals.

Table 21.3 details the number of blogs published in the online portals of mainstream news organizations.

The results present interesting data regarding our argument: The April Publisher<sup>7</sup> media group responsible for publishing leading magazines in the country has five of the 16 news blogs in their portal. Their most popular magazine, *Veja* (“Watch”), has four news blogs by their own journalists among the most relevant.

The Group Folha da Manhã (“Morning Sheet”), owner of the main Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* and the two main online portals – UOL (universe online) and Folha Online, hosts two blogs listed among the most important in the country.

**Table 21.2** News blogs linked to mainstream portals.

<i>News blogs linked to mainstream online platforms</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	12	75
No	4	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 21.3** Blogs and their portals.

<i>Online portals</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Independent	4	25
<a href="http://oglobo.globo.com">http://oglobo.globo.com</a>	2	12.5
<a href="http://veja.abril.com.br">http://veja.abril.com.br</a>	4	25
<a href="http://www.abril.com.br">http://www.abril.com.br</a>	1	6.3
<a href="http://www.folha.uol.com.br">http://www.folha.uol.com.br</a>	1	6.3
<a href="http://www.ig.com.br">http://www.ig.com.br</a>	3	18.8
<a href="http://www.uol.com.br">http://www.uol.com.br</a>	1	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>

In turn, O Globo Online, part of the “Globo” group – proprietors of the biggest television station in the country and one of the largest in Latin America – has two news blogs in the list of the most prestigious blogs in the country.

The online portal iG – Internet Group of Brazil – an independent business of the Oi Telecommunication Company – also has an important position. Although not part of the Brazilian elite of media conglomerates, iG has been very successful in the area of news content production because it is a platform for specialist news blogs and has its own popular news site called *Ultimo Segundo* (“Last Second”).

The most popular blog in Brazil, Interney ([www.interney.net/](http://www.interney.net/)) aggregates three of the 16 news blogs mentioned in Table 21.3 and works in partnership with the Portal R7.<sup>8</sup> The “About us” section of the platform “[Interney.net/blogs](http://www.interney.net/blogs)” states that it aims to offer “total freedom to participants to create their own news or entertainment content and the possibility of being remunerated” although the site offers a set of strategies to reinforce the credibility of news published in their blogs.

The issue to be highlighted is that the most popular Brazilian news blogs are mainly based in the online portals of the same traditional media organizations controlling the communication landscape. It could also be argued that this tendency is not peculiar to Brazil but part of a global trend among established media conglomerates to colonize the structures of digital communication, thus contradicting earlier expectations that the blogosphere would be populated mainly by alternative forms of communication and worldviews.

The short history of online journalism shows that globally, in the initial stage of the digital era, mainstream news media did not have confidence in the online potential to expand their news business. In fact, respected news blogs were perceived as a threat and there was a concern that traditional printed journalism would lose readership and its power to influence the public. Most of the western news media quickly recognized that instead of competing with digital media, they should expand their business by creating new platforms and colonizing the digital media landscape.

This trend has been followed by the Brazilian news media. For instance, a number of traditional newspapers simply copied the printed version onto the new online site; others created independent portals linked to traditional news media but which were editorially independent; some made changes in the printed version and gave the e-mail addresses of

its journalists. By the end of the 1990s, new economic conglomerates, working outside the media business, entered the digital news business increasing the competition to the traditional media (Karam, 2009).

What seems to be similar to those media initiatives was their understanding of the need to adopt the new media in a scenario marked by access to information at low or no costs. The clear result of this new market is the intensification of competition for the audience/reader. In this scenario, news blogs are one of the most important news archives that journalists and news media organizations have created in the last decade (Gant, 2007).

Following this trend for adopting new technology, the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*<sup>9</sup> was one of the first to redefine its organizational structure to include a digital content editor. Pedro Doria, the journalist responsible for the “digital” desk, pointed out the need to increase the amount of online news. One of the solutions was to increase the number of blogs hosted on the *Estadão* web site. In a lecture to the Campus Party, January 2011, Doria suggested “Blogs increase the audience/users more than news,”<sup>10</sup> which might help us to understand the basis of the new configuration of online journalism. That is, blogs might become renowned because of the content offered that resonates with the readers’ interests, thus creating niche markets – for specific current affairs issues – to be explored. It also suggests that blog readers want not only fair news but also a mode of opinion which is more informal or “light.”

There are news organizations that are cautious in using blogs. The editorial board of *The New York Times*, for example, created a blog title “The Board,” intended to open up a channel of discussion with its readers on future developments of the newspaper, including the issue of blogs. In 2007, *The Economist* decided to publish its content in the leading 100 American political blogs, aiming to generate debate on their material and increase readership.

Although it is possible to point out these examples of content sharing and uses of blogs by mainstream news media, their relationship is not always straightforward. The anxieties generated in the traditional news media by news blogs’ potential effects on their business, such as competition and editorial independency, are perhaps fundamental in defining their decision to colonize the new platforms.

The problem of anxiety is visible when news media organizations establish rules for use of blogs and social networks by their journalists. In 2009, for instance, Globo Television released a statement<sup>11</sup> that prohibited the publication of any information or activity relating to the Globo organization on any media platform unless authorized by the company, including those blogs produced by their own journalists.

The newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* also has similar rules to regulate the use of media platforms by its own journalists. According to the newspaper’s directors the reason for such regulation is to avoid the risk of their own journalists taking political positions that could harm the ethos of impartiality adopted by the newspaper, as well as to prevent their journalists publishing material which was for exclusive access to their subscribers.

Another solution to this potential problem used by some media organizations is to invite their own journalists to create blogs on their media organization platform (see Miriam Leitao blog, <http://oglobo.globo.com/economia/miriam/>). This also allows

the news organization editorial control and to increase the number of their online users based on the credibility of the journalist.

## **News Blogs: Reconfiguring Journalism?**

Currently, we are witnessing the proliferation of a range of news blog experiences: from reproducing content published in mainstream media, to reproducing part of this content and adding extra material or critique, to producing their own material under the blogger's editorial control.

Such a range of possibilities might suggest that the content structure in news blogs does not follow the rules fundamental to the news production process typical of journalistic routines. In fact, the technology on which blogs are based functions as a trigger to reconsider the validity of the ethos and practices of journalism:

The success of journalism in reporting news across all media has always been influenced if not determined by technological advances: from manual typesetting to desktop publishing, from bulky cameras to handheld devices, from analogue recording to digital editing, from single-medium to multimedia. At different times in the history of the profession, technology was (and still is) heralded as the bringer of all kinds of new threats and possibilities.

Deuze, 2008: 10

As mentioned before, the changes happening in the ethos and practice of journalism are not caused solely by technological developments. According to Postman (1992), the transformation brought about by the technology is ecological, changing, for example, behaviors of professionals and institutions:

Technological change is neither additive nor subtractive. It is ecological. I mean "ecological" in the same sense as the word is used by environmental scientists. One significant change generates total change. If you remove the caterpillar from a given habitat, you are left not with the same environment minus caterpillars: you have a new environment, and you have reconstituted the conditions of survival.

Postman, 1992: 18

The motivation for bloggers to move from a phase of copying content from mainstream news media to producing their own content was related to a new attitude regarding the practice of journalism. In another words, a new conception of (blog) journalism was slowly delineated: immediacy of updates; hypertext (links to the portal the blogger is connected to); and interactivity with users. The new practices also demanded a reconfiguration of approach to structure (e.g. need of professionals to deal with readers' comments) and format (design of easier-to-read "pages").

Blogs then become characterized by a new set of attitudes and competencies aiming to satisfy the user interested in obtaining updated and relevant information. In this scenario, the admission of mistakes, previously avoided by many mainstream news media outlets, is now common practice in blogs. Users of blogs are prepared to

challenge and point out mistakes, while many journalists are not used to relating directly to their readers or trained to provide quick responses (Borges, 2006).

According to Wall (2005), blogs represent a new genre of journalism because they offer:

News that features a narrative style characterized by personalization and an emphasis on non-institutional status; participation of the audience on content creation; and story forms that are fragmented and interdependent with other websites. Ultimately, these shifts suggest that some forms of online news such as blogs have moved away from traditional journalism's modernist approach to embody a form of post-modern journalism.

Wall, 2005: 154

The changes are not only happening in the everyday practice of journalism but also in the ways journalism engages with the users of blogs, such as in the creation of a "reading contract" with the readership. That is, an assumed ethical code in which journalists do not break the trust of their readers; they report on real events, not fictional ones – which is considered a "crime" for both blogs and traditional news media. This can be illustrated by the case of the former *Washington Post* journalist, Janet Cook, who lost her Pulitzer Prize and subsequently her job because the character of the winning reportage was invented (Traquina, 1993: 168).

Carpenter (2010) argues that among the changes observed in the work of blogger-journalists is a tendency to disregard certain journalistic practices characteristic of traditional news media. A number of authors, such as Zelia Adghirni, observe that news blogs offer more opinionated coverage of events than is usually accepted in mainstream news:

Blogs, even news blogs, have two aspects of discourse: sacred (rituals and rules of traditional journalism with its legitimated news values) and the profane (subjective discourse, closeness to readers, emotions, and rupture of journalistic protocols). Both coexist in the space of the blogosphere based in the media portals.

Adghirni, 2008: 14

The central argument of these experts is that there are subtle distinctions regarding the relationship between journalists and readers. The emphasis on subjectivity and interpretative opinions in news blogs would indicate a certain deviation from the traditional journalistic ideal of providing objective information. Friend and Singer (2007), for instance, point out the unspoken agreement between news organizations and the audience (readers) to provide impartial and objective news:

Over its 300-year history in America, journalism has moved away from loyalty to political faction and toward a professed loyalty to "public interest", with a paramount obligation to citizens contingent on journalistic independence (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001)... Although some observers have documented a shift toward a more "journalist-centred" approach to news delivery that increasingly includes some expression of opinion, non-partisanship remains a normative standard for journalists.

Singer, 2005: 177–178

In this regard, how can bloggers give opinions in their personal blogs about reportages (theoretically objective and impartial) produced by colleagues working in the same newspaper they work for? Would such comments damage the newspaper's reputation or even the unspoken rules about objectivity?

It could be argued that perhaps online news users do not have a problem with news offering opinions (that would depend perhaps on the credibility of the blogger). In this sense, it could also be suggested that, by using news blogs, readers might be challenging what constitutes news and the role of journalists as news providers. This could contribute to modifying the readers' expectations in relation to the nature of the news they would like to consume.

This new audience/reader behavior can be exemplified by the case of the journalist Ricardo Noblat, whose blog is one of the most visited and influential in Brazil<sup>12</sup> (<http://oglobo.globo.com/pais/noblat/>).

In 2007 he commented about the scenario for the 2008 USA presidential elections with the following observation:

It is rather early for this blog to present its choice of candidate to the USA presidential election. Four years ago the blog supported the democrat candidate defeated by Bush. Previously, it supported the candidacy of the cardinal of Vienna to the Pope election. Last year, it supported Cristovao in the first turn of the presidential election, in the second turn, it supported nobody. Before one says that the blog is unlucky, you should be reminded that the blog supported the current mayor of Fortaleza, Luiziane Lins, when even her party PT [Labour Party] abandoned her.<sup>13</sup>

The opinionated nature of Noblat's blog has got the attention of readers and academics. Adghirni, for example, examined how Noblat used the space and popularity of his blog to discuss personal issues such as the birth of his grandchild in 2008, thus becoming a blog to present personal matters that have no relation to news coverage (Adghirni, 2008).

The reconfiguration of journalism practices generated by blogs raises another issue: who has the authority to give opinion on current affairs? Users might read blogs not only to get information but also to find out what views and opinions are available on certain issues (Gomes, 2008). What seems relevant is that many blogs are available but some have more credibility than others. In spite of the changes generated by technology, credibility is a traditional element of journalism that maintains its currency in the new journalism landscape.

In particular, what can be said regarding the differences between the credibility of established news organizations and the credibility of one professional?

In the discussion about ethics in journalism it is important to point out the commitment of journalists to their audience/readers. However, ethics also refer to the news organization's responsibility to its readers. That is, the establishment of a relationship of trust does not necessarily happen directly between journalists and their readers. There is the credibility of the news organization behind the professional that provides the final seal of that relationship of trust. Perhaps to those bloggers who do not yet have great visibility it is fundamental to be part of an established news platform organization to give credibility to their work.

Journalistic credibility hence is built into the everyday of producing reliable news and needs to be constantly reaffirmed to the audience/readers through various mechanisms. It could be confirmed, for example, among other things, by newsroom manuals, in prizes received, or by an ombudsperson in the news organization. The main point however is that news blogs add new components to the concept of credibility as suggested by Christofolletti (2007):

Journalistic blogs provide an indication of new forms of relationship between journalists and their readers/audience. Is the credibility of blogs different? Yes and no. What is apparent – at least in the first decade of the existence of blogs – is that blogs have traces of traditional journalistic credibility as well as a new system of reputation originated and strengthened by the internet. Thus it seems there is in news blogs a symbiosis of both models that certifies the credibility of both media.

Christofolletti, 2007: 2

The relationship of trust between a journalist-blogger and the reader seems to be based on two elements: First, on the positive image of the journalist. Part of this image was probably built while working in the traditional news media. It could be argued that a journalist's experience and recognition allow him or her to inform and confidently provide opinions on current affairs relevant to the reader. This credibility brought from the traditional media to the blog is consolidated and even expanded in the online space as the journalist uses trustworthy sources and interacts with the readers. That is, the credibility is strengthened by the involvement of readers with the blogger. Second, on the readers' understanding that the blog offers information and opinion from a journalist they trust. Put another way, the readers know this particular journalist is someone whose views and opinions they trust and, in many cases, they subscribe to his or her political position. Mostly, users seem to access blogs for the views and analysis offered by renowned and respectable journalists aiming to position themselves in relation to specific current affairs of interest to them. The key to understanding the success of news blogs – and the anxiety of media outlet owners to use them – is then perhaps with the readers' demands: news organizations seem to use the Internet to cater for the needs of the users – opinionated news that positions itself in relation to the topics presented.

### **Blogs, Journalists, and News Organizations: Tensions, Symbiosis and/or Independence?**

The majority of the most popular news blogs are in the portals of Brazilian media conglomerates. A number of blogs were created independently by journalists out of the news market. On the one hand, this proved to be an advantage for those who already had good journalistic credentials and authority to speak and be heard in the online public sphere characterized by a profusion of voices. On the other, integration within the portal of a consolidated news company has its advantages. For example, the blog might attract more advertisers; have better technical structure; and have better synergy with different sites



of the portal. Perhaps these reasons explain the symbiotic relationship taking place between well-regarded bloggers and the traditional media organizations.

Such symbiosis is not without contradiction or rupture. Bloggers might migrate to different competitor news portals when convenient for them. The users of the blog tend to follow the journalist to another portal because of the established relationship of trust. That was the case with Richard Noblat who, in 2007, moved from the *Estadão* newspaper portal to the *O Globo* online portal.

What these practices might suggest is that those journalists who are recognized in the world of journalism and are very popular with news users do not need to be subjected to the restrictive rules of news organizations where their blogs are based. That is, they have the power to bargain for editorial independence and, in a sense, to create a “newspaper” inside a newspaper portal.

As happens with many columnists whose work is not subjected to the same editorial filters applied to “ordinary” journalists, celebrity bloggers have privileges. For example, they tend to ignore the conventional rule of not mentioning news competitors by referring to them in their news reports and analysis.

In other words, it is plausible to agree with Adghirni’s view (2008: 2) that a “news blog is a phenomenon related to the audience and to the credibility associated with the main news organizations, such as *Estadão*, *O Globo*, *Folha de Sao Paulo*, *Universo Online*, etc.” Worth noting, however, are the tensions that, if not bringing about divergence from the traditional patterns of journalism practices, at least change the dynamic among those agents responsible for the editorial and hierarchical control of news production that characterized most newsrooms in the twentieth century.

The tension in a partnership between bloggers and news media organizations is noticeable, for example, with regard to the editorial limit on what is acceptable for publication. Total autonomy of opinion might be risky for the news organization as they lose control over the bloggers’ news and views (Breed, 1955). The relationship is well balanced because both parts know the benefits of such enterprises, from using the structure of the news organizations (technicians, equipments, and prestige) to attracting significant readership to the blog and to the mainstream news platform. Moreover, one should consider the challenges news organizations are facing. It is necessary to rethink the management of online platforms owned by the same group in order to avoid internal competition, which would be detrimental to all involved – bloggers, news companies, and readers.

## Conclusion

This chapter discussed how the development of information and communication technology has changed particular aspects of the practices of journalism, specifically news blogs in Brazil.

The popularization of blogs as a digital platform of communication aroused the interest of the large media conglomerates as they realized their potential to attract an audience, subsequently triggering a process of colonization of these resources.<sup>14</sup>

This is not a straightforward process for the big media players as the online world offers numerous possibilities to everyone. First, there is a plethora of alternative forms of

consumption of information available to readers; and second, the chances of a blog becoming popular for its credibility is quite high, even when not hosted by main news portals. This is the case for many independent blogs that offer autonomous journalistic analysis and news.

These possibilities have not prevented the leading news companies investing in blogs, including those previously considered as competitors. By observing the new informational scenario of the first decade of the twenty-first century, news organizations realized they had to embrace the new digital communication technologies and innovative ways of making news. This happened both at the internal level (innovation in the forms of news production and need for frequent updating of news material) and the external level (the need to be present on all platforms used by users; the need to respond immediately to mistakes in the news).

One of the main changes blogs have brought to the relationship between prominent journalists and news media organizations is the power they give those journalists to negotiate the editorial autonomy of their news blogs. The credibility and enormous audience these blogs have somehow become a type of capital for journalists to negotiate the best deal when moving to a mainstream news portal. This indicates perhaps a qualitative change in the way news conglomerates are reorganizing themselves.

A relevant observation here is that these changes seen in the news landscape are mainly cultural (Hallin, 1994) because they imply the reconfiguration of attitudes among readers and journalists, and the reshaping of the relationship between journalists and news organizations. These cultural and organizational transformations in the practices of journalism should require an update of traditional theories related to “explaining” the nature of news (Traquina, 2004) such as the organizational theory – inspired by Breed (1955), which was last updated in the 1970s.

In the Brazilian case, what seems to be happening with regard to changes in journalism practices related to digital technologies of communication is a similar process to that observed in many countries: new components are absorbed in the process of news production, new forms of relationship are established between the different social actors involved in the process, while major media conglomerates develop a steady process of colonization of new media platforms, leaving most alternative voices talking among themselves outside the mainstream news spaces and only occasionally engaging with the wider public sphere.

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## **Notes**

- 1 The debate on the social shaping of technology is not the focus of this chapter and has been mentioned only to position this study as not technologically deterministic.

- 2 “Brazil reads more blogs than any other country in the world” [“Brasil lê mais blogs que resto do mundo,” in Portuguese], article published March 2, 2011. *Folha de S. Paulo* (FSP) was created in 1921, edited in São Paulo, Brazil. It is owned by the Group Folha, a media conglomerate of an Internet service provider (biggest in Brazil UOL – universe online), newspapers, publishing house, and a market research company. Its national circulation figure for 2010 was 295 000. FSP is one of the leading newspapers in Brazil (All translations from Portuguese to English were done by the authors.).
- 3 Petrobras (Petroleo Brasileiro S/A) is company of open capital created in 1953. The Brazilian government is the main shareholder. According to their web site, Petrobras is the largest company in Latin America in terms of market capitalization and revenue, and the largest company headquartered in the southern hemisphere in terms of market value. (<http://fatosedados.blogspetrobras.com.br/>) last accessed May 8, 2011.
- 4 It is important to point out the criticism of the slow adoption of digital technologies by news organizations in the late 1990s (Deuze, 2003).
- 5 Points = (PR × 1000) + Google + (Yahoo/100) + (Feedreaders/10) + Alexa + (blogblogs × 10)/100.
- 6 The complete table is available at [http://www.interney.net/blogs/alexprimo/2009/11/11/ranking\\_dos\\_blogs\\_brasileiros\\_2009/](http://www.interney.net/blogs/alexprimo/2009/11/11/ranking_dos_blogs_brasileiros_2009/) (last accessed April 20, 2011). The table relates to data from 2009 and the ranking positions of blogs might have changed since then.
- 7 The publication is part of the Abril (April) Group, founded in 1950. The company is one of the most powerful in the communication sector. The Abril Publishing house has a very diverse printed media portfolio – from news to entertainment. They are responsible for *Veja* magazine, the weekly news magazine with the highest circulation in Brazil – more than one million copies.
- 8 The portal R7 is part of the Record Media Brazilian conglomerate – radio, newspapers, and television – owned by the Church ‘Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus’.
- 9 The newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*, was created in 1875 and has a circulation of 250 million copies. It is a very influential newspaper in Brazil.
- 10 More details at <http://migre.me/5M7jK> (last accessed May 15, 2011).
- 11 Source: <http://migre.me/4gzSp> (last accessed May 15, 2011).
- 12 Noblat’s blog obtained public recognition for the in-depth coverage of a corruption scandal among Brazilian politicians – called “Mensalao” (monthly) – when the Executive power was accused of buying off members of the legislative house to vote for the government projects/laws (<http://oglobo.globo.com/pais/noblat/>).
- 13 Source: <http://migre.me/4gLsX> (last accessed May 12, 2011).
- 14 We have to consider the diversity of types of news blogs, among them we could mention: independent blogs of unknown journalists aiming to provide opinions; blogs that are merely repositories of news produced elsewhere; and those blogs of established journalists based in the portals of major news media companies.

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# A Chance for Diversity? Australian Online Journalism

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## Introduction

As it enters the second decade of the new millennium, Australian journalism – and Australian *online* journalism with it – is experiencing a period of significant disruption. On the one hand, some news organizations and enterprising journalists are actively seeking to explore what ways of reinvigorating the profession may be open to them – not least by drawing on the affordances of a changing media environment that now also includes online, social, and mobile media platforms. On the other hand, however, there remains a significant and at times belligerent resistance to change, especially where that change is likely to lead to a shift in the professional role and public standing of journalists at an individual level, or to the repositioning and restructuring of news organizations at an institutional level. The conflict between these two broad positions is played out, at times vocally, between the news organizations and individual journalists representing them, as well as (by proxy) between journalism academics in Australia.

The situation in the country is further complicated by “the extraordinary concentration of media ownership in Australia” (Jones and Pusey, 2008: 587). Its print, radio, and TV news markets are each controlled by a handful of major nationwide operators: the newspaper market in most Australian states and territories is dominated by one or two major regional papers, for example, published either by Rupert Murdoch’s News Ltd or by the Fairfax Media group, with significant amounts of content syndicated nationally within these news organizations. As these newspapers have developed their online presences, the same remains true here, too – for example, content from Fairfax’s *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper or its Melbourne equivalent *The Age* is regularly rebadged for the company’s online-only Brisbane outlet, the Brisbane Times, at times even without

removing references to the *Herald* as the originating paper or otherwise adjusting the material for an interstate readership.

This oligarchic environment provides only limited incentives for product innovation or experimentation with new reporting and publishing techniques: news organizations have generally preferred to preserve the relatively settled status quo of the Australian news media industry rather than to explore new opportunities in pursuit of as yet unknown and unknowable competitive advantages. Historically, indeed, most significant investment in new news ventures seems to have been driven by a perceived need to preserve the news organizations' status, and by the egos of the news proprietors, more than by commercial or professional imperatives and opportunities: so, for example, Rupert Murdoch's costly launch of *The Australian* as a national newspaper in 1964 was in large part designed to establish Murdoch as the nation's leading news proprietor, and to provide him with a national platform from which to wield political influence, while Fairfax's introduction of the Brisbane Times as an online paper was an attempt to develop a news presence in the important Brisbane market, which had until then only been served by News Ltd's *Courier-Mail* newspaper.

A further striking example of the use of news publications as status symbols is provided by the long-running Australian news magazine *The Bulletin*, which had been operated by the third major player in the Australian media industry, Publishing and Broadcasting Limited (PBL), since 1961. Much like *The Australian* for Murdoch, *The Bulletin* was seen as an object of personal prestige for PBL chairman Kerry Packer, who continued to support its publication – in conjunction with the Australian edition of *Newsweek* – even in spite of its persistent unprofitability and a significant haemorrhage of readers since the mid-1990s (resulting from a shift of readers to the emerging online news sources). Packer's death in 2005, and the subsequent acquisition of most of PBL's media interests by a private equity firm in 2007, are seen as direct causes for *The Bulletin*'s termination on January 23 2008: media analyst Peter Cox is quoted as saying that “the magazine had been a favourite of Kerry Packer and, upon his death, there had been no need to keep it open” (Steffens, 2008: np).

At the turn of the millennium, the Australian news industry could have been described as one of the last bastions of a form of journalism that is driven by the political intervention and practical involvement of news proprietors in the day-to-day operation of newsrooms, then. Further, given the significant experience of these media barons in developing Australia's print and broadcast news industries, online news remained a mere add-on to what continued to be seen as the “main game” of journalism, and an unwelcome disruption threatening the *status quo*. Since then, arguably, Packer's death, and the gradual shift in Murdoch's focus away from his Australian origins and toward emerging markets, along with protracted leadership issues at Fairfax Media, have left a vacuum of leadership within these key Australian media companies. This lack of forward direction is impacting especially notably on their ability and willingness to explore new opportunities in online journalism, and in some cases provides the basis for a continuing animosity and belligerence toward those emerging and established Australian media organizations that are engaged in building new and innovative online platforms.

## **Innovation in Online Journalism: The ABC and the Independents**

Against the backdrop of a generally slow-moving commercial media industry still bemoaning the decline of its traditional sources of revenue and readership, more aggressive innovation strategies have been pursued by a number of other media organizations. Chief amongst them is the major public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), which established a New Media division within the organization in the year 2000 and has since developed Australia's leading online news platform, ABC News Online. Its activities in this sector are clearly inspired by the successful model of BBC News Online (the BBC has long served as a role model for the ABC overall), and under the leadership of current Managing Director Mark Scott, the ABC has put particular emphasis on exploring innovative news formats through online, social, and mobile media – indeed, the New Media division was reconstituted as ABC Innovation some six months after Scott was appointed to his role at the ABC in June 2006.

Key elements in the ABC's digital media strategy are the continued expansion of its web platform ABC News Online, and its close interconnection with the ABC's broadcast news operations; the ABC now provides rapid online transcripts and podcasts for a large number of its key news bulletins and current affairs shows in both TV and radio, as well as significant online-only coverage. Additionally, it has also followed the BBC's iPlayer example by offering iView, a multimedia application that allows for online catch-up viewing of its news and entertainment shows as well as providing access to online-only content; an ABC iPhone app with similar functionality is also available. Of particular interest amongst these multimedia offerings is the online broadcast of its ABC News 24 channel, which was launched in July 2010 as a terrestrial digital television channel – the first domestic free-to-air TV news channel in Australia (previously, News Ltd's Sky News Australia, available only to pay-TV subscribers, had been the only Australian 24-hour TV news channel). ABC News 24 is available for streaming to Australian Internet users, and the geoblock that otherwise restricts overseas access has been lifted by the ABC during significant events including the 2010 federal election as well as recent natural disasters in Australia and New Zealand.

The ABC's ability to develop such new journalistic offerings for online audiences is aided by the fact that, unlike its European counterparts, which as a public broadcaster molded after European models it otherwise closely resembles, it is not subject to the EU competition legislation that has led to the introduction of "public value tests" of various forms in those national markets. In several countries, chiefly including the UK and Germany, European Union legislation designed to protect the open media market from the undue influence of government-funded public broadcasters has led to tight limitations especially of new online and mobile ventures; the German public broadcaster ARD, for example, has been heavily criticized for developing an iPhone application for its main news bulletin and web site, the Tagesschau (Focus, 2010), and is now forced to remove news stories from its web site after a grace period of seven days (Niggemeier, 2010). Objectively, rather than merely avoiding a distortion of the market in favor of government-funded public broadcasters, as they were designed to do, such rules appear to have the effect of actively distorting the market to their disadvantage.



In Australia, although occasionally the ABC has been criticized by its commercial rivals for distorting the market (see e.g. Leslie, 2010), no similar rules exist. Additionally, the fact that its public broadcasters – in addition to the ABC, the second public broadcaster Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) serves Australia’s minority populations – are funded directly by the government, rather than through license fees raised from the public independently of their taxes, combines with persistent complaints about the limited level of government funding for public broadcasters to create an impression of the ABC as a perennial underdog, forced to make do with a pittance while commercial news organizations are awash with cash. While – given the significant revenue crisis experienced especially by newspaper publishers in Australia as well as abroad – such perceptions may no longer fully resemble reality, they have led to a generally positive predisposition of the Australian populace toward “Auntie,” as the ABC is affectionately known. Australians generally appreciate “their” ABC, and not least its online services, and value the quality of its news coverage. By contrast, ABC Managing Director Mark Scott has observed that in Britain, “a reliance on licence fees came with several burdens including stiff opposition from people who rarely tune into the BBC and plenty of arguments over how the broadcaster spends its money” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2009: np).

Criticism of the ABC’s comparatively expansionist approach under Scott has therefore come mainly from its competitors. Through a series of public speeches and interviews, Mark Scott and both Rupert and James Murdoch have engaged in a discussion at a distance about the future course for journalism, especially online: while the Murdochs loudly decried the distorting presence of public broadcasters like the BBC and ABC in the overall news market, Scott responded in kind – in a public speech pointedly entitled “Media after Empire,” aimed squarely at “Rupert,” as he called him – by suggesting that the paywalled online news models currently pursued by the Australian News Ltd and its international parent NewsCorp were unworkable and based on outdated ideas:

The Murdoch push is fascinating. You sense this rage at the injustice of what the online world is doing to his traditional print business model. Murdoch has always been willing to cross-subsidise his print passions. Papers like *The Times of London*, *The New York Post* and *The Australian* endured years of losses and survived, because he said so. And because he had The Simpsons there to soak up the red ink.

And, ironically given his current plans, one of his strategies was always to cut the price of content – to cheap and almost uneconomic levels – to put his competitors under the gun.

But now, the man who just four years ago said he wanted to “make the necessary cultural changes to meet the new demands of the digital native” says he’s not going to respond to the demands of these digital natives. Instead, they – who have never in their lives paid for news online – will be asked to respond instead to his demands and start paying.

Scott, 2009: np

This vocal challenge to the long-standing Murdoch primacy in the Australian media industry has opened a clear and defined fault line between Scott’s ABC and News Ltd’s various print, online, and broadcast outlets, with Fairfax papers as interested but comparatively uninvolved observers.

Arguably, however, what is at stake in this debate is not just the financial prospects of the commercial media organizations, which are now facing renewed competition from the free content provided by a reinvigorated public broadcaster, but also their leading role in setting the news agenda and determining the way specific news stories are framed through reporting. This latter question – of who takes the lead in informing the nation and its debates – has been the focal point of recent debates in Australian journalism, and extends well beyond the ABC and its mainstream commercial counterparts alone. In addition to these long-established media interests, the past decade has also seen the emergence and establishment of a variety of smaller, independent news and commentary providers, especially online – ranging from the long-running *On Line Opinion* to *Crikey* and *New Matilda*, and beyond them to a thriving ecosystem of news and political blogs (see Bruns, 2008; Bruns and Adams, 2009).

While some of these sites – especially *Crikey* – have gradually moved to include some degree of first-hand news reporting into their repertoire, the majority continue to focus mainly on political analysis and commentary; they are acting as gatewatchers (Bruns, 2005), observing and commenting upon what is reported in other news outlets and what becomes available from first-hand sources including government and NGO reports and unfiltered news releases, rather than acting as gatekeepers, deciding what events are worth reporting about, and in what context. In doing so, they have positioned themselves in direct competition with the established political commentariat of mainstream news organizations (often referred to, due to the location of their workplaces in Parliament House, as the Canberra press gallery) – and by challenging the interpretations of political events that are offered by mainstream industry journalists in both their news reporting and subsequent political analysis, they have opened up a significant new front in the struggle between traditional and new modes of journalism.

This struggle has personal, procedural, and political dimensions. On the *personal* level, it is widely acknowledged that in spite of the institutional rivalries between the various mainstream Australian news outlets, the close working conditions of the Canberra press gallery have led to a significant amount of camaraderie and interchange between the individual journalists involved – a situation that has been criticized as leading to a substantial amount of groupthink in Australian political news reporting: individual nuances notwithstanding, political events are generally perceived by journalists through a shared frame, leading to a very limited set of perspectives on political events actually being represented in the resulting news reports. Such observations are comparable with the results of studies of journalists' attitudes in specific newsrooms (see e.g. Gans, 1980), which detected similar shared frames.

By contrast, the analysts and commentators contributing to the second tier of independent news organizations in Australia are generally not members of the press gallery, and operate independently and at a distance from mainstream journalism; while – even in spite of the absence of a shared physical newsroom space for most of these online news sites – a shared frame for interpreting news events might exist amongst their contributors, too, that frame is likely to be markedly different from that of the press gallery. What results are news reports and analyses that diverge notably from the logic of Australian mainstream journalism, but are often no less compelling.

Additionally, as the gatewatching approach of these independent news organizations enables them to depart to a significant extent from conventional journalistic practice, it also enables the participation of a wider range of contributors – who are not necessarily trained as professional journalists, but bring different skillsets to the task. One of Australia's most highly regarded independent political commentators, for example (operating under the pseudonym Possum Comitatus first on his independent blog and then as part of the Crikey stable of political bloggers), is a trained psephologist – a scientist specializing in the interpretation of public opinion polls – and has brought this expertise to bear in a number of debates about the true meaning of political opinion trends.

While undoubtedly the core practices of journalism – especially those associated with the first-hand reporting of events and issues – remain crucial, then, the new breed of online news analysts and commentators contributes important new impulses to Australian journalism at the *procedural* level, too. Rather than relying on journalists to incorporate the analysis and perspectives of experts in their news reports, these expert commentators choose to become active in their own right, bypassing standard editorial procedures altogether; in doing so, they are able freely to point to omissions and misrepresentations in the mainstream journalistic coverage and can ensure that their own views are communicated correctly and in full.

Finally, this broadening of available perspectives on and interpretations of political issues also has effects at a *political* level – it provides contrast to the framing of stories in the mainstream news outlets, and thereby makes it easier to identify persistent political bias in the reporting of specific news organizations. This should not be seen as a simplistic argument against political bias in news reporting altogether – many strong democratic systems, especially in Europe, are inherently built on the robust engagement between a variety of news organizations, each with its own in-house political bias, as a representation and orchestration of political debate within the population itself. Demonstrably, however, Australia has a substantially more impoverished media system that is dominated by a small handful of mainstream media outlets, each of which tend to claim to have no house bias; this results in political debates that often simply descend into claims and counterclaims of bias, rather than accepting and appreciating that bias and instead engaging in the necessary struggle between divergent political ideologies in a more constructive and respectful fashion. Intelligent, independent online news commentary and analysis that acknowledges its own political perspectives has the potential to overcome this impasse, and to move political debate in Australia from a debate *over* bias to a discussion *between* differently biased political perspectives.

To date, these challenges have not always been readily accepted by the mainstream journalism industry in Australia, however; rather, the news organizations' first response was often to attack and denigrate their new online challengers. A number of key cases from recent years illustrate this point. First, the 2007 federal election campaign saw a protracted battle between leading political reporters (especially at *The Australian*) and independent election analysts over the correct interpretation of opinion polls that had consistently predicted a change of government (from the conservative Coalition under Prime Minister John Howard to the Australian Labor Party under Kevin Rudd). Howard, in office for more than a decade, was widely seen by voters as out of touch, and this was

reflected in poll results indicating a landslide Labor victory – but a number of political journalists sought to interpret any minute shifts in poll results toward Howard as the beginning of a narrowing of the gap between both parties; indeed, they did so with such vigor and repetition that talk of “TEH NARROWING” (*sic*) has now become a standing joke amongst political bloggers.

Through their blogs, psephologists such as Possum Comitatus (now at Crikey) provide a clear and detailed counter-narrative to this journalistic interpretation, focusing especially on clearly documenting their methodology for making election predictions. With journalists often basing their comments on shifts in the poll results of one percentage point or less, the psephologists pointed most frequently to the fact that the opinion poll methodologies used by the major pollsters tended to have an unavoidable margin of error of two percentage points or more, rendering any speculation about smaller poll shifts absurd.

Such criticism (by experts in the field) only served to inflame the rhetoric from professional journalists, however. With sad predictability, *The Australian* attacked its psephologist critics as “sheltered academics and failed journalists who would not get a job on a real newspaper,” and – somewhat illogically, given that what was at issue in the debate were the political sentiments of the general public, and the clarity with which they pointed to a defeat of the Howard government – as “out of touch with ordinary views” (*The Australian*, 2007: np). The eventual result of the election – a 20-seat majority in federal parliament – clearly vindicated the psephologists’ views.

The chief reasons for *The Australian*’s belligerent reaction are both political and institutional. For the staunchly conservative newspaper, maintaining the possibility of a conservative comeback in the polls, against all odds, was an important aim in itself, which was pursued in part by the paper’s unsustainably upbeat interpretation of the opinion polls. This keeping of the conservative faith was made all the more difficult by the persistent counter-narrative provided by the psephologist bloggers, however, who not only argued against it but also provided clear evidence for the logic of their interpretation. Further, then, this clear defeat in the political debate, especially as it comes at the hands of non-journalists, also undermines the professional standing of *The Australian* (and by extension of its parent company, News Ltd) as a news institution: it positions the paper as a news organization that will not allow basic psephological facts – such as margins of error in opinion polling – to get in the way of the political stories it intends to tell its readers. From that perspective, in fact, the paper’s final shot in its attack on the psephologists and their publisher appears especially hapless: when the paper claims that “unlike Crikey, we understand Newspoll because we own it” (*The Australian*, 2007: np), rather than adding support to *The Australian*’s argument this only serves to damage the News Ltd-owned pollster Newspoll by undermining its scientific independence. (See Bruns, 2008 for a further discussion of the 2007 “blog wars.”)

During the intervening years, the posture of *The Australian* as the most belligerent critic of the new online news commentators and analysts who have emerged in Australia has not diminished; consequently, neither has their criticism of its news reporting. While the significant dissonance between the paper’s observably conservative political stance and its fulsome claims to represent the mainstream “heart of the nation” has contributed to positioning it as the most obvious lightning rod for critics of political journalism, that criticism addresses what is perceived as a more fundamental problem in Australian

journalism: a lack of depth in news reporting, a reluctance to engage with the facts of a story, and a focus on political gossip rather than on policy substance. Such criticisms were aired especially against the backdrop of the 2010 federal election contest between Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, most vocally and persistently perhaps by the then-anonymous author of the blog Grog's Gamut:

There's a dearth of ability to write and comment about [policy] in Australia's media. It is why blogs such as Possum's and others flourish. And it's why 95 percent of the media following Julia and Tony around are pointless – they don't know what questions to ask, and lack the ability to explain the complexities in a way that non-specialists would be able to understand or find interesting. And so we get "The NBN: How much it will cost you" or some such.

Grog's Gamut, 2010: np

Although writing anonymously – what was known about him at the time was only that he was a public servant in the federal capital, Canberra – Grog had established significant status in the Australian political blogosphere, and his running commentary on the media's performance during the election campaign was widely read; indeed, it provoked a response from none less than ABC Managing Director Mark Scott himself:

Half way through the campaign, the ABC Executive met on a Monday morning and discussed the weekend blog by the Canberra public servant, writing under the tag Grog's Gamut. It was a lacerating critique of the journalists following the candidates, their obsession with transient matters, the political scandal of the day. He met a chorus of praise and support, triggering a barrage of criticism of campaign coverage.

I think there is quite a bit of beard-stroking on this issue. There will be big political stories and they often have important implications – like how united or divided a party is – or how seriously they treat matters of national security. Leaders must be questioned on these issues.

And often it is hard to ask nuanced questions about a policy that is only delivered in press release form to your hands at the beginning of the press conference, if at all. In fact, often the leaders only want you to ask questions on their policy of the day, on their terms, without allowing you to dig – avoiding the news stories and deflecting other issues for another occasion.

You need both of course. The journalists on the bus firing questions, the team back doing the digging, taking paths away from the mainstream. So that we don't just get more and more about less and less.

One of the questions of this campaign is whether we took advantage of the increased capacity to create and deliver content using digital media to provide the breadth and depth of coverage that was possible. And if we did – whether we really helped interested voters to find it.

Scott, 2010: np

While this reaction from the management of one of Australia's leading news organizations is encouraging, however, the responses from a number of the political journalists concerned were less positive; much like *The Australian's* response to its psephologist critics in 2007, they resembled the well-familiar tendency by journalists to circle the wagons in defence against criticism from outside the profession.

Ultimately, such responses resulted not in a reasoned debate about the future direction for Australian political journalism, but in a far more base attempt to dispose of the messenger: Grog's personal identity – as Canberra public servant Greg Jericho – was unmasked in a piece in *The Australian* by journalist James Massola (2010). While this action was at first justified by the paper's Media Editor Geoff Elliott as supposedly serving “the public's right to know” (Elliott, 2010a: np), that defence rings hollow given that – as Jericho noted soon after – Massola had known his true identity for some ten months before the unmasking (Jericho, 2010). It is difficult, therefore, to see Massola's action as anything other than a naked attempt to cause personal and professional difficulties for Jericho, and thereby to pressure him to tone down his criticism or cease blogging altogether. Indeed, Jericho did suspend his blog for several weeks following the incident, but the strong support that he received from the Australian political blogging community kept him from quitting his blog altogether. Far from silencing criticism, the affair (dubbed “Grogsgate” by the bloggers) has only served to further cement a perception of Australian political journalists as reacting with petulant defensiveness as soon as criticisms of their professional performance are raised.

## From Online to Social Media

However, if since the early 2000s independent political bloggers have provided a challenge to Australian journalists that is as yet to be fully addressed, then the subsequent rise of further social media tools and their embedding into journalistic and political discussion practices has only served to further complicate the situation. Twitter, in particular, has proven especially popular – at first perhaps with the authors and readers of Australian political blogs, but a growing number of Australian mainstream journalists, politicians, and other public figures have now embraced the medium as well, if at times reluctantly.

In discussing Twitter, there is always a danger of overestimating the impact of this platform on public communication – certainly, in Australia as well as at a global level, it continues to run a distant second or third to Facebook as the preferred social networking platform. However, it must also be noted that available studies of Twitter's user demographics appear to indicate that they closely match those of the group of politically engaged citizens whom Stephen Coleman (2006) might describe as “political junkies:” generally well-educated, well-connected, urban professionals within the 25–45-age bracket; in this, these demographics may well match those of the readers of political blogs (although clear data on this are much more difficult to gather), pointing again to the high likelihood of significant overlaps in participation between these two channels. While with a broadening of the overall Twitter user base such demographics may continue to change, for now the key observation remains that Twitter is used to a significant extent for political discussion and activism.

This is also aided by the fact that – in stark contrast to the underlying model of Facebook – it is possible for Twitter users to form loose, ad hoc communities around shared interests and themes without needing to “friend” one another's profiles or to “like” particular pages; indeed, it is even possible for users without their own Twitter accounts to follow these distributed discussions within the community. This is facilitated through the use of Twitter hashtags: short keywords or abbreviations, preceded by

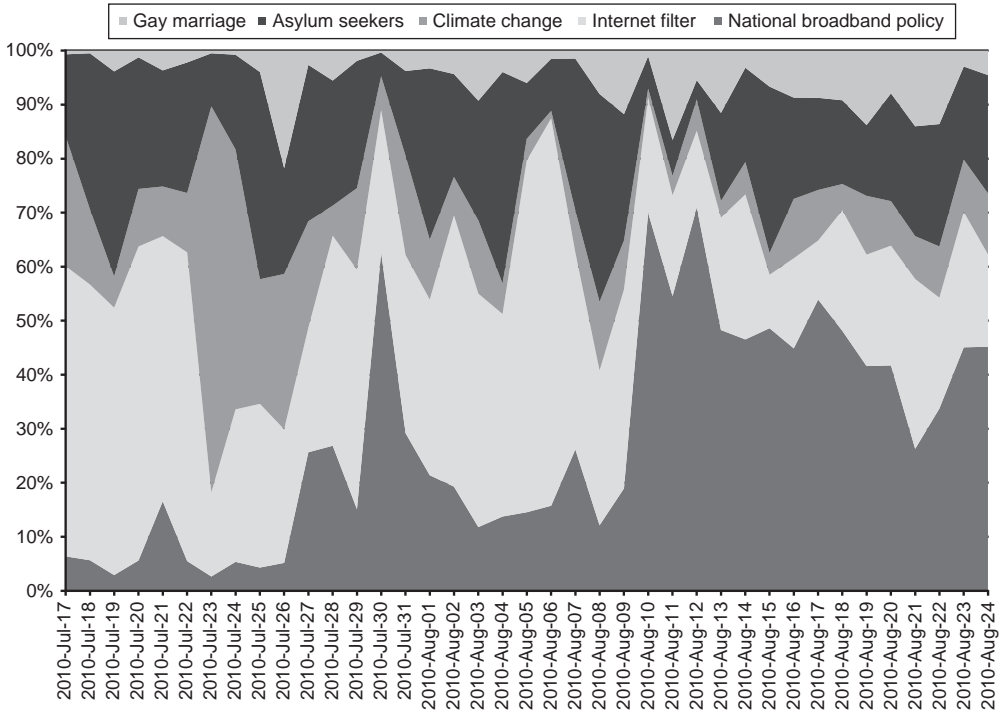
the hash symbol “#.” Any Twitter user can include a hashtag in their tweets, making those tweets visible to any other users (or non-users) following or searching for the hashtag; no prior sign-up or other form of subscription or registration for the hashtag is necessary to use it. On the one hand, this makes it possible for interest groups to form around specific themes at a very rapid pace (a process observed especially in the context of breaking news, where hashtags emerge usually within minutes of the first Twitter reports); on the other, it also enables participants to make contributions to continuing conversations about the topic over the course of days, weeks, months, and even years, without necessarily following each and every tweet posted to the hashtag tweetstream.

Both patterns have been in evidence in the Twitter community’s coverage of major Australian political and other events during 2010 and 2011, and have had a significant effect on Australian online journalism. Twitter was a key site for rumors and speculation when in the evening of June 23, 2010, news broke of the prospect of a leadership challenge (or “spill”) within the Australian Labor Party: credible sources reported that it was becoming increasingly likely that Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard would request a party-room vote to replace Kevin Rudd – Labor’s election winner in late 2007, whose popularity ratings as Prime Minister had gradually declined during the first half of 2010. Twitter discussion of these rumors, and of the possible implications of a leadership challenge, rapidly centered around the hashtag “#spill,” generating over 13 000 tweets per hour at its peak (Bruns, 2011).

What is especially significant during the course of this event, however, is the interplay in covering the story – between social and mainstream media, at a general level, and between everyday Twitter commenters and known journalists and politicians on Twitter, at a more specific level. Discussion activity on Twitter followed the release of news updates by online and broadcast media at least to some extent, with a number of the journalists covering the story also posting live updates directly to Twitter as news came to hand; network analysis of the #spill discussion patterns shows these journalists to be near the centre of the overall network of Twitter users replying to one another (using the platform’s @reply functionality, through which users can address one another by including @[username] in their tweets).

This clearly demonstrates that, far from the reductively and counterproductively adversarial “us vs. them” mentality that continues to persist on both sides in some of the interactions between Australian political bloggers and journalists (which we have discussed above), it is possible for proactive journalists to maintain positions of significant authority and centrality within social media environments, too (see Bruns, 2010a, b, for a detailed analysis of the #spill discussion network as it unfolded over the course of the evening of June 23, 2010). Such constructive uses of Twitter as an extension of the journalist’s ability to address an interested public clearly also depend on journalists adopting new modes of working, however – chiefly, on engaging in a two-way conversation with the public rather than on persisting to simply report to them; in other words, on once again becoming a correspondent in “its original meaning of ‘one who corresponds,’ rather than the more recent one of ‘well-paid microphone-holder with good hair,’” as Glenn Reynolds so memorably put it (2003: 82).

The Labor leadership spill controversy – the first such challenge in Australian history against an elected first-term Prime Minister, and one of the first times that Twitter had played a substantial role in covering breaking political news in Australia – also set the scene for a sustained coverage on Twitter of the subsequent election campaign, pitting



**Figure 22.1** Key daily themes on #ausvotes during the 2010 Australian election campaign (normalized to 100%).

new Prime Minister Julia Gillard against conservative Opposition Leader Tony Abbott (who had himself assumed his role in a leadership challenge only months earlier). Twitter debate of the 2010 election was organized through the hashtag #ausvotes, generating more than 10 000 tweets per day during most days in the second half of the campaign, and peaking at nearly 95 000 tweets on election day, August 21, 2010 (an average of more than one tweet per second throughout the entire 24 hours of the day).

*Inter alia*, a close analysis of key themes discussed under this hashtag clearly points to the fact that the Twitter community of political discussants accurately mirrors neither the agendas set by the mainstream news media, nor the political preoccupations of the wider populace as indicated by contemporary opinion polls. Rather, in spite of a campaign dominated by arguments over which side of politics would be better able to curb “illegal” immigration, to address the challenge of climate change, and to manage the economy during the continuing global financial crisis, discussion on #ausvotes showed a strong bias toward the themes favored by Australia’s most committed Internet users: the proposal by the Labor government to introduce a mandatory Internet filter (officially designed to combat child pornography and similar materials, but also able to block other “undesirable” content), and the commitment by the conservative opposition to cancel Labor’s plans to build a A\$43 billion fiber-to-the-home National Broadband Network (itself in part a major nation-building initiative which was launched in order to avert a domestic recession as a result of the global financial crisis).



For the course of the five-week campaign, Figure 22.1 tracks the volume of tweets per day that related to the five most prominent policy issues. It demonstrates this technological focus: with only a single exception, from day ten onward tweets discussing the Internet filter or the National Broadband Network (NBN) consistently account for 50% or more of the daily tweets (see Bruns, 2010c, d, e, f for a detailed analysis of #ausvotes). Additionally, there is a significant change of balance between the two technology-related topics: while discussion of the Labor Internet filter (shown in light gray, second from bottom) dominates during the early weeks of the campaign, from 10 August onward the focus shifts decisively toward the NBN (dark gray, bottom). This shift also demonstrates the continued importance of mainstream media in setting the political agenda: it is caused by a disastrous appearance of the Opposition Leader on the ABC's current affairs programme "7.30 Report," during which he reiterated his strong opposition to the NBN project but was unable to provide a clear reasoning for doing so. Abbott's appearance in the programme culminated in his statement "I'm no Bill Gates here and I don't claim to be any kind of tech head in all of this" (7.30 Report, 2010) – an admission of ignorance which for Twitter users, even in spite of the Internet filter project, appeared to clearly position Labor as the lesser of two evils in the field of communications policy.

Additionally, however, the Twitter community's persistent focus on the NBN project during the final weeks of the campaign is also out of step with mainstream media reporting: while news coverage during the election returned to other themes shortly after August 10, Twitter discussion clearly did not, as Figure 22.1 indicates – tweets referred to themes related to the question of national broadband policy more frequently than to any other key election topics, by a significant margin. While the shift toward the NBN project as an election issue on Twitter is clearly driven by a mainstream media event, then, this is the case only because the Twitter community *permitted* the 7.30 Report to set the agenda in this way, by focusing on a topic that touched on users' pre-existing interests; once set, however, Twitter users continued to frame the election to a substantial extent as a contest for or against a National Broadband Network, even in spite of the other frames provided by subsequent journalistic coverage. This positions the Twitter #ausvotes community as an independent entity governed by its own interests, rather than merely as an adjunct to political reporting whose coverage is determined by mainstream news agendas.

It is notable as a footnote to these observations that at the end of 2010, following the Labor leadership spill and subsequent federal election, and the substantial online coverage of these events on Twitter and elsewhere, one of the political journalists who most consistently appeared at the centre of Twitter discussion networks, Latika Bourke, was appointed by the ABC to a new position of "Social Media Reporter." According to a statement released by the ABC at the time:

The new role will be attached to the ABC's existing award-winning radio news and current affairs team, and will be part of a range of measures designed to explore how social media can be used to enhance and extend the ABC's coverage of national politics.

ABC TV Blog, 2010: np

While it is too early to assess the outcomes of this exploration, it nonetheless represents a significant qualitative shift, especially in the context of ABC Managing Director Mark

Scott's strong support for an expansion of the ABC's social media activities: this appointment may mark the first time that an Australian news organization has not only used Twitter and other social networks as additional channels to disseminate its news updates, on a more or less automated basis, but has positioned a member of its journalistic staff as a dedicated social media *reporter*.

The increased attention that mainstream media organizations now pay to Twitter and other social media has also positioned them as a new battleground for journalism ethics and institutional politics, however. This was highlighted by events in late November 2010, when University of Canberra journalism lecturer Julie Posetti was threatened with legal action over alleged defamation by the Editor-in-Chief of *The Australian*, Chris Mitchell. Attending the annual conference of the Journalism Education Association of Australia in Sydney, Posetti had used Twitter to report on a conference panel including Asa Wahlquist, a former journalist for *The Australian*. Wahlquist had claimed interference from Mitchell in her coverage of climate change, and Posetti reported these claims via Twitter, where they were widely retweeted by Posetti's network of followers. Mitchell, in turn, took exception to these reports, and publicly threatened to sue Posetti (rather than Wahlquist, notably) for defamation (Elliott, 2010b); he failed to withdraw his threat even after audio recordings from the conference panel, documenting Wahlquist's statements and thus the accuracy of Posetti's coverage, became available (Thomson, 2011). With Posetti in turn reporting the threat of legal action against her on Twitter, the issue (known under the Twitter hashtag #twitdef) itself caused substantial debate in the social media community.

In the first instance, this case could be seen as another example of an established news organization seeking to silence its perceived detractors amongst citizen journalists and social media users; as other examples discussed above indicate, *The Australian* has long pursued a notably belligerent line against its online critics. According to media reports, Posetti herself has stated that the case had had a "chilling effect" on her rights to free speech and academic freedom:

I refuse to be cowed into silence, but Mitchell's threats mean I'm reluctant to speak as freely as I'd like as I'm conscious of the possibility of ongoing legal action of the sort which would demand caution in my public writings and statements on the issues surrounding Twitdef.

Thomson, 2011

But more generally, too, the #twitdef case also highlights the fact that our understanding of users' social media activities in reporting and discussing news and political issues has yet to be fully formed. Questions in this context mirror those that have already been raised for blogging as well (but are yet to be fully answered there, too): can tweets be regarded as a legitimate form of journalism – and thus attract applicable legal protections for journalistic speech – and under what circumstances? Does the accurate reporting of a public statement by another person exempt the Twitter reporter themselves from possible legal repercussions for defamation? Posetti herself – who, as a journalism academic, may be able to draw on legal protections for both journalistic and academic free speech – may have grounds to be relatively confident of being able to mount a successful defense, should Mitchell ever choose to carry through his threats of legal action; the same, however, may not be true for random Twitter users reporting (or even just retweeting) similar material.

## The Politicization of Journalism in Australia

Cases such as #twitdef, but also the broader complaints about the quality (or otherwise) of professional journalism that we have outlined above, ultimately point to the growing concerns about the politicization of journalism in Australia – with *The Australian* often positioned as a chief lightning rod for criticism. In the first place, “politicization” refers here to a perceived gradual shift from a more straightforward reporting of the facts to a focus on the political – and politically partisan – interpretation of the news story, even within the news report itself. This is evident across most major Australian news outlets, and even in the journalistic work of the major public broadcaster, the ABC, whose news reports now often no longer provide merely the facts of a story, but are framed from the start by how government or opposition representatives have reacted to them. For audiences, the result is that facts and political spin are becoming harder to distinguish from one another.

Alongside these shifts in the core business of journalism – news reporting – Australia has also experienced a substantial growth in mainstream outlets dedicated to news analysis and commentary. At the same time that *The Bulletin* as the major remaining proponent of investigative journalism in the country closed its doors, each of the major news organizations in the country – Murdoch’s News Ltd, the Fairfax group, and the public broadcaster ABC – introduced dedicated online spaces for (largely political) news commentary: respectively, The Punch, The National Times, and The Drum. The latter also generated a spin-off television show of the same name on the ABC’s new 24-hour TV news channel, joining the broadcaster’s other major initiative in facilitating political debate, the weekly TV talkshow “Q&A” (which has also developed a substantial Twitter following under the #qanda hashtag).

Online, such commentary sites served as mainstream additions and alternatives to the already existing independent news commentary spaces provided by Crikey, On Line Opinion, or New Matilda, as well as the news and political blogs; indeed, they frequently share their contributors with them: many of Australia’s leading political bloggers have also become more or less regular authors for these new commentary outlets. Similarly, many established and emerging political journalists, as well as politicians, business leaders, academics, NGO representatives, and other public figures have published their contributions here. In their selection of authors, as well as in structure, style, and content, then, these new mainstream political commentary sites sit somewhere between the – itself increasingly politicized – news reporting by the major news organizations, and the open ecosystem of the independent political blogosphere in Australia; in particular, their publishing format – with a blog-style stream of articles, and (usually) a facility for readers to add their own comments, but under the imprimatur of major news organizations – mixes elements from both sides.

On the one hand, this development supports an argument that news and political blogs and similar sites have now become part of the journalistic establishment. But if what is taking place here is a gradual “blogification” of Australian political reporting, then that is cause for concern as well: it may well lead to an overabundance of mere commentary (or worse, pure gossip) that no longer has much basis in the facts, as any

news stories which would provide those facts are increasingly drowned out by incessant speculation, interpretation, and agitation. Indeed, “blogification” is hardly the appropriate term to describe this shift, because Australia’s leading political blogs *are* based on a solid understanding of the facts, and utilize that understanding to advance the debate through considered argument; the same cannot be said for a significant proportion of the material published by the mainstream media-operated commentary sites, authored by professional pundits (see Bruns, 2010g for a further discussion of these issues).

In fact, placing such professional commentators not in opposition to, but *alongside* political bloggers – as they now so frequently are, due to the growth in opinion sites that we have outlined here – is an interesting exercise. What it reveals is the difference between those articles written out of a professional obligation to file copy, and those resulting from personal or professional interest and conviction. For all their faults, the leading Australian political bloggers publish intelligent and insightful commentary on current political issues – and when they misstep, they still have the excuse of doing this work mostly *pro bono*, out of personal interest rather than as their core professional endeavor. Journalists and journalistic pundits producing poorly reasoned, fact-free copy are unable to provide a similar excuse; neither do the editors commissioning their articles or approving the resulting material for publication.

At the center of this argument, it should be noted, is not the instrumentalization of journalism in pursuit of specific political aims: to stress the journalistic ideal of objectivity and impartiality would be an overly simplistic response to the challenges facing Australian journalism, not least because that ideal has itself been challenged as illusory by many journalism scholars. Again, it should be noted that the news media in many democratic nations are far from objective and impartial in their reporting; France and Germany, for example, both boast a diverse and thriving ecosystem of newspapers, broadcasters, and online news providers that are variously aligned with each of the major political parties, and this has strengthened rather than weakened political discourse in these countries.

Instead, what is problematic about the politicization of Australian journalism is not that politicization as such, but the fact that the highly concentrated nature of the Australian media industries inevitably causes a pronounced lack of choice and diversity in media outlets. The small handful of mainstream media organizations in Australia (chiefly, News Ltd, Fairfax, and the ABC) are able only to represent a small handful of divergent political views in their reporting and commentary; as a result, political discourse in the country is suffering – and it is notable that Australian politics itself, too, is at present severely polarized.

Against this backdrop, it is difficult at present to see a pathway allowing a return toward a more nuanced, constructive approach to Australian political debate, for either journalists or politicians. Online media may still provide the chance for a greater diversity of viewpoints, and political blogging as well as political discussion through other social media platforms remains a significant feature of Australian political discourse; however, the development of mainstream commentary sites by the three major news outlets also represents an attempt to colonize that space. Whether Drum, Punch, and National Times serve to undermine independent political commentary sites by poaching their most

promising talent, or conversely to draw attention to these spaces by enabling their leading commentators to cross-promote the work they do outside the mainstream, remains to be seen; similarly, the question of whether the mainstreaming of blog-style debate through these sites lowers the barriers to meaningful political engagement for more users, or whether the hit-and-run commenters who disrupt many mainstream sites will also begin to disturb the political debates on independent sites, has also yet to be decided. The future shape of the Australian online journalism ecosystem is still unclear.

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# Online Journalism in Germany

Thomas Hanitzsch and Thorsten Quandt

## Introduction

In Germany and most western countries, the impact of Internet communication – and online journalism in particular – has been one of the most discussed topics in the last 20 years. From its early days, the potential of the Internet has been subject to visionary expectations and fears alike. Rapid developments in new media technologies were seen as powerful forces that might even change the face of journalism in the future. Online journalism was therefore enthusiastically greeted as a “revolution” (Boldt, 1996; Stephens, 1998), as “the future of journalism” (Neuberger *et al.*, 1998; Newhagen and Levy, 1998; Pavlik, 1999; Singer, 1997), or “a whole new journalism” (Quittner, 1995). The Internet promised a new market with huge economic potentials, while traditional media, most notably newspapers, radio, and television, faced stagnation. After the collapse of the new economy at the beginning of the new millennium, investments began to shrink due to lacking profits (Chyi and Sylvie, 2000).

Several media researchers believed that online journalists do not work in the traditional way (e.g. Deuze, 1999; Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002; Heinonen, 1999; Singer, 1998). Singer (2003) forcefully argued that online journalists are not reporters in the sense of primarily gathering and processing information. Rather, traditional reporting skills have been downplayed by those working online: “Journalism is about reporting but most online journalism is not” (Singer, 2003: 149). In the German context, online journalists have been labeled “content managers” who merely organize news by rewriting and repackaging existing material (Meier, 2002). Consequently, online journalism was, in its early years, mainly seen as a technical occupation, executed by personnel with practical experience in online technologies and some rudimentary journalistic capabilities (Kopper, Albrecht, and Czepek, 2000). All this seems to suggest that there is a strong belief that

online journalism is clearly different from other, more traditional kinds of journalism, and that online journalists might constitute a “special breed” of news people.

Today, the major challenge to online journalism – and perhaps to journalism in general – is believed to stem from the participatory potential of the Internet. The erosion of traditional boundaries between producers and users, which is often referred to as “produsage” (Bruns, 2005), has opened up new means of interaction between writers and audiences, while the inclusion of multimedia content promised to herald innovative forms of storytelling. The “people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen, 2006) can now actively contribute to the mediascape, which in turn fuelled optimistic expectations of increased democratic participation and active citizenship (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004). It is especially citizen journalism – the “act of citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information” (Bowman and Willis, 2003: 9) – that has become a preoccupation within the collective imaginary of communication and media scholarship around the world. Perhaps as a self-fulfilling prophecy, citizen journalism is therefore perceived to be a major challenge to professional newsrooms by the World Association of Newspapers (WAN, 2006).

Moreover, many scholars believe that weblogs and other Internet-based services subsumed under the umbrella of “Web 2.0” signify a new digital era in which control over public communication shifts from media institutions to users by means of social networking, collaboration, and participation (Paulussen *et al.*, 2007). Deuze (2006a) points out that the digital culture is participatory in principle – inevitably driving profound changes within the mediascape. Of particular relevance to this chapter is the fact that journalists may have to rethink their social roles, from acting as gatekeepers to serving communities as “gatewatchers” (Bruns, 2005). Journalists may therefore become “bottom-up facilitators and moderators of community-level conversations among citizens” rather than “top-down storytellers for an increasingly disinterested public” (Deuze, 2006b: 275).

It is against this backdrop that we review the state of online journalism in Germany, its developments and current challenges. German media have been amongst the first to experiment with online journalism. Several news media, such as *Spiegel*, have roughly 15 years’ experience of publishing in a networked environment. During the history of German online journalism, approaches to online news and the corresponding professional practices have changed considerably. In the early days, online news heavily borrowed material originating from traditional outlets. Even now, original news reporting for the Internet is quite scarce and mostly practiced by big market players. However, a shrinking newspaper readership and growing economic pressures have forced traditional media to intensify their efforts in cross-media news reporting that is increasingly produced in an organizational environment of news desks and converged newsrooms. At the same time, Web 2.0 ideas have been picked up by German mainstream online media fairly hesitantly. As a result, user participation is mostly limited to news commenting. While users are regarded to be a useful source of information for online reporting, production is still controlled by professional journalists (Singer *et al.*, 2011).

After introducing the rich body of research on German online journalism we will describe the world of online media and online journalists in Germany, the journalists’



qualifications, educational backgrounds, and practices, as well as their role perceptions. The chapter will then move on to a discussion of the challenges of participative media and the impact of online journalism on political deliberation and participation. The major questions guiding this contribution are as follows: How large is the population of online media and online journalists in the German context? Are online journalists indeed a “special breed” of news people with respect to their personal characteristics, educational backgrounds, professional practices, and role perceptions? What role do participative media play in the German context, and what are the tensions and dividing lines between professional journalists and “netizens” (mostly: bloggers)? What impact do online journalism and other means of web-based media have in the realm of political communication?

### Studying Online Journalism in Germany

Just like the Internet itself, research on German online journalism has experienced rapid growth and popularity during the last 15 years (Kopper, Kolthoff, and Czepek, 2000; Neuberger, 2003; Quandt, 2005). A substantial proportion of this work is rather conceptual and speculative in nature, especially during the mid- and late 1990s when researchers often focused on the innovative aspects and technological potential of the new medium. Online media were discussed largely in a technological context, prompting a perception of the online journalist as being merely a “creative computer freak” (Benker, 2001: 61).

Several early newsroom studies already challenged this image (Schmitt, 1998; Wilke and Joho, 2000). Online journalists were found to exhibit a quite traditional news work pattern, while technical duties were mostly performed by specialists. These results were later confirmed by several large surveys of journalists. The first representative survey of online journalists (“Online Journalists in Germany”) was carried out in 2002 by a team based at the Ilmenau University of Technology (Löffelholz *et al.*, 2003; Quandt *et al.*, 2006). In close cooperation with the third wave of the “American Journalist” study (Weaver *et al.*, 2006), they conducted telephone interviews with a probability sample of 461 journalists in 332 online newsrooms. Online journalists were found to be younger and less experienced than their counterparts working for traditional media. In terms of their work pattern and professional views, they appeared to be not much different from their colleagues in offline media.

Two years after this first study, Weischenberg, Scholl, and Malik (2006) interviewed 74 online journalists as part of their larger representative survey of 1536 German journalists. They replicated most results from the 2002 study, concluding that online news workers are by no means a special breed of journalists. In yet another survey, conducted in 2007, Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke (2009c) interviewed chief editors of Internet media, including 144 respondents working for online newsrooms of traditional media and 39 chief editors selected from stand-alone online sites. Their findings pointed again to striking similarities rather than substantial differences. They did not find indications of a “technologization” of news work, neither did they discover signs of an involvement of German publics in editorial processes. In the same year, Hohlfeld and Wolf (2008) surveyed 137 newsrooms, noting a rather sluggish implementation of mobile multimedia applications.

There is no doubt that these studies offer valuable insights into online journalists' attitudes, professional values, and motivations, as well as into the organizational structures of their work. However, self-reports of journalists provided in interviews and real-life observations on the ground may lead to different conclusions about the nature of online journalism. It was for this reason that Quandt (2005) conducted an extensive ethnographic study of six journalists in five German online newsrooms: the stand-alone online newspaper "Netzeitung," as well as the online newsrooms of four major traditional media "FAZ.net," "SVZonline," "tagesschau.de," and "Spiegel Online." The study involved 10 weeks of on-site observation during 2001. One of the key findings of this study was that online journalism is indeed highly dependent on agency material and, to a certain extent, reshuffles and recomposes existing material.

Some of the above-mentioned scholars have carried out considerable investigative work in order to find out more about the world of German online newsrooms and online journalists. Most notable and sophisticated of these were the studies conducted by Löffelholz *et al.* (2003) and Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke (2009c). Content analysis is another important method of approaching online journalism. In this context, Quandt (2008) investigated altogether 1603 news accounts of 10 major (elite) news sites in France, Germany, the UK, Russia, and the USA. He concluded that, across the board, "the promises of an interactive age of reporting are not fulfilled yet" (p. 717). Most of the analyzed web sites revealed a fairly standardized repertoire of article types, a lack of multimedia content and interactive facilities, missing source/author attribution, and a general focus on domestic political news.

As part of a massive and generously funded Internet journalism project, Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke (2009b) also conducted an excellent and very telling meta-analysis of 231 online contributions to public discourses about the relationship between journalists and bloggers (discussed further in the next section). In the area of political online communication, von Pape and Quandt (2010) carried out a representative survey of 999 audience members shortly after the German general elections in 2009. They found that Germans still turn to trusted (traditional) news sources when it comes to relevant political content. In addition, they noticed a striking absence of active participation and a very minimal use of Web 2.0 media for political information.

## **Overview and Trends: The World of German Online Journalism**

To sketch out the world of German online newsrooms and online journalists is not an easy task. There are several media directories, all of which apply different definitions of online media, or no definition at all. Online sites were categorized on the basis of vastly different criteria, resulting in a dramatic variance in estimates of the German online universe. Due to the lack of reliable information, the population of online newsrooms and journalists needs to be estimated by using some kind of extensive investigation and intelligence. The situation becomes even more complicated if one considers that there is no accepted definition of online media and online journalists even within the academic community. Moreover, online journalism is, by its very nature, a "moving target."

Constant changes especially in the technological environment of online media quickly render definitions out of date by the time they are published. It therefore comes as no surprise that estimations of the population of German online media and online journalists show some considerable variation.

The first theoretically driven attempt to estimate the number of German online newsrooms was undertaken by Löffelholz *et al.* (2003). They estimated a total number of about 7800 online journalists working in roughly 1150 newsrooms, of which about 4400 were permanently employed. Most of the newsrooms (60%) employed very few journalists (1–3), one-quarter had 4–10 journalists, and only 15% of all online newsrooms were classified as “large” (as they employed more than 10 journalists). An important outcome of the study was the conclusion that online journalists constitute a fairly heterogeneous group of individuals. Of those who are permanently employed, relatively few (13%, or 583 individuals) belong to what Löffelholz *et al.* (2003) called the “core” of online journalism consisting of those who are full-time journalists exclusively working for online media. The majority of journalists (82%,  $N=3619$ ), however, are full-time journalists who only partially work in online newsrooms, therefore constituting the “rim” of online journalism. Another 5% ( $N=212$ ) of the population was classified as belonging to the “fringe” of online journalism consisting of part-time journalists working for online media.

Two years later, based on information obtained in 2004, Malik and Scholl (2009) estimated a population of German online journalists of 2325 people, of whom 42% work for online newsrooms of traditional media and 58% for stand-alone online sites. There are several reasons that may account for the hugely different estimations of the population: First, the 2002 study deliberately included freelancers and those who work in other areas but sometimes “moonlight” as journalists. The 2004 study only included respondents that earn at least 50% of their overall income from working as journalists. Second, the Ilmenau project focused on online journalists and exhausted all means (directories, online search, etc.) to compile a list of online media, while the 2004 survey only incorporated a minority sample of online journalists as part of a larger study. And third, online journalism has suffered a major setback between the two studies as a result of the new economy crisis that took effect in the job markets shortly after, and sometimes even during, the first study.

In a different study, Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke (2009c) counted 503 journalistic news sites in Germany as of 2007. Of these, 388 outlets (77%) were found to belong to traditional news media (265 dailies, 2 weeklies/Sunday newspapers, 30 magazines, 89 broadcasting stations and 2 news agencies), and another 115 media (23%) were classified as stand-alone online sites (40 professional news sites, 39 portal sites, 18 weblogs, 5 user-generated content platforms, and 13 news search engines). An interesting finding of this study was that less than one-third of all studied newsrooms were able to cover their costs.

In terms of their individual characteristics, one substantial finding was that online journalists were two years younger (average: 35 years) and had three years less professional experience (7 years on average) than their colleagues working for traditional media (Löffelholz *et al.*, 2003). Based on evidence from a more recent representative survey of German journalists, online news people were found to be even four years younger (average: 37 years) than the average journalist (Malik and Scholl, 2009). Based on such

evidence, Quandt *et al.* (2006) characterized German online news workers as a young group of journalists at a relatively early stage of their careers.

## Educational Backgrounds and Practices

If German online journalists are indeed considerably younger than their colleagues working for traditional media, does this difference also translate into different educational backgrounds and practices? The short answer is: mostly not. In terms of education, by far the majority of online journalists hold a university degree (75%), compared with 66% of average German journalists (Malik and Scholl, 2009). We suspect that this difference is not so much related to the nature of online journalism work as it is to the growing relevance of university degrees in the general German context. However, compared with their counterparts working in traditional media, online journalists are less likely to have a formal educational background in the field of journalism, though the differences are not striking. If we look at the field of online journalism as a whole, it seems that the share of journalists with journalism-related educational backgrounds tends to be higher among those who belong to the “core” of online journalism, while it is smallest among those who belong to the “fringe” (Löffelholz *et al.*, 2003).

What types of qualification are online journalists expected to hold, and are they different from traditional journalists? Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke (2009a) have explored those questions in a survey of chief editors of online newsrooms. Their findings, again, point to striking similarities rather than substantial differences. The types of qualification that ranked highest among the interviewed chief editors were the following: excellent general education, writing and editing skills, sound professional education in journalism, and a willingness to communicate with users. Of lesser importance were skills in the area of web programming and web design, as well as a specialist professional education in online journalism. Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke (2009a) noted that the importance of programming and web design skills has even decreased since 2000, and they attributed these changes to the increasing availability and accessibility of easy-to-use content management systems. They concluded that their findings do not clearly indicate any of the “technologization” of news work that was often suspected by early theorists.

This conclusion can be further corroborated in the light of empirical data gathered on online journalists’ practices and routines. According to findings from the first representative survey in Germany, online journalists actually spend the major part (72%) of their average 45-hour working week on writing, online research, news selection, and editing of news material from agencies and public relations (Löffelholz *et al.*, 2003; Quandt *et al.*, 2006). This kind of work pattern is the same for more than 80% of online journalists. The German online journalists’ work pattern therefore clearly reflects the conventional mode of traditional journalism. Only 5% of their work time is used for news production, and another 2% for web programming and related activities. It is notable that less than 30% of all online journalists said that web programming and web design is something they regularly do.

These findings were replicated by Malik and Scholl (2009) two years later. Although they found a somewhat higher amount of time (100 minutes) invested in activities that

require technical skills in a usual work day, the difference from the average across all media was only 16 minutes. The authors therefore concluded that in terms of their editorial practice, online journalists are by no means a “special professional species” (185, transl. by authors). In his ethnographic study, Quandt (2005) also observed a rather traditional work pattern among German online journalists. Multimedia production tasks were not found to be of major importance, which clearly contradicts some of the early predictions of online journalists becoming “multimedia news producers.” This consistent empirical outcome fits well the self-description of an online journalists working for the *Netzeitung* expressed in one of Quandt’s (2005: 284) field interviews: “In no way do we perceive ourselves as being technicians or programmers.”

A specific characteristic of online journalism, however, is the relatively high amount of (wire copy) editing found in some of the surveys (Löffelholz *et al.*, 2003; Quandt *et al.*, 2006), as well as in Quandt’s ethnographic study. Journalists routinely edit, cut, and rewrite their own texts, as well as agency material and already published texts. Some of the observed journalists in Quandt’s study admitted that online journalism is highly dependent on agency material and, to a certain extent, operates on the level of “secondhand” journalism (Quandt, 2005: 411).

The secondary and multiple usage of material is often seen as a major problem in online journalism. In the late 1990s, Neuberger *et al.* (1998; see also Neuberger, 1999) investigated the news output of five online media and their print counterparts in Germany. They counted the amount of “shovelware” – content that was copied or transferred from the parent medium to the web page. The authors found a proportion of between 5.6 and 37.2% of all online content was merely copied from the parent medium. They concluded that “edits are just minor, links to other items with similar topics are rare, multimedia and interactivity is limited” (Neuberger, 1999: 262, transl. by authors). In a more recent study, Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke (2009c) discovered that news sites of daily newspapers seem to be especially dependent on content from print. More than half of the interviewed chief editors admitted that their newsrooms mainly “recycle” material provided by their parent media. Another 24% of the editors said that their newsrooms mainly exploit material from news agencies. A partly different picture, however, emerged from the representative survey of online journalists. In the interviews, the journalists said that a time equivalent of only 10% of an average work day was going into copying and transferring content from the parent medium to the web page (Löffelholz *et al.*, 2003; Quandt *et al.*, 2006).

## Role Perceptions

In the introduction to this chapter we have argued that changing media cultures might lead journalists to rethink their traditional social roles. The question here is if these changes have already begun to show some empirical manifestation. A common approach to studying journalists’ role perceptions is by way of survey. Findings from interviews with 461 online journalists conducted by Löffelholz *et al.* (2003: 484) indicate once again that online journalists do not substantially differ from their colleagues working for traditional media in terms of their professional views. Online journalists are even more

attuned to the ideals of neutral and speedy dissemination of information. They gave clear priority to “getting information to the public quickly” (mean score on a five-point rating scale (M) = 4.49), “getting information to the public neutrally and accurately” (M = 4.47), and “providing analysis and interpretation of complex problems” (M = 4.33). At the same time, they were less likely to act as a “watchdog of politicians, the economy and society” (M = 2.22), to “set the political agenda” (M = 2.08), to “express personal views” (M = 2.63), to “stand up for the disadvantaged people” (M = 2.68), and to “give ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs” (M = 2.65). These findings are echoed by Malik and Scholl (2009), who found traditional values of quick, neutral, and accurate information highly regarded by online journalists, while the watchdog role and the importance of political content and advocacy were found to be less important.

These findings clearly show that German online journalists understand their role in much the same way as their colleagues in traditional media. Online journalists see their function even more as mere information providers, even at a time when audiences can easily bypass professional journalism through the means provided by the Internet. Journalism’s capacity to serve as a “Fourth Estate” in democracy is not very deeply appreciated by German online journalists. And the fact that it is now easier than ever before for journalists to interact with their audiences has not (yet) contributed to a practice of online journalism offering opportunities for audiences to articulate their views. If online journalists are to challenge the traditional values of corporate journalism, it seems that they still have a long way to go.

## The Challenge of Participative Media

The inclusion of the German public in processes of news selection and production is, in contrast to the situation in the USA, still in its early stages (see Singer *et al.*, 2011). One reason might be the political culture and fundamentally different structures of political participation and public deliberation. Other reasons might be the historically important role of public broadcasting in the German mediascape, as well as a different community structure where the population is mostly concentrated in large, urban cities (Paulussen *et al.*, 2007). Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke (2009) note that the involvement of German publics in editorial processes has not yet fundamentally changed from the good old times when the only feedback option was to write letters to the editors. This is also clearly indicated by the findings from the first representative survey of German online journalists, with respondents reporting an average of 3.4% of their work time going into communication with users (Löffelholz *et al.*, 2003; Quandt *et al.*, 2006). A more recent comparative study on user participation in online journalism, based on in-depth interviews with (chief) editors, supports this tendency: German journalists were quite skeptical of participatory potentials, especially when compared with their peers in other countries (Singer *et al.*, 2011).

While the move toward stronger involvement of the public in the news is accompanied by a lively discussion about public and civic journalism in the USA, such discourses had virtually no effect on Germany (Lünenborg, 2005). One of the reasons is perhaps the fact that many local newspapers already serve a community function; hence, there is

no urgent need for a reorientation in many of these papers. Based on evidence from their latest survey of journalists, Weischenberg, Scholl, and Malik (2006) also note that local journalists in Germany may have a less elitist occupational culture than those working on other beats. It seems that local journalists in Germany have always had an orientation toward their audience's interests. That said, there have been some experiments with public journalism, most notably in the so-called "open channels" – TV and radio offerings produced by citizens. However, these channels have not been successful in attracting large audiences.

In such a media environment it is hardly surprising that user participation in online media was rather hesitantly greeted by the mainstream media. Today, participative modes of Internet communication have finally marked their arrival in German markets, too. User-generated content rather than content produced by professional editors has become a recipe tested by some mainstream media companies – not so much in their flagship outlets but in separate channels. Examples include "jetzt.de" (a spin-off of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*), "Sensation!" (by *Tagesspiegel*), "Opinio" (by *Rheinische Post*), and "Reader's Edition" (originally developed by the *Netzeitung*).

The true reasons for the adoption of user-generated content in mainstream online media remain speculative. One potential answer is related to editorial resources: media organizations might use it as an easy solution to save costs by inviting users to provide content for free. Some of the detrimental effects on the journalistic profession have been discussed, triggered by a practice of the largest German tabloid *BILD* of awarding money to "reader reporters" whose – mostly Paparazzi-like – pictures are published in the paper. The shrinking number of full-time journalists in Germany (Weischenberg, Scholl, and Malik, 2006) seems to point in this direction, too, as well as the relatively large number of part-time or even semi-professional journalists working for online media, but these developments could also be attributed to a shrinking job market in times of global economic turmoil. Moreover, Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke (2009c) found no evidence for economic motivations in their survey of chief editors. Respondents clearly opposed such an interpretation by arguing that, in contrast to popular wisdom, the inclusion of active users actually leads to higher labor costs. This finding was replicated by a comparative study including chief editors and online journalists (Singer *et al.*, 2011).

Of all modes of user participation in media production, weblogs have received most attention from scholars and the wider public. Of particular relevance to this chapter is the tension between professional journalism and the blogosphere that has fuelled much of the ongoing public debate. After the prominent German blogger Don Alphonso (2004: 26) elevated weblogs to become the "coffin nail for professional Internet media," German journalists responded with equally drastic comments regarding the blogosphere. Thomas Leif, chief reporter of the public broadcaster SWR, reportedly characterized bloggers as "narcissistic egocentrics who want to satisfy their urge to talk" (Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke, 2009b: 159). The Internet editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Dominik Graff, wrote under the headline "Web 0.0" that the "Internet degenerates into a debate club of the anonymous, ignorant and denouncing" (p. 138). And Michael Konken, chairman of the German Journalists' Union DJV, portrayed weblogs as a "romping place of people who are too cowardly to publish their opinions under their names" (p. 139).

It is in this context that the results of Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke's (2009b) meta-analysis of the public discourse revolving around bloggers and their relationships with professional journalists is informative. An important issue in the debate is the question of whether and where the two groups draw a dividing line between professional journalism on the one hand, and weblogs on the other. Interestingly, the majority of bloggers and journalists believe that some weblogs do belong to the realm of journalism. Only 21.4% of the content-analyzed contributions argued that weblogs are not journalism. Similarly, most of the pieces contributed by journalists and bloggers indicate that weblogs are seen as another or a new kind of journalism. However, striking differences emerged with respect to questions of performance. That weblogs perform better than journalism is indicated by most of the contributions written by bloggers (52.9%) and blogging journalists (82.6%), while a majority of journalists' contributions (59.1%) argued that journalism performs better than weblogs. In the public debate, journalism was typically associated with objectivity, relevance, accuracy, credibility, and thoroughness, while weblogs were linked to other attributes such as "partial," "subjective," "open to participation," and "discursive."

These traditional dividing lines were further confirmed by a survey of chief editors in online newsrooms (Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke 2009d). More than two-thirds of the interviewed editors (69%) at least partially agreed with the statement "Weblogs have nothing to do with journalism." Only 12% of the journalists agreed that weblogs constitute "a new kind of journalism." By far the majority of the editors (81%) agreed that "bloggers perceive themselves as journalists." Not surprisingly, dominant characteristics of journalism sound quite familiar to the researcher: "neutrality," "accuracy," "credibility," "service-orientation," "continuity," "relevance," "thoroughness," "exclusivity," "independence," "expert knowledge," and "diversity." Weblogs, by way of contrast, were primarily connected to a "subjective perspective," the "accessibility of authors," and an "intense discussion." Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke (2009c) concluded that these self-descriptions quite readily correspond to results from earlier studies, and that – at least in the perception of journalists and bloggers – these two groups are clearly distinguished.

The authors also argue that accepting users as collaborating authors essentially requires substantial changes within the role perceptions of professional journalists. Such a change has yet to occur. In their survey of online chief editors Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Rischke found an overwhelming and very telling support of the statement: "It is hard for professional journalists to accept users as coauthors." Of all interviewed editors, 19% fully agreed, and another 53% partially agreed. This clearly shows that subsuming the extremely heterogeneous group of bloggers under the larger umbrella of "journalism" is misleading and not even supported by the protagonists involved. Some blogs, such as the German "BILDblog," may indeed show a journalistic profile, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

In the comparative interview study of Singer *et al.* (2011), German chief editors and journalists from online newspapers supported such a critical perspective on blogs and user-generated content. Some even referred to participative forms of publishing on the Internet as a potential danger to journalism. The chief editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung's* online publication doubts the credibility of user-generated content and



information produced in the blogosphere, while he maintained that journalism was the last remaining “pillar of credibility:”

The Internet will provide a crazy richness of voices, opinions and facts. At the same time, the need for orientation and pillars is growing. Journalistic brands ... and authors that can be trusted ..., the last pillar of credibility ... actually needs to be preserved. That won't be done by Web 2.0. That is not a pillar of credibility, but overall adds to the confusion.

Quandt, 2011: 165–166

A journalist at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* even described user-generated content as an “avalanche overrunning you” (p. 169) – an uncontrolled force that should be stopped by all means. These opinions highlight a considerably skeptical viewpoint of German journalists, one that becomes especially evident when compared with their peers in other countries. According to German online journalists, the blogosphere and user participation need to be controlled, and for the most part, kept separate from professional journalism.

## The Internet and Political Participation

While the impact of the Internet on the journalistic profession and production processes remains undisputed, the specific effects of exposure on opinion formation are still being debated. This issue is not only discussed among journalists and bloggers who describe the other side as being not credible (journalists about bloggers) or non-democratic and essentially outdated (bloggers about journalists) – in both cases with a reference to the respective role for democracy and the public. In the academe, there is also an ongoing discussion about the actual effects of online communication on (traditional) media and democratic processes.

A long-time panel study by Emmer and Vowe (2004) could prove a general “Internet” effect: respondents who were heavy users of the Internet also showed a higher interest in political participation. Similar findings were reported from the USA (Xenos and Moy, 2007; Kenski and Strout, 2006), hence, this effect is arguably not limited to a specific culture and country but marks a more universal finding. However, the effect might be a result of differential online communication diffusion in specific societal groups, and, at least partially, a selection and amplification effect rather than a media effect (meaning that the already politically interested and active are more likely to turn to the Internet for information, and an already existing disposition might be strengthened and amplified). While Emmer and Vowe controlled for this possibility in their panel design, some partial effects and effect loops might still be at play here. Furthermore, self-estimations of political interest and participation can lead to an overestimation of the effect in actual use situations.

Studies on very specific episodes of recent media use can paint an alternative – and somewhat different – picture of the impact of the Internet on political participation. In a representative survey after the German elections in 2009, von Pape and Quandt (2010) asked 999 people for information about their specific use of media and communication channels as a means to acquire information about elections and election campaigns. The findings supported the notion of a heightened importance of the Internet – and online

journalism – as a source of information. However, the media diet of many Germans still seems to be very much dominated by traditional media outlets. The premier source of information during the elections was still television. For some – especially younger – users, however, the Internet already reached or even surpassed newspapers. Overall, 47% of all respondents named the Internet as an information source for the elections, but only a minority (13%) listed it as the main source for such information. Age differences play a central role here: Only 32% of older respondents (65 and above) used the Internet, in contrast to 71% of those who were between 18 and 24 years old. For the latter group, online sources had surpassed traditional newspapers as an information source for electoral matters. Education is also an important factor when it comes to the use of various media: 50% of the respondents with high formal education used the Internet as an information source for elections, while only 36% of those with low formal education did so.

Interestingly enough, participatory forms of communication remained largely unused, and if they were used, then mostly in passive modes (and not actively as a contributor). Of the people who actually used online media during elections, a majority used news on portal sites (50%), on web sites of TV stations (31%), on sites of magazines and journals (37%), and newspapers (41%). User-generated “Web 2.0” sources were only used by a minority of respondents: blogs (15%), Internet forums (17%), and social networking sites (9%) played a relatively small role for the users who actually turned to online media during the elections. Those users claiming to have played a predominantly active role in such Web 2.0 features make up less than 1% of the overall sample. Three-quarters of the users of social networks and Internet forums admitted that they were mainly “lurking” without actively participating.

These findings shed some interesting light on the actual use of online news and participatory forms in comparison. Naturally, elections mark a time of heightened interest in political matters and news in general – and arguably also in trusted, high quality news sources. Hence, these findings might somewhat overstate the importance of traditional news sources and online journalism in comparison with user-generated content. On the other hand, one might argue that modern opinion formation might be informed by a much broader array of sources, with citizens turning to unusual information outlets and even reading some unverified electoral “gossip” from alternative news sites. But no matter what interpretation is preferred, the findings clearly point out that the time of journalistic news sources is not over yet. The almost complete absence of active participation and very minimal use of Web 2.0 media for political information during the electoral campaign are in line with the very skeptical perspective of the journalists themselves, as described above: when it comes to important political information, citizens still turn to trusted news sources, and they remain a largely non-participatory audience.

## Conclusion

Online journalism in Germany is a relatively well researched field: There are a number of surveys and interview studies, aimed both at journalists and their audiences, as well as newsroom studies and content analyses dealing with the phenomenon. These studies paint a differentiated picture of the current situation of Internet-based news in the country.

Journalists in the online field are a younger breed of media professionals, with less experience, but with high formal education. Their work pattern is not as technology-oriented as it was believed some years ago, and their overall work profile clearly marks them as belonging to the core of journalism. This conclusion is also supported by self-reflections of online journalists who define themselves primarily as “journalists,” and not so much as technology-driven content producers. The findings on role perceptions also reveal a strong orientation toward quick and neutral information dissemination, with less importance given to watchdog and advocacy roles. This might be an indication of a general change in the younger generation of journalists, or an effect of the influence of a virtually immediate – and therefore event- and information-driven – production of news. It remains to be seen if this finding constitutes a specific orientation among German online journalists or if it indicates processes that will affect journalism in general.

The content offered by online news media in Germany does heavily rely on material provided by their parent media and news agencies. The early promises of multimedia journalism on the web remain therefore unfulfilled despite the occasional inclusion of video and audio material. Similarly, the incorporation of user-generated content – which has been discussed for many years – is not as developed as one might believe on the basis of the public and academic debate. Several empirical studies have consistently shown a reluctance of German online journalists to include participatory elements in their publications – and some openly fear or despise too much user participation, at least outside the “walled gardens” of discussion forums. Interestingly enough, this somewhat conservative approach is reflected by the audience’s limited use of participatory formats for information. Blogs, forums, and social networking sites might be the places where users go for entertainment – but empirical findings cast some doubts on their actual use for information purposes.

Overall, one might conclude that online communication has certainly changed the face of journalism and the journalistic profession in Germany. However, compared with other countries, the German news media tend to be very cautious in their efforts to implement participative features of online communication, and still cling to “tried and tested” working patterns, role conceptions, and definitions of the journalistic production process. That said, the German media were among the first to adopt the Internet for information dissemination, and journalism in Germany is still a vital institution – especially when compared with countries where journalism is on the decline. From this strong “home base,” media companies still have the power to experiment with new features and develop journalism further. As we have seen, this does not necessarily mean that media organizations embrace participatory forms in Germany. In fact, media companies have tried to keep tight control of the publication process under the umbrella of their conventional journalistic brands until recently.

The reasons for this lack of desire of media companies to capitalize on the potentials of the online environment, which has also been observed in other countries (Singer *et al.*, 2011), are manifold. It seems plausible that a strong “traditional” media system, as well as a cultural pattern of generally conservative attitudes might play a role in this process. However, more comparative work would be needed to identify the most relevant factors. The national peculiarities outlined here might be a good starting point for the analysis of national and cultural differences.

Some studies have already taken the first steps down this road, but there are still many unanswered questions when it comes to the cultural specifics and national idiosyncrasies that set (online) journalism in Germany apart from what we can observe in many other countries. Furthermore, as online journalism is a field of constant change, longitudinal studies need to be undertaken to trace these transformations. Ideally, both research objectives can be combined in comparative, long-term studies. Such efforts could open up new avenues of research that help to clarify some of the unanswered aspects mentioned in this overview of German online journalism.

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# The Evolution and Challenges of Online Journalism in Nigeria

Farooq A. Kperogi

## Introduction

Two momentous developments have defined the Nigerian journalistic landscape in the last 10 years. The first is the migration of all major Nigerian newspapers to the Internet (while actively sustaining their print editions) in the hope of reaching the highly educated Nigerian migratory elite in the diaspora (Youngstedt, 2004; Reynolds and Youngstedt, 2004; Reynolds, 2002; Stoller, 1999). The second development is the robust growth and flowering of transnational, diasporan citizen online news media that have vigorously sought and captured the attention of Nigerians both at home and in the diaspora (Kperogi, 2008, 2011a, b). On the surface, these developments seem contradictory, even counter-intuitive: the migration of news content from homeland legacy newspapers to the Internet should have functioned to satisfy the thirst for domestic news by geographically displaced diasporan Nigerians and therefore obviated the need for diasporan-run citizen news outlets. This is more so because the Nigerian diaspora in the west, though highly educated and savvy, had never before now been a vector of informational flows to the homeland (Bastian, 1999). So what dynamics actuated this process?

In this chapter, I trace the evolution and idiosyncratic features of online journalism in Nigeria, explore its variegated manifestations, capture the relational and professional tensions that have erupted between web-only, mostly diasporan, citizen journalists and more traditional homeland journalists, and show how all this has altered journalistic practice in Nigeria. I also discuss the tensile relationship between citizen online journalists and the Nigerian government, a relationship that has led to the high-profile arrest of diasporan citizen journalists who traveled to Nigeria from their base in the west for routine business. Finally, I explore how the emergent genre of citizen social journalism (i.e. microblogging on Facebook and Twitter by ordinary citizens about news events)

helped shape the 2011 general elections in Nigeria and enriched homeland traditional journalistic practice. This contribution is important because the extant literature on the consequences of the Internet for traditional journalistic practices is almost exclusively preoccupied with the experiences of the more advanced parts of the world; it does not capture the singularities of peripheral, transitional nations like Nigeria where the tension between traditional and online journalists is assuming unique forms, where citizen online journalism imposes on itself the simultaneous task of fighting corrupt governments and serving as a counterfoil to an equally corrupt mainstream media formation.

## The Past and Present of Online Journalism in Nigeria

The defunct *Post Express*, under the direction of the late Dr Stanley Macebuh, is widely acknowledged as the first Nigerian newspaper to migrate its content to the Internet in 1996 (Kperogi, 2011). Like many newspapers at the time, the *Post Express* merely recycled its print content to the web. By the close of the 1990s, a few other newspapers, notably the (Nigerian) *Guardian*, *Punch*, *Vanguard*, and *ThisDay*, had web sites where they episodically republished selected contents from their print editions. By the early 2000s, almost all the legacy newspapers in Nigeria had some web presence, aided in part by the aggregation and distribution of their content, along with those of other African newspapers, by AllAfrica.com, the Washington DC-based multimedia content service provider widely recognized as the world's largest Africa-centered site. The site signed content agreements with over 130 African news organizations, which "generate steady revenues for the content partners and give them, in turn, access to the prize-winning reporting of the AllAfrica team" (All Africa.com, accessed May 14, 2011, <http://allafrica.com/whowere.html>). By the mid-2000s, newspapers without their own web sites became the exception rather than the rule.

It was precisely the period during which the web presence of Nigerian newspapers became entrenched and normalized that citizen online news sites owned and operated by Nigerians living in the diaspora sprouted and grew rapidly. The most notable of these online diasporan newspapers are "Elendu Reports,"<sup>1</sup> "SaharaReporters,"<sup>2</sup> the "Times of Nigeria,"<sup>3</sup> the "Nigerian Village Square,"<sup>4</sup> "HuhuOnline,"<sup>5</sup> and "PointBlankNews."<sup>6</sup> There are many others, such as "Empowered Newswire"<sup>7</sup> (which operates like a wire service agency), "USAfricaonline.com" (which prides itself on being the "first African-owned US-based professional newspaper to be published on the Internet"),<sup>8</sup> and "IReports-NG.com"<sup>9</sup> but, in the main, their influence in the Nigerian domestic public sphere has been peripheral at best and non-existent at worst. By far the most influential Nigerian diasporic electronic newspapers are the first six identified above. Since their emergence in 2005, they have continued to break sensitive news stories that have radically altered the journalistic practices and politics of Nigeria (Kperogi, 2008, 2011a).

ElenduReports.com, the first notable diasporan citizen news site, which came on board in 2003, is published from Lansing, Michigan, and is associated with Jonathan Elendu, a former newspaper journalist with the Nigerian *Daily Times*, who is a legal permanent resident in the USA. SaharaReporters.com is owned and edited by Sowore Omoye, a New York-based activist and permanent US resident who had no previous



mainstream journalistic training or experience. The site, which broke away from ElenduReports.com in 2006, is far and away the most popular Nigeria-centered citizen media site. The TimesofNigeria.com was started in 2005 by a Maryland-based Nigerian journalist called Sunny Ofili, who is a former reporter with the defunct *African Guardian*. He emigrated to the USA in 1993. The Nigeriavillagesqaure.com was founded in 2003 by a group of immigrant Nigerians based in the USA. The main person associated with it is Philip Adekunle, a Chicago-based computer information systems specialist. Pointblanknews.com was launched on January 20, 2007 by a Nigerian immigrant in the USA by the name of Jackson Ude. Other people associated with the site, which is published in New York, are Oladimeji Abitogun and Churchill Umoren, who are also legal permanent residents in the USA.

These diaspora news outlets have gone beyond being instruments for the construction of subjectivities in the migratory settings of their owners and consumers to being active participants in the domestic and international politics of the homeland. They not only compete with but vigorously undermine the credibility of homeland newspapers, and have been growing in popularity and acceptance by leaps and bounds (Kperogi, 2011). Their popularity is a consequence of the originality of their news reporting (although they also offer platforms for critical commentary on news published in the homeland news media), their detachment from and non-affiliation with political parties and politicians (unlike many homeland newspapers), and the willingness of whistle blowers to trust them with sensitive, and sometimes classified, government information. Diasporan citizen journalists also take advantage of the Freedom of Information Act in the USA to access the records of Nigeria's elite who have investments in the country. They have, for instance, published PDF files of court documents that have indicted prominent Nigerian government officials when they lived in the west (which should disqualify them from holding public office), and pictures and costs of the choice property of corrupt Nigerian elites in Western capitals. Thus, they have tremendous access to information that is not available to their counterparts in the homeland.

### **Other Reasons for the Popularity of Diasporan Online Sites**

Two other fundamental factors account for the rising centrality of diasporan online citizen media sites in the Nigerian media landscape. The first is the dearth – in fact, the death – of the brand of investigative, adversarial, and advocacy journalism that characterized the performance of the Nigerian press during the military era from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, which found an especially concentrated expression in the guerilla press of the 1990s (Olorunyomi, 1996; Dare, 2007). The absence of a virile, uncompromised domestic watchdog media system that is committed to comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable in the face of the enormous venality that has accompanied Nigeria's return to democratic rule since 1999 needed to be corrected.<sup>10</sup> Homeland newspapers have proved either unwilling or unable to rise to this challenge.

Another reason for the rise in popularity of Nigerian diasporan online media is the technical deficiency of the web sites of homeland newspapers. Their web sites are, for the most part, neither updated in real-time nor sufficiently interactive and multiplatform

in the fashion of contemporary legacy media web sites in the west with which diasporan Nigerians have become familiar. So, in an interesting reversal, while the mainstream media in the west ventured into online journalism out of anxieties about the potentially disruptive effects that the emergent citizen online journalism might have on their professional authority (see Kperogi, 2011a and Singer, 1997a, b), the Nigerian mainstream media's lack of sophisticated web presence partly inspired the emergence of Nigerian citizen online journalism, which now potentially disrupts the authority and dominant journalistic practices of the homeland mainstream media, as I will show in subsequent sections of this chapter.

## Features of Online Journalism

In order to appreciate the idiosyncratic features of online journalism in Nigeria in a global context, it is appropriate to review the form and history of online journalism in general. Mark Deuze (2003) has isolated three dominant features that are fundamental to the possibility and vitality of online journalism. The first feature he identifies is interactivity, which he defines as the ability for readers or audiences of online content to react to or interact with and even adapt news content presented to them. The comments section of online content is a key element of this attribute. The second feature is multi-mediality, which is the technical capability for news content to be delivered in multiple platforms – text, video, audio, and animated graphics. Solely static textual content would be regarded as deficient in multimodality. The third feature that defines the exceptional-ity of online journalism is hypertextuality, which Deuze describes as the ability of news sites “to connect the story to other stories, archives, resources and so forth through hyperlinks” (Deuze, 2003: 206). Here, the presence of links that connect readers to related material within the same web sites and/or that lead readers to external sites relevant to the content being presented constitutes the core of hypertextuality.

Deuze explores these three broad characteristics in terms of four types of online journalism: “mainstream” news sites, “index and category” sites, “meta and comment” sites, and “share and discussion” sites. “Mainstream” and “index and category” sites, he points out, are characterized by “moderated participatory communication” while “meta and comment” and “share and discussion” sites are characterized by an “unmoderated participatory communication” (Deuze, 2003: 205). In other words, while mainstream-and-index and category sites, such as legacy media news sites, are mediated by an elaborate, clearly defined gatekeeper structure, the meta-and-comment and share-and-discussion sites are not encumbered by the kind of discursive policing that defines the operations of mainstream news organizations. In reality, though, most online content sites are hybridized; they have a bit of all of these dimensions of online journalism.

Pavlik (1997), for his part, identifies three stages in the evolution of online journalism. In the first stage, he points out, mainstream newspapers merely recycled their print content to the new online platform. This is often derisively called “shovelware” in industry vernacular (Deuze, 1999; Boczkowski, 2002). The second stage in online journalism, he says, improved on the first and involved some measure of interactivity with the news content posted on news web sites. At this point, content ceased to be dull and static; it

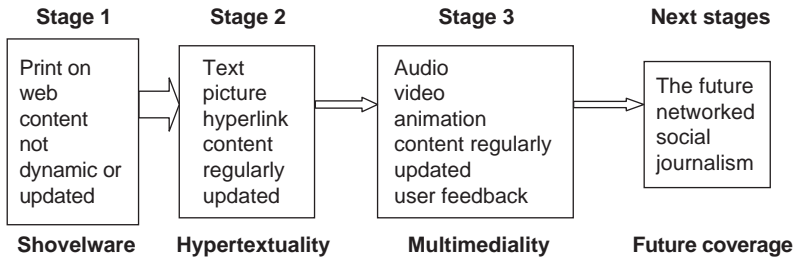


Figure 24.1 Stages of online journalism<sup>11</sup>

became periodically updated as news broke. So news appeared on news web sites first before it appeared in the print editions. The third, and in his reckoning current, stage is the convergent phase. This phase features dynamic content that is not necessarily the same as the print content and that has a lot of multimediality and hypertextuality. This stage of online journalism makes it possible for lengthy interviews that cannot be published as a whole due to the traditional constraints of newspaper space to be posted online. It also makes it possible for the audio and video files of interviews published in print to be uploaded onto news sites and for exclusively video- and audio-based or photographic reports that cannot possibly be captured by the print medium to be featured on web sites.

It is anybody's guess what the next stage will be. However, it seems appealing to prognosticate that the next stage, which is already unfolding in many fascinating ways, will be networked social journalism, or what Flew and Wilson (2010) have called "journalism as social networking." So, online journalism evolved from textuality to hypertextuality and then to multimediality and is now inching toward an amorphous, citizen-led, networked, social media phase. While some people prognosticate that the next stage might witness the death of the traditional media as we know it, others caution against such gloomy, apocalyptic projections, insisting instead that "newspapers can coexist with the Internet while surrendering some tasks, such as archiving factual background, becoming instead more analytical advocates" (Nerone and Barnhurst, 2001: 467).<sup>12</sup>

## Features of Nigerian Online Journalism

The web sites of Nigerian homeland newspapers fail the requirements of Deuze's multimediality and hypertextuality and seem to be stuck in Pavlik's first stage in the evolution of online journalism. However, as I will show shortly, they seem to be leapfrogging to the networked social journalism phase. Since *Post Express* first migrated its content to the Internet in 1996, subsequent Nigerian newspapers that appeared on the web have, for the most part, also merely repurposed static shovelware from their print versions. There were exceptions, though. The Nigerian *Guardian*, which prides itself on being "the flagship of Nigerian journalism" (Ette, 2000), used to be fairly interactive, although it was always lacking in multimediality and hypertextuality. The online forums and chat rooms it created for discussing its news content (which qualifies as interactivity in a

limited sense of the term) were so popular between the late 1990s and the early 2000s that they were the first port of call for homesick Nigerians living in the west. A participant in the chat room discussions who lived in the UK at the time called it the “rallying point for Nigerians at home and abroad to meet and discuss common issues of national importance” (Nworah, 2010: np). However, realizing that its forums had become wildly popular, the paper decided to commercialize participation. It required people to pay upfront before being allowed to participate in online discussions on its platforms. The paper lost nearly all of its participants. Nobody was prepared to pay a fee to discuss across spatial and temporal boundaries. Instead, this move to commercialize participation in the *Guardian’s* chat rooms inspired diasporan Nigerians to set up their own free discussion groups.

To require people to pay a fee before interacting with a newspaper’s content was a thoughtless and unimaginative business strategy. The *Guardian* could have used one of the many strategies that the DailyMail.co.uk, for example, deployed to monetize its boards: it could have used advertising overlays and sponsorship and “intelligent hyperlinks” within postings, etc. (Thurman, 2008: 139). At the time of writing, the Nigerian *Guardian’s* web site does not even provide any kind of platform to interact with or comment on its stories. It has reverted to posting shovelware versions of its print edition and does not even have a functional, intuitive search feature, nor does it have an online archive of all its content – all features that are basic and integral to the architecture of the web sites of almost all mainstream western news media and that Deuze (2003) identifies as central features of online journalism.

A recent notable case of a Nigerian newspaper that could be said to have graduated to the second stage of Pavlik’s periodization of online journalism is the Abuja-based *Leadership* newspaper. The paper’s web site provided a robust platform for readers to react to and interact with its stories. Reader comments were uncensored and unfiltered. However, in time, it attracted Internet trolls who turned the forum into avenues for throwing caustic vitriol not only at the writers, editors, and reporters of the paper but also at other Nigerian ethnic groups. The site was also hacked through its message boards.<sup>13</sup> The paper took a decision, after about one year of uncensored comments, to require that readers be registered first before they could have the right to post comments on the site. The policy drove most readers away.

Other Nigerian newspapers that currently experiment with some form of interactivity on their web sites are *Daily Trust* (based in Abuja, Nigeria’s federal capital), *P.M. News*, *Vanguard*, *Punch*, and the *Nation* (all based in Lagos, Nigeria’s media headquarters and former federal capital) and the up-and-coming multimedia news platform called *NEXT*, which is led by Dele Olojede, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Nigerian journalist who served as the foreign editor for *Newsday*. At the time of writing, *NEXT* is the only mainstream Nigeria-based daily newspaper that streams video and audio on its site on a sustained basis, that is updated in real time, and that is truly hypertextual and fully searchable.<sup>14</sup> Most of the other Nigerian papers with an online presence are stuck in the first stage of online journalism.

In many ways, the majority of Nigeria’s mainstream newspapers are guilty of the criticisms that media critic Jon Katz leveled against the US media in the late 1990s. He criticized US newspapers for remaining “insanely stagnant in an interactive age” (cited

in Matheson, 2004: 444). Matheson (2004: 446) attributes this to the mainstream media's tendency to have a "rather static core set of news practices" and to place "other journalistic practices at its margins" (Matheson, 2004: 446). Business and technology columnist Dan Gillmor, for his part, attributed the slow adoption of the blog by the mainstream media to their "innate conservatism" and asserted further that "when big media companies consider having a conversation with their audience, they tend not to push many boundaries" (Gillmor, 2004: 112). These criticisms now seem dated in reference to the mainstream media in the west, but they are still apt in reference to the mainstream media in Nigeria. In the case of Nigeria, however, it seems more plausible to implicate low technological development and Nigerian print journalists' unease with Internet technology for this state of affairs than the "static core of news practices" or an "innate conservatism." As Olukotun (2000: 35) notes, "Most [Nigerian] journalists are not computer literate, much less own personal computers, in spite of the arrival on the Internet of *The Post Express*, *The Guardian* and *The Vanguard*." He cites a survey in the Nigerian *Media Review*, an authoritative industry newsletter, as having lamented the technological backwardness of the *Guardian*, Nigeria's leading newspaper, in its March/April 2000 issue in the following words:

A visit to *The Guardian* newsroom does little credit to its place and influence in journalism. Besides being a long clutter of tables and chairs, reporters still go through long-hand production. Very little information technology presence is felt here.

Olukotun, 2000: 35

Thus, although by the year 2000 many Nigerian newspapers had their own web sites, they were still stuck in the mindset and production practices of pre-Internet newspapers. This attitude has changed only marginally. And it is precisely this structural and functional deficiency of traditional homeland newspapers that provided the fillip for the emergence, popularity, and acceptance of online citizen media by Nigerians who reside outside the shores of their native country; diasporan citizen online newspapers merely took advantage of the weak online presence of Nigerian newspapers to establish their relevance. Most of the Nigerian diasporan citizen media sites referenced earlier in this chapter clearly belong in the third stage of Pavlik's mapping of online journalism. Their content is active and updated in real time. They are hypertextual, interactive, and multimedia. Because of these qualities, they have beaten homeland newspapers, except perhaps *NEXT*, in breaking regular, routine news stories. Typically, in moments of political crisis, the most popular diasporan web sites, such as SaharaReporters, almost always shut down because of high volume of traffic (Kperogi, 2011a). Unlike the web sites of homeland newspapers, the diasporan online media outlets also provide video and audio clips of newsworthy events, such as the videotape of a Muslim governor caught dancing with Arab prostitutes and spraying money with reckless abandon at a Dubai night club while criminalizing similar indulgences in the state he governed (SaharaTV, 2010) and an audio tape of a serving Nigerian governor detailing plans on how he intended to rig elections using thugs dressed in fake military attire who would intimidate voters. This quality – that is, accompanying stories with multimedia corroborations – redounds to the popularity and credibility of diasporan online news sites. Most mainstream Nigerian

newspapers have no technical capability or expertise, for now at least, to report on the kinds of news stories that involve video and audio components and animated graphics even if they so desired, and this is precisely why the institutional media in the homeland are such poor competitors to their diasporan online counterparts.

### **Government's and Traditional Media's Response to Diasporan Citizen Media**

The reaction of the Nigerian governments and corrupt politicians to the piercing scrutiny of their activities by diasporan citizen media organizations has ranged from blackmail, arrest, and detention of bloggers, attempts to block diasporan citizen media sites from being viewed in Nigeria, web counteroffensives, hacking of the diasporan citizen media, and cooptation of oppositional bloggers, to the initiation of expensive libel suits against the particularly radical online media like SaharaReporters and Elendu Reports (before it lost its credibility due to its infiltration by the same corrupt politicians it had exposed in its earlier form).

The Nigerian government first responded by making several attempts to hack radical citizen media sites like SaharaReporters “but [it] survived owing to the foresight of its managers.” Not done, the government mandated its lawyers to threaten the US webhost of SaharaReporters with a lawsuit if they did not shut down the site. In a letter to the webhost, written all in caps, the government agents claiming to be “solicitors and advocates” with Reardenilson and Associates wrote:

We are aware that Domains by Proxy is a reputable company. We are worried that a Web site <http://www.saharareporters.com/> hosted with Domains by Proxy is being used for subversive dissemination of information against the president and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. We have read the terms of registration of Websites which say that any Website used for illegal purposes, morally objectionable/defamatory and libelous articles will be closed down. Please note that <http://saharareporters.com/> has violated the laws by writing articles that are treasonable offence [sic] in Nigeria. We therefore request that as a responsible company that you are to shut down <http://saharareporters.com/> immediately to avoid any legal proceedings which may affect your company and affect your business.

Ochonu, 2008

Although the law firm was apparently based in Nigeria, it nonetheless scared the US-based webhosting company enough to warn SaharaReporters to desist from publishing libelous materials. It subsequently shut the site down. In a widely distributed press release, SaharaReporters said: “Our Webhosting company complained to us that our Website was ‘abusing their server and using their cpu at 100%’ and as such had to shut down SAHARAREPORTERS because it was rendering others sites on their server ‘inoperable’” (Againstbabangida.com, 2010: np). It however dismissed this technical explanation for shutting the site as mere obfuscation, saying: “There is a conspiracy to put our site out of existence. However, this will not happen, as such we will be working round the clock to resume our activities online ASAP” (NigeriansinAmerica.com, 2010: np). It also asked

for suggestions on how SaharaReporters could get its own server and avoid having to go through third parties. The response was overwhelming: readers contributed funds to buy an independent server for the site.

In 2008, Dr Paul Orhii, the director-general of a government agency called the National Food and Drug Law Administration, sued SaharaReporters in a Texas court and asked for US\$25 million in punitive damages. The Media Legal Defense Initiative, the London-based NGO that provides “legal support to journalists and media outlets who seek to protect their right to freedom of expression” said Dr Orhii’s case was being handled by “the high-powered Cook law firm in Houston” (Media Legal Defence Initiative, 2010: np). The NGO linked up with the US-based Media Law Resource Center, which asked Julie Ford, an experienced Texas-based media lawyer, to defend SaharaReporters for free. “She defended Mr Omoyele on grounds of personal jurisdiction, arguing that since the publication was clearly aimed at a Nigerian readership and the defendant had no links with Texas, the Houston courts had no jurisdiction” (Media Legal Defence Initiative, 2010: np). The judge was persuaded and the case was dismissed on March 31, 2009. But this was not the end of the legal challenges that SaharaReporters has had to contend with. The same month that the Texas judge dismissed the suit against the site, another US-based lawyer for the Nigerian federal government sued SaharaReporters in a Maryland court for libel (SaharaReporters, 2010a).<sup>15</sup> Again in April 2010, Nigeria’s ambassador to the United Nations, Mrs Joy Ogwu, notified SaharaReporters that she would begin a multi-million-dollar law suit against the web site over “exposure of improper contracts awarded by her at the nation’s Permanent Mission” (SaharaReporters, 2010a: np).

Olumhense, a respected Nigerian journalist who now lives in New York, sums up the strategies of the Nigerian government against SaharaReporters in the following manner: “So that is the line-up: technological warfare designed to make SR unpublishable; a scorched-earth campaign to discredit Mr. Sowore personally; a gigantic lawsuit by an interested party; and a political appeal to Internet hosts to take the site off the air” (Olumhense, 2008a: np). These actions are scripts created out of an elaborate US\$5 million budget by the Nigerian government to dilute the growing influence of diasporan online citizen media and to “ensure that Websites like Saharareporters.com and others are stopped from taking root in Nigeria” (Elombah, 2009: np). Part of the plan included sponsoring rival diasporan citizen media sites and unleashing an army of pro-government commenters on the discussion boards of the radical and popular sites like SaharaReporters.com to subvert the growth of “critical blogging culture that is taking the Nigerian nation by storm and effectively replacing the mainstream local media” (SaharaReporters, 2010b: np). But this has not worked.

So the government experimented with a more desperate measure: the arrest of diasporan citizen journalists who traveled to Nigeria. The first diasporan citizen reporter to be arrested by Nigeria’s security forces was Jonathan Elendu, the owner of Elendureports.com. He was arrested when he traveled to Nigeria from his base in the USA. He was accused of being the sponsor of a “guerilla news agency” (Macha, 2008: np). The charge against him was later amended to include “money laundering and sedition” (Ekine, 2008: np). It later emerged that the Nigerian government thought he was aligned with SaharaReporters. Curiously, the arrest of Elendu generated more buzz

among western media NGOs than it did in Nigeria. It was virtually blacked out in the Nigerian domestic media. A Nigerian writer wrote: “Although the incident took place within their vicinity at the Nnamdi Azikiwe airport Abuja, it was the online publications – Pointblanknews and Saharareporters that broke the news.” He added: “Even when the publisher was charged with sedition by the State Security Service (SSS), only *Punch* gave it wide coverage” (Babalola, 2008: np). He attributed the indifference to, or inadequate coverage of, Elendu’s arrest by Nigerian traditional journalists to the fact that journalists in Nigeria do not regard online journalists as colleagues.

Again in 2009, HuhuOnline’s editor-in-chief, Emmanuel Asiwe, was arrested and detained by Nigerian security forces when he traveled to Nigeria from his base in the USA. Nigeria’s national security agency said he was being “questioned over matters of national security” (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2008: np). After pressure from human rights groups worldwide and from the US government (Asiwe is a dual citizen of Nigeria and the USA), Nigerian courts declared his arrest illegal (SaharaReporters, 2009). Whatever the case, the Nigerian diasporic Internet-based media are transforming both the form and content of Nigerian journalism in ways that at once enrich and complicate the dynamics of informational flow from the core – in this case, a privileged diasporic “peripheral core” – to the periphery where the ancestral roots of the migratory elite that are now spatially situated at the core are located. The Internet-based diaspora news outfits have become so influential that, in many cases, opposition politicians fed up with the domestic media’s double standards and timidity – and even government officials hoping to fly kites or expose government secrets for personal gain – bypass the mainstream domestic Nigerian media and get across to territorially displaced citizen journalists in the diaspora. Once a story gets prominence in the diaspora online press, it almost always eventually becomes the editorial staple of the traditional domestic press at some point, even if there is initial reluctance from the domestic media to give such stories prominence.

Traditional journalists are predictably jealous of the diasporan citizen journalists and have sought for creative ways to undercut their growing influence. One of the rhetorical strategies they use to undermine the credibility of diasporan citizen journalists is to suggestively hint at their geographical distance from the scene of the events they report on. Whenever they are mentioned in the mainstream homeland media, their individuality is often erased; they are hardly identified by their names and instead get called by such amorphous names as “online news agency,” “offshore news sites,” “guerilla sites,” and so on. Although they provide a wealth of information to the mainstream media, they are often either completely ignored or grudgingly acknowledged when government officials or politicians react to diasporan citizen media reports through the local press. And as was pointed out earlier, when some of the citizen journalists were arrested and detained when they traveled to Nigeria, the domestic media blacked out the news. The animosity of traditional journalists to diasporan citizen reporters is not only because traditional journalists are leery of the transgression of nonprofessionals into their craft, but also because the citizen media of the Nigerian diaspora have exposed many embarrassing corruption scandals in the media (Kperogi, 2011a). However, as diasporan citizen media become normalized as part and parcel of the media landscape in Nigeria, it would be interesting to watch how relational tension between homeland traditional journalists and diasporan citizen journalists develops.



## **Social Media and the 2011 General Elections**

Perhaps no event has dramatized the diminishing importance of the industrial homeland media formation in Nigeria more than the epochal role that microbloggers (Facebookers and Twitterers) and citizen journalists played in the 2011 Nigerian general elections. Following the renewed enthusiasm and faith in electoral politics that the appointment of respected academic Attahiru Jega as chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission generated in the country, scores of citizen media initiatives were set up to monitor and safeguard the integrity of the electoral process. Many young people and civil society activists chose to deploy the instrumentality of the Internet and mobile technology to influence the course of the election. They resolved to share with the world textual updates of the election on Twitter and Facebook, and to also video-blog about it on YouTube and Facebook with their phone cameras. The Nigerian power structure was alarmed at this prospect, and so Nigeria's Inspector General of Police issued a directive forbidding voters from taking cameras to the polling units. As would be expected, the directive outraged the sensibilities of many people. It met with so much stiff resistance from civil society groups, media pundits, and citizen reporters that the authorities were compelled to withdraw it forthwith (Ogala and Bamidele, 2011). The Independent National Electoral Commission, the agency that conducts elections in Nigeria, also dissociated itself from the directive. "INEC has said anyone can bring their phone or camera to the polling unit. Anything to the contrary is not the position of INEC," the agency said in a widely publicized press statement (Iyang, 2011).

This set the stage for robust citizen participation in the election. Dozens of web-based citizen initiatives quickly sprouted. At least eight such initiatives had widespread following and popularity across Nigeria. Perhaps the most popular such initiative was "ReclaimNaija: Election Incident Report System ([www.reclaimnaija.net](http://www.reclaimnaija.net))," an activist citizen initiative that was formed to ensure transparency in the conduct of the 2011 general elections through citizen reporting. Its membership was drawn from a vast array of grassroots, peasant, working-class, and civil society organizations across the country. It provided phone lines for election observers to reach it, an open-source mapping software known as Ushahindi for people to report their observations in real time, and it encouraged its members and non-members alike to send tweets about the election with the hashtags #reclaimnaija and #NigeriaDecides. "Project 2011 Swift Count" (<http://www.pscnigeria.org/aboutus.php>) was another hugely successful project that stood out not only because of the efficacy of the reportage of its citizen reporters but also because of its capacity to unite many elements in Nigeria's traditional primordial fissures. It brought together the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN); Justice, Development and Peace/Caritas Nigeria (JDPC); Nigerian Bar Association (NBA); and the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG). It persuaded members of the public to announce results of voting in their polling units as soon as they were available so as to subvert the possibility of official manipulation of results. The Police Service Commission (<http://www.pscnigeria.org/aboutus.php>) was set up to monitor the conduct of police officers who were posted to polling units to monitor the conduct of elections. In the past, the police were often accused of colluding with politicians to

intimidate voters and to change election results in favor of their patrons. This group encouraged citizen reporters to chronicle, if possible through phone cameras, instances where police officers were complicit in electoral fraud. It provided dedicated numbers to which citizen could report the conduct of the police in real time. “Vote or Quench” (Nigerian Pidgin English for “Vote or be damned”) was also very active in monitoring the conduct of the election through its pack of youthful citizen journalists who shared updates on its site, [www.voteorquench.org/](http://www.voteorquench.org/). So were many Facebook groups, such as the Nigeria 2011 Election Center (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Nigeria-2011-Election-Centre/169819256402639?ref=ts>), which saw vigorous debates and status updates on the election. There were also many “video-your-vote” channels on YouTube such as <http://www.youtube.com/embed/aH8dAdZhB7k>. These initiatives complemented the efforts of such well-known diasporan citizen media sites as SaharaReporters, which gets millions of hits every week, the Nigerian Village Square, The Will, the African Examiner, Eagle Eye Report, and so on.

In more ways than one, although citizen reporters did not influence the outcome of the election, they shaped its processes and conduct and guided its discourse. For instance, the first set of the three-tier election that was scheduled to be held on April 2, 2011 was postponed by a week partly as a consequence of the irregularities reported by citizen reporters at the ClaimNaija project. As a Slate.com reporter observes:

I saw dozens of voters transformed into informal election monitors – snapping photos on their mobile phones and alerting friends when the lines were shortest. A local newspaper took note: “The tweets, Facebook updates, Skype messages, text messages and pictures that voters exchanged via email and mobile phones gave the addresses of the polling booths, the locations, the number of people accredited, those who voted and the votes that each party got.” Within 12 hours of the polls closing, a charming YouTube video documented the group count at one polling unit. If thugs tried to snatch that ballot box, they might have seen their face on the evening news.

Olopade 2011: np

But the consequences of citizen media reports of the elections would certainly extend beyond the conduct of the elections. Many citizen reporters captured video evidence of election rigging in many parts of the country, and aggrieved politicians who were at the receiving end of electoral fraud have vowed to use these videos as testimonial evidence to ask for the invalidation of the electoral victories of their opponents. The unprecedentedly enthusiastic participation of citizen reporters in the electoral process eclipsed the traditional role of the Nigerian mass media as the first source of information. Alarmed by their diminishing role, the mainstream media were forced to invest more efforts in their online delivery. The *Daily Trust*, for instance, started live, real-time updates of the elections from all parts of the country. For the first time also, it started uploading on its web site videos of the election that were recorded by its reporters. The *Vanguard*, *Guardian*, *Punch*, and many other legacy newspapers not only started live updates on the election but also formed online communities and invited citizen journalist participation. In addition, they had Twitter and Facebook accounts and utilized them to disseminate updates. But it was too little too late. The efforts did not gain much traction, first,

because they were not sufficiently robust and, second, because they could not rival the sheer infectious ebullience of citizen bloggers on Twitter, Facebook, diasporan media sites, and the many lively discursive arenas created by sundry citizen initiatives.

Although the media in Nigeria seem to be immune from the financial hemorrhaging and uncertain future that the western media are confronted by, going forward, they would need to justify their existence by living up to the demands of twenty-first century journalism, which is increasingly networked, multimedia, interactive, archival, interactive, and driven by social media trends. The only saving grace for Nigeria's corporatized media, for now, is that advertisers are still leery of the efficacy of advertising in online citizen media platforms. But this reluctance is unlikely to last forever. The decoupling of the traditional media from advertising that we have witnessed in the past five years in the USA and other industrialized democracies could sooner or later creep into Nigeria, especially as Internet penetration deepens and becomes demotic. For instance, the World Bank estimates more than 44 million Nigerians had access to the Internet as of 2009, up from fewer than 1 million seven years earlier (Spiegel, 2011). Similarly, according to the International Telecommunications Union's 2010 report, 40% of all Internet traffic from the whole of Africa now comes from Nigeria. The report also says Nigeria has at least 43 million active Internet users (Malakata, 2010). It is conceivable that by the close of 2011 the number of Nigerians with Internet access had doubled, especially with the proliferation of Internet-capable cell phones in the country, which has made Nigeria the country with the fastest-growing number of Facebook users in sub-Saharan Africa. As of early 2011, the country had more than 4 million active Facebook users, making it the country with the 35th most active Facebook users in the world, rivaled only by Egypt in the entire African continent (<http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/>). Advertisers whose patronage sustains newspapers are taking notice. The crisis of the Nigerian domestic newspaper market will deepen once advertisers migrate in large numbers to the online Nigerian citizen media.

## **Conclusion**

It is obvious that geographically displaced online citizen news sites are radically altering the journalistic landscape in Nigeria. But what lessons can global journalism learn from this? Well, these newfangled Nigerian diaspora media might very well be the prototype of an evolving, Internet-enabled, trans-local, and mutual informational and cultural exchange between the educated deterritorialized ethnoscaples of peripheral nations whose exile in the west invests them with symbolic and cultural capital and the private media institutions and governments of their homelands. It is important to note, too, that although the Internet is not as widely accessible in the developing world as it is in the west, thus potentially limiting the power and reach of online citizen media, Internet access and literacy have been growing by leaps and bounds lately, especially with the wild popularity of mobile Internet service. In Nigeria, as in most developing countries, most people get access to the Internet through their cell phones. But, more importantly, as the two-step flow theory of communication (sometimes called the multiple-step-flow theory of communication) suggests, the effects of mass communication are not often measured primarily through the number of people who have had first contact with the content of

the mass media. News often percolates to the general populace through a network of interpersonal relationships led by “opinion leaders” (Lazarsfield, Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, 1944). The theory states that news from the mass media usually gets first to opinion leaders – who are usually well-educated, media-savvy, and have access to modern communication facilities – who then relay it to the lower strata of the society through informal channels. This theory captures the reality of the effect of citizen online media in Nigeria, and it can potentially be replicated in other developing nations of the world.

## Notes

- 1 The homepage of this online paper can be found at <http://www.elendureports.com/>.
- 2 Check the site at <http://www.saharareporters.com/>.
- 3 <http://www.timesofnigeria.com>.
- 4 <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com>.
- 5 <http://www.huhuonline.com>.
- 6 <http://www.pointblanknews.com>.
- 7 <http://www.empowerednewswire.com/>.
- 8 See <http://www.usafricaonline.com/news.html>.
- 9 This up-and-coming, muckraking outlet (which can be found at <http://ireports-ng.com>) is published from Noblesville, Indiana. It has existed since 2008 but only began to attract attention when it exposed massive corruption scandals in the *Punch* newspaper, one of Nigeria’s most notable daily newspapers.
- 10 The Chicago journalist and humorist Finley Peter Dunne pointed out, at the turn of the century, that “the job of the newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel explain that the essence of this quip, which has now metamorphosed into a journalistic maxim, is its dramatization of the role the press is expected to play in “watching over the powerful few in society on behalf of the many to guard against tyranny.” See Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001). For other interpretations of this phrase, see Benjaminson and Anderson (1990) and Teel and Taylor (1988). For a somewhat similar death of watchdog journalism in a developing country, see Pinto (2008).
- 11 Table adapted from Dimitrova and Neznanski (2006).
- 12 For other lively debates about the future of the newspaper in the age of the Internet, see Franklin (2008), Conboy and Steele (2008), Picard (2008), and Schultz and Voakes (1999).
- 13 Many Nigerian newspapers, because of their rudimentary technical capacities, get hacked through the feedback mechanisms they provide on their sites. That is why many of them have backed out of providing interactive features to their site. A recent example is the case of the up-and-coming Abuja-based *People’s Daily* newspaper, which was shut down for more than a week because it was hacked through the reader comments section. After getting back up, it banned reader comments entirely for months.
- 14 The homepage of *NEXT*, which came on board in 2009, can be found at [www.234next.com](http://www.234next.com). It is bankrolled by former minister of the Nigerian Federal Capital Territory Nasiru el-Rufai who found himself outside the orbit of power and became a virulent critic of the government of the day. He was on self-exile in the USA and the United Arab Emirates. With the death of President Umar Musa Yar’adua on May 5, 2010, he returned to Nigeria and is back in the political mainstream.
- 15 The case is in progress at the time of writing this chapter.

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# Doing Journalism Online: How UK News Organizations Have Adapted in the Age of the Internet

Kostas Saltzis

## Introduction

When the *Daily Telegraph* created its online sibling, the Electronic Telegraph, in 1994 – the first UK national newspaper web site – there was a growing understanding among UK media organizations that the Internet was going to be a significant development for the newspaper business. However, few could have predicted the extent of this significance or indeed the ways in which this new medium would become such a factor for change in the news industry.

Certainly the initial approach of traditional media organizations toward the Internet was at best cautious and at worst driven by fear. The Electronic Telegraph was one of the first attempts to explore new revenue streams for a trusted newspaper brand that conceived the Internet as a new marketing tool and a way to modernize its aging image (Bishton, 2001). The main emphasis was on the commercial side of the web site rather than news, mainly because there was a danger of the web site “cannibalizing” the newspaper; that is, stealing readers by offering the same news stories for free. And although the editorial/commercial balance has been re-addressed since then, particularly after the “dotcom boom” of the early 2000s, the question of whether the Internet will kill traditional media remains a hot topic even today.

Other approaches have also been adopted, such as that of the *Guardian* and the BBC, which invested early and heavily in their online ventures and tried to get as much online traffic as possible, or that of the MailOnline, which despite being a late starter<sup>1</sup> has managed to become the most popular newspaper web site in the UK<sup>2</sup> (Kiss, 2011). Despite the variety of approaches, it has become clear that this new medium has acted as a highly disruptive force (Jarvis, 2008, 2011) for the news industry in most countries around the world. It has led to radical restructuring, new working cultures, and new forms of journalism, while it created the conditions for a re-evaluation of the role of journalists.



One of the biggest changes observed in the UK news industry since the emergence of the Internet was the radical rethinking of the strategy and business of established news organizations – newspapers and broadcasters, such as the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, the BBC, Sky News, and so on. In their efforts to expand their activities on the Internet, these organizations had to slowly redefine themselves as *multimedia* instead of *single* media organizations based on media-neutral competitive advantages and to share resources between their online and “offline” outputs.

This need for sharing information and resources has also created an impetus toward multimedia production, which is achieved through newsroom integration and work reorganization in most news companies. A new working culture in multimedia newsrooms requires more versatility from journalists who have to keep up with multiple demands and continuous pressure.

Finally, the openness of the web, the emergence of alternative news sources, and the increased competition have challenged the gatekeeping role of journalists. At the same time j-blogging, increased audience feedback, and new platforms of discussion (particularly through social media) present opportunities for journalists to know their audience better than ever before. This new relationship between journalists and citizens has been seen as a force of change to the profession and the overall role of journalism in society.

Nevertheless, although for many years the academic study of news has highlighted a number of problematic areas in “traditional” journalism, and although citizen journalism and social media have created a news environment where the traditional news organizations do not have the monopoly on determining what is newsworthy or who should be a journalist, the importance of the latter has not disappeared altogether. It is argued that these organizations through their expertise, professionalism, and influence have still a special role in the multimedia age. So instead of holding a monopoly, they are now the big – probably the biggest – players in a much more diverse environment.

This chapter attempts to map the key changes in the traditional news industry and UK journalism in general as a result of the rising importance of the Internet.

## **New Media vs. Old Media**

Almost every newly appearing medium has been considered as a threat to the newspaper industry. Broadcasting media were blamed for the long-term decline of newspaper readership since the Second World War, while the development of 24-hour television news services challenged newspapers’ role as information providers, because these services could deliver news at such speed and regularity that much of newspapers’ content had become redundant even before it was printed. But whereas in the 1980s the response by the newspaper industry was that of innovation, internal reorganization, and restructuring of its business (as best demonstrated in the “Wapping revolution”<sup>3</sup>), the 1990s were characterized by a lack of clear strategic direction toward the emergence of online news.

Most newspaper companies were quick to create their online versions in order to avoid being left behind in the development of the Internet. This was partly due to the fact that the Internet represented a far more threatening challenge for newspapers.

Here was a medium that could compete directly with newspapers by offering a very similar product in text form, much faster – almost instantly – and more importantly for free (for those who have access). The reaction of the newspaper industry has been mixed, at times worrying about the possible effects on newspapers and at times dismissing the new medium.

The voices predicting the demise of newspaper as a medium have been widespread. Even from as early as 1997, Franklin suggested that the new digital environment presents a very grim picture for newspapers: “virtually everything that newspapers provide, information and entertainment, is now offered more readily, cheaply, efficiently and interestingly by some other news medium. *The demise of newspapers seems inevitable*” (Franklin, 1997: 69). Moreover, the Internet provides huge savings in manufacturing and distribution costs over publishing because there is no need for printing facilities, for the purchasing of paper, or for a distribution network (Fidler, 1997). Even people within the industry have argued that “the future of written journalism lies more with electronic distribution than it does with the printed page” because of the Internet’s special features such as “searchability,” immediacy, and “permanence” (Bell, 2005).

The more optimistic arguments of this debate lie mainly on the special characteristics of the newspaper product (Franklin, 1997). The newspaper is silent and highly portable, it does not need batteries or electricity to operate, it can be stored and readily retrieved, and finally it can be consumed in small easily digestible bites. In general, as Franklin (1997) notes it is all about personal freedom and choice.

Similarly to newspapers but probably less intensely, the Internet has posed a new threat for television news. First of all, the Internet has challenged television in the crucial area of speed, by matching or even beating it (Mason, 2006). Deuze (2001: np) also points out another advantage of the web over broadcast news: archival capacity: “a news channel has the specific problem in that it ‘sits on’ more content than it can broadcast within a daily scheduled program of rotating, recurring newscasts.”

Moreover, as broadband connections make the Internet faster, news web sites include more multimedia features such as video news, which makes them direct competitors with television. This argument might be even stronger for the 24-hour news channels, which, despite being the original provider of “news on demand,” are attracting small audiences, while the intense competition coming from the Internet offers not only an alternative but arguably a better product:

broadcast news has to move into a cross-platform world now. Rolling news is a medium that cannot be interactive, lacks sufficient power to tell a story and is no longer unrivalled as the way to get moving pictures to a mass audience. As people begin to create and share their own content, and the PC screen merges with the television, it is worth asking “what is the point of rolling news?”

Mason, 2006

Despite the arguments for the death of broadcasting there are also voices in the industry that argue that convergence and new media will instead offer alternative ways for traditional news organizations to deliver and produce their products, for example through digital interactive television, multimedia web sites, or mobile phones (particularly thanks

to the wider availability of smarter technology and mobile Internet). Where most people seem to agree though is that this digital environment is significantly different from the era of analog broadcasting, presenting fundamentally different problems and opportunities for news broadcasters. The entry barriers in broadcasting markets have dropped, while the Internet has introduced new players, “but at the same time, digitization and converging technologies have encouraged strategies of expansion, diversification and ever increasing concentration of ownership amongst leading players in the media and communications industries” (Doyle, 2002: 2).

The long-term decline of newspaper readership, a significant decrease of the numbers of viewers of television news together with the decline of advertising revenues are painting a pretty stark reality for traditional media, according to a number of commentators (Freedman, 2010; OECD, 2010). The prospect of newspapers closing down has become a reality particularly in the regional and local press in the UK (Curran, 2010), while a number of media analyses and projections suggest that even national titles will “be forced to reduce publication frequency by more than half, move online or close entirely” (Davoudi, 2008). In the broadcasting sector as well, job cuts have been observed in both commercial and public service broadcasters<sup>4</sup> in the period 2008–2011 (Curran, 2010).

The Internet has not been the only reason behind this so-called “crisis of journalism” but it definitely has played a significant role, because its huge popularity since the early 1990s has coincided with an accelerated decline of traditional media and because of resistance to change from an industry which has been relatively stable for many decades.

### **From *Single* to *MultiMedia***

A new ecology of news has therefore appeared in the British media, one that is characterized by certain key trends. Firstly, convergence and multimedia competition have become a reality for news organizations in all media sectors. By entering the online news market most news organizations have automatically started competing with information providers with traditions and cultures completely different to their own. This diverse online news market brings together broadcasters, newspapers, news aggregators (such as Google news), news blogs, tweets, and so on, all of which may be based anywhere around the world.

This internationalization of the news market on the Internet has had two aspects for traditional media organizations. First of all the nature of the competition is significantly different from the print or broadcast markets. Apart from bringing together a number of companies from different media backgrounds, new competitors, such as news aggregators can repackage news and therefore avoid the huge costs of newsgathering. Scott (2005) points out that news organizations moved away from the traditional media markets, which were protected by high entry costs, and they were positioned in a very unstable environment with extremely low entry barriers.

The second aspect is the expansion of the audiences of traditional news organizations beyond national borders. For instance whereas most national newspapers have always been catering for a British audience, their respective web sites get most of their

traffic from outside the UK<sup>5</sup> (Kiss, 2011; *Press Gazette*, 2007). This has helped them to access new markets and to maintain their audiences irrespective of where they are based. On the other hand this has also allowed a much more fluid and less loyal readership. Furthermore, news aggregators have gained in importance by directing users to news web sites and therefore have become a new “middle man” between news providers and consumers. So although the entrance in the online market meant that news organizations gained a wider audience and accessed new markets, it also provided new challenges with a less loyal customer base, a more competitive market, less advertising, and as we will see below a new relationship between journalists and their audiences.

Another consequence of this multimedia competition has been a variety of approaches to the product of online news. Coming from different industries and production cultures means that news organizations approach their web sites in diverse ways. As broadband speeds have facilitated the downloading of audiovisual material on the web, organizations like Sky and the BBC can easily publish their broadcast material online. This therefore has put pressure on newspapers, which have been lagging behind in audiovisual production. This is a major challenge for them as they lack not only the technical expertise but also the managerial will to explore this area.

Despite the different approaches to their online strategies it is clear that most news organizations have adapted to new media by redefining themselves for the digital age. In terms of strategy, culture, and production they had to rethink their core values and break with the tradition of being media-specific organizations (Baldwin *et al.*, 1996). They are perceived more and more as multimedia news organizations rather than newspapers or broadcasters, and they promote themselves based on media-neutral competitive advantages.

For example, *The Financial Times* defines itself as an organization that offers authoritative financial analysis and interpretation rather than a financial newspaper. Equally, the *Guardian* claims to be “all about the distribution of the written word” through any medium, the BBC has expanded its role as a public service broadcaster to the Internet too, while Sky News is slowly redefining itself as a multimedia breaking news organization rather than just a 24-hour news channel (Saltzis, 2009). This development does not signify a complete diversification of the industry since the original businesses remain more profitable than new media, but it demonstrates the change of thinking and philosophy inside news organizations. And although there are varying degrees of this process of redefinition, in most cases this has been a big challenge as organizations had to wrestle with long traditions and established working cultures.

## In Search of Viable Business Models

This transition from single media to multimedia organizations has been observed in most UK cases even though the original businesses (i.e. newspaper publishing, broadcasting, etc.) remain important particularly in financial terms. Particularly for newspaper organizations the expansion to the Internet and new media has not managed to provide a viable revenue model apart from a few exceptions.

Despite the fact that the most popular commercial news web sites (such as MailOnline and Guardian.co.uk) get millions of daily users on average (Kiss, 2011), which is much more than their average newspaper circulation, the revenues from online advertisements are only a fraction of the ones secured by the print versions. As a result very few news web sites today manage to generate beyond modest profits (Robinson, 2009). The reason lies in the fact that the Internet is a much more open marketplace and advertisers can target their audiences better without the mediation of media organizations. Moreover this has also affected the existing business models of newspapers and television news (Freedman, 2010).

More specifically, the market for advertisers' money has been complicated and disrupted by this much more open field, and a new dominant player has emerged (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010). Google offers much more targeted advertising alongside its search engine results with which online web sites cannot even compete. The news industry has been so unhappy about this development that they have tried to push the government for more regulation in order to protect their interests. Particularly newspaper managers have criticized Google for not spending "a penny on any kind of journalism at all and yet they are making money out of our journalism" (Bailey quoted in Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010), and explained the dilemma that newspapers face as a "no-win situation ... unable to remove their content from Google as this would be even more damaging to their businesses" (McCall quoted in Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010). The National Union of Journalists summed up the situation:

The problem is that Google itself doesn't actually produce any content – it just lives off the work of others, and that has to be paid for. However given that there are fewer adverts for content producers to fight over then there is less money to pay creators and so media companies axe journalists, photographers and editors.

Quoted in Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010

Since the online advertising model has not been as effective for news web sites, a number of other avenues have been considered and tried out. The solution of full or partial subscription has been discussed and applied with various degrees of success. Specialist news web sites such as FT.com have managed to make their operation profitable based on a subscription model, and News International has also raised a subscription wall for some of its web sites in June 2010 (Mostrous and Steele, 2010). Rupert Murdoch's strategy has been seen however as a gamble by a number of analysts and its results in the second half of 2010 were cautiously optimistic. However the key problem for news organizations and one that has been viewed as "a crisis of journalism" by many (Freedman, 2010) has been the trend of continuing falling circulation for newspapers and modest revenues from online advertising and subscriptions, which seems to create an unsustainable situation in the long term.

Rupert Murdoch's reactions to online news are indicative of the industry's strategic uncertainty. After describing himself as a "digital immigrant" in the late 1990s and viewing the Internet as a distraction rather than something integral for his newspaper business, Murdoch characteristically accepted that the Internet can be revolutionary for the news

business, and become “an opportunity to improve our journalism and expand our reach” (Murdoch, 2005). This change of heart was followed by a complete revamping of the web sites of News International as well as acquisitions of web sites such as the social network Myspace in 2005. But this great Internet enthusiasm was dampened again in 2010 when News International decided to “protect” its journalism by raising a paywall, inspired by the successful subscription model of the WSJ.com (the web site of the Wall Street Journal), which Murdoch acquired in 2007.

## Changes in Newsrooms

The impact of the expansion of traditional news organizations to new media and the Internet in particular has been more than just on strategy and business. The multimedia demands that appeared with the continuous development of their web sites have to be met through changes in production processes and the introduction of new technology. The strategies of news organizations in the early stages of the Internet were reflected also in the ways their web sites have produced news content. For newspapers, the early web sites were merely electronic versions of their paper copies. As the Internet penetration and traffic grew, the need to produce original material for their web sites was met usually by separate “online” newsrooms that were quite distinct to the main newsrooms. The distinction between online and newspaper journalists have been quite significant in terms of prestige (with the paper version being viewed by journalists as the “real thing” compared with the “vulgar” online version) (Singer, 2003), working routines (such as different working hours, with newspaper journalists being busier toward the printing deadlines in the afternoon, and their online colleagues responding to the peak hours of web traffic in the morning hours), and physical location with the two newsrooms being clearly separated (and in some cases even in different buildings).

For news broadcasters, the early stage of online expansion was slightly different in the sense that they had to produce completely new material straightaway due to the fact that the Internet was a largely text-based medium at the time with little audiovisual material, which meant that their existing material was not fit for the web site. Nevertheless, the strategy of distinctive editorial teams and clearly separated newsrooms, between online and broadcasting, was present there too.

This cultural and physical separation became problematic for news organizations when demands for original material online increased and the online newsrooms grew in size. Suddenly the problem of duplication emerged; that is, having to send two journalists from the same organization to cover the same event, made little sense both editorially and financially.

This problem was addressed by merging both technically and editorially the previously separate newsrooms. First of all, digital newsroom technology has allowed for a degree of automation in news production and improved information sharing within organizations. The main idea behind newsroom convergence has been to “write once and publish everywhere,” in other words to avoid duplication of reporting and to lead to cost savings.

This process of newsroom integration has been observed in a number of UK newsrooms both in broadcasting and newspapers, the best examples of which were at the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Financial Times*, and the BBC.<sup>6</sup> In most of these cases the key goal of integration has been content sharing at all stages of news production through a “common distribution infrastructure” in the newsroom (Doyle, 2002; Albarran and Dimmick, 1996). Two main strategies have been employed to that end: the digitization of newsrooms (through server-based newsroom production systems that allow common access to the gathered material by all news workers, connect the various operations inside the newsroom, and automate a number of processes) and a push towards a more multiskilled workforce, based on the idea that journalists have transferable skills between different media. As a result the creation of integrated multimedia newsrooms facilitated the sharing of material in production by treating information as platform-neutral and allowed editors and journalists to develop a number of different ways of distributing the same content to new media platforms such as cell phones, PDAs, and interactive television services.

## Multiskilling

Newsroom integration and convergence have had a significant effect on the working practices of journalists and the professional skills required. Journalists nowadays are required to be more versatile than ever before. Although older generations have been less willing to adapt to this new working environment, there has been a growing demand for multiskilled journalists, whether that means multimedia production or simply multitasking such as editing, using video cameras, and so on.

Multiskilling is not a uniform phenomenon in all organizations and in general this term has been used to describe a number of different cases. First of all in some organizations journalists are asked to work for more than one outlet. This has been more prevalent in newspapers where the skills of writing for the web and the paper are quite similar. There have been also cases where journalists have become truly multimedia reporters in the sense that they produce news in multiple formats (i.e. text, video, audio). Though this has not been a widespread trend, journalists nowadays need to be more and more aware of the multimedia aspects of their reports, since most news stories on the Internet combine text and audio-visual material. Also journalists are increasingly asked to carry out tasks that in the past have been done by technical staff. Editing video material or formatting pages online have become easier thanks to user-friendly digital technology.

It has long been argued that this trend toward journalistic multiskilling should not be considered as a case of technological determinism but the result of “management led economic decisions” aimed at cost reduction and improvements in efficiency (MacGregor, 1997; Cottle, 1999). These efficiencies were largely based on what Shepherd (1979, quoted in Doyle, 2002: 40) described as “maximum value of outputs for given values of inputs” and were aimed at keeping the redundancies of journalists at a minimum but increasing instead the number of tasks they had to perform.

As journalistic jobs become “rationalised and re-designated” (Cottle, 1999) a number of issues have been raised. Bromley (1996) commented that the key question is whether multiskilling leads to journalistic “*enskillings*” or *deskilling*. Certainly a number of studies have shown that journalists spend more time doing more tasks (some of which are more technical than editorial) which means that there is less time for analysis. Increased competition and a faster pace of work have also contributed to that effect. This development has been criticized because it is linked to work overload and increasing pressure on journalists who become “deskilled” and drop their quality standards (Cottle, 1999).

The opposite argument is focusing on the fact that journalists take control of more aspects of the final product and practice a wider range of skills compared to the recent past (Saltzis and Dickinson, 2008). What remains certain however is the fact that the job of the journalist has become more flexible. The new working culture in online and converged newsrooms is characterized by versatile journalists, pressures from continuous deadlines (or we might say, the absence of deadlines), and increased competition. Plus there is greater emphasis on the sharing of information and flexible working practices that enable faster and multiformat reporting.

The impact of the Internet on journalistic practices has been examined by a number of studies and perspectives that have shown changes in the final product and working routines, and have discussed the new relationship that has emerged between journalists and the audience (Pavlik, 2001; Fenton, 2010). The key changes identified in those empirical studies have been the interactive nature of news and the changes in newsgathering and reporting.

Fenton (2010: 6) suggests that the “new journalism” associated with the Internet is “open to novices, lacks editorial control, can stem from anywhere (not just the newsroom), involves new writing techniques, functions in a network with fragmented audiences, is delivered at great speed and is open and iterative.”

McNair (1998: 136) points out that the Internet is linked to and accelerates developments such as “the erosion of time-space barriers in the production and consumption of news, the globalization of news and its audiences, the proliferation of outlets.” But this multidimensional news environment does not necessarily mean greater diversity (Fenton, 2010). Journalists have to provide continuous updates on their stories and aim for speedy reporting in many cases without even leaving the newsroom (Fenton, 2010; Quinn, 2002). The great emphasis on speed and the increased pressure means that news agencies become more important as original reporting suffers (Scott, 2005; Davies, 2008; Paterson, 2005).

On the other hand, some voices of enthusiasm about the new medium shared by other scholars and journalists point out the main advantages of Internet news: multimedia format, interactivity, personalization (or customization), global accessibility, hypertextuality, interconnectivity, and instantaneous reporting (Pavlik, 2001; Kawamoto, 2003). Furthermore, Pavlik (2001) hails online journalism as “potentially a better form of journalism” as it can “reengage an increasingly distrusting and alienated audience” (Pavlik, 2001: xi).

This last point signals perhaps the biggest change in the work and even the role of journalists that has come in the age of online news: a new relationship between journalists and their audience, which we examine in the section below.



## A New Relationship with the “Audience”

The wider implications of the Internet on public discussion and journalism have been discussed frequently in the literature (Fenton, 2010; Allan, 2006; Gillmor, 2004). While most of the debate focuses on the impact of citizen journalism and blogging, it is also quite significant to consider the changes that the new online discussion has brought to the actual work of the journalists in the newsroom.

The first and clearest change has been the increased feedback received by members of the “so-called” audience. What was initially in the form of e-mails sent to the editor or journalists has now become an integral part of most online news stories in the form of comments that are added to the original story and can be viewed by everybody. As a result the feedback received by journalists has increased both in quantity and quality. Whereas for decades journalists had to imagine in an abstract way what the audience thought of their work, a relationship described by Schlesinger (1987) as “the missing link,” now this feedback cannot be ignored by the daily routines of journalists.

In some cases the amount of feedback has become so extensive that a new type of editor has emerged, that of the moderator, in an effort to manage this influx of feedback and more importantly to ensure that comments left by readers on the web pages of news organizations are not offensive (Domingo *et al.*, 2008). The latter point has also raised the issue of responsibility and legal accountability about material that is hosted by news organization web sites. A number of organizations have been very wary of the dangers of being suited for libel by hosting comments that even though they are not produced by their employees are considered as their published material.

The impact of this increased feedback is wider though, as journalists can now be more informed about reactions of the audience on their work. In most organizations comments and feedback are monitored continuously in order to provide evidence of the most commendable stories. High interest in certain topics means more resources and reporting being devoted to them in the future in order to respond to the demands of the online readers.

The level of engagement with the feedback received has been varied in UK news organizations (Redden and Witschge, 2010). Some web sites such as [guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk) have treated that as a way of participating in a broader discussion which eventually benefits journalists by broadening their outlook, improving them as communicators as well as helping them to understand the wider implications of their work. This has been particularly interesting and challenging in the coverage of international conflicts where highly contracting views can inform and in some cases develop into disputes and complaints.

Journalists nowadays can hardly ignore that there is always a wider discussion of issues online and might even want to link to outside sources. Without attempting to examine whether this indeed creates a new public sphere or is a force of democratization (Fenton, 2010), it is undeniable that journalists can no longer treat their stories as a “dead-end” and they need to develop a number of ways to facilitate traffic coming in and out of their stories. This particular point contrasts early approaches to online news where outside links were seen as undermining the actual web site (Bishton, 2001).

Furthermore, another type of material has emerged in news web sites: the so-called j-blogs. These are blogs written by journalists who are given more freedom by news organizations to provide more personal commentary and different perspectives on the events that are covered routinely. These j-blogs have allowed some journalists (those can be specialists or well-known columnists) to connect in a more informal way with their readers.

Another aspect that has been widely discussed is citizen journalism. Its particular impact on journalism has been seen as a challenge to traditional journalism (Fenton, 2010; Allan, 2006). However it is also important to point out that the fruits of citizen journalism have been used widely by news organizations too. In fact in most cases it has been encouraged by inviting readers to send their material (photos, videos, information, etc.) to the newsrooms directly. The obvious advantage of this is the fact that journalists cannot be everywhere all the time, whereas there are always some witnesses who could have covered some aspects of events. News organizations present themselves as a platform for this material. It is true that citizen journalists have provided highly original material that in certain cases has even defined the way events were covered. The best examples have been the coverage of the 7/7 London bombings, the tsunami disaster of 2004, and more recently the coverage of uprisings in Arab countries in 2011.

But even during routine reporting citizen journalists can still be of value to news organizations in the sense that their material is cheap (if not free) and fast (as there is no need to send a correspondent). Enabling citizens to tell their stories as well as send their material has become a common practice for a number of news web sites including BBC Online, for which Gillmor (2004) maintained that few other organizations have done so much as to involve its users.

This phenomenon has raised a number of issues though. Some, such as what makes someone a journalist, were old questions that need to be revisited, while others, such as whether traditional journalists are being sidelined by these developments, were entirely new. Some commentators have actually suggested that traditional news organizations and journalists have moved away from their gatekeeping role where they defined what is important in society and therefore what is newsworthy. Instead their role on the Internet remains relevant but more as a point of reference, as “gateopeners” whose “editorial function centred on the facilitation and circulation of knowledge produced by a vast network of users-turned-producers” (Boczkowski, 2004a; Sambrook, 2005; Kawamoto, 2003). Boczkowski (2004a) claims that news organizations might not have entirely abandoned their gatekeeping role, but they have become more open and more aware of a new ecology of news. Sambrook (2005) characteristically puts it that “transparency about the news selection and editing process is now as important as the journalism itself in retaining public trust.” Rheingold (1993) points out that such a development does not mean the end of traditional journalism – vertical communication – but it rather transforms it “by moving more towards a many-to-many and multilevel, multi-source model of communication” (p. 378). Others such as Jarvis (2009) and Gillmor (2004) take this point further and suggest that this is merely a transition point for journalism which moves away from a the “myth of the perfect product” and the “lecture,” toward a more collaborative and conversational type of information sharing, a “new journalism.”

## Conclusion

At a moment when the number of commentators who suggest that the end of “traditional” journalism approaches is growing and the resistance of the technophobes and “Internet deniers” is becoming more resolute, it is important to acknowledge the multifaceted changes that have been attributed to the emergence of online news as well as other interrelated but equally important drivers of change. By observing current trends it seems that online journalism is taking more and more a central position in the new ecology of news. Furthermore, due to an internationalization of the news market, UK news organizations, through the Internet, have become global players. Their tradition and reputation for journalistic standards have certainly been an advantage so far but there is no mistaking that the online market is truly diverse, ultra-competitive, and fast changing. This reputation alone might not be enough to guarantee a successful future but it certainly suggests that quality and strong journalistic traditions are still relevant today.

Local conditions however are also still relevant and important, and as Fenton (2010: 6) comments they “can lead to different outcomes.” Certainly, in the UK online news market we can observe a merging of old traditions and cultures with new technical possibilities (Boczkowski, 2004b). Convergence of media and technologies make the distinction between media sectors insignificant beyond that of the form of news. New media and the Internet in particular force news organizations to slowly abandon their media-specific characteristics and to redefine themselves as multimedia organizations.

Developments that have started with concentration of media ownership (Albarran and Dimmick, 1998; Alger, 1998) and were halted by legislation in the early stages of mass media in the twentieth century (see Winston, 1998; Fidler, 1997) have now gained a new impetus and seem to be leading to a single, much more complex but interconnected news industry and market. What this means is that divisions between newspaper, broadcasting, and online media continue to decline in importance. Perhaps the only meaningful distinction in an increasingly connected world appears to be the one between being “offline” and “online” in the sense that the latter provides an interconnected, multiformat network of news that is continuously changing and shared. However, as we have seen above, even if the delivery of news happens “offline,” the journalists, newsrooms, and processes that produce them are not.

From the perspective of the news industry, however, the key question remains whether what we call “news organizations” will continue in their existing forms, mainly because the old business models seem doomed in the current state. The picture that is emerging is that of underfunded online journalism being challenged by citizens and bloggers around the world, news aggregators stealing revenue, and an ultra-competitive news market. This might just be a transition moment for those traditional businesses trying to find new ways of becoming profitable in a new environment. But news organizations as the locus where professional journalists come together to share and process information will always be relevant irrespective of business models.

In theoretical terms all these developments raise a number of questions about the study of journalism. On the one hand the financial challenges that the news industry is

facing are inviting us to revisit the relationship between the profit-seeking goals of news organizations with the public service role of journalism. A relationship that in the past has been uncomfortable but essential has now a questionable future as news becomes less profitable as a business, especially online. The key question that emerges is, if privately owned businesses cannot fund the journalism of the future, how can we make sure that its role as the Fourth Estate is preserved? This apparent discrepancy between the economic and social value of journalism is certainly a cause for concern for both professionals and academics but it has also led to a deeper reconsideration of journalism's roles and functions particularly in the light of a much more open news environment.

This environment is complex, fluid, and truly interactive. Furthermore it is vast and chaotic. A recent study has pointed out that the amount of information each person receives on average has increased five-fold since 1986 and is equivalent to 174 newspapers a day, while the average information output for each person equals to six newspapers a day (Alleyne, 2011). The sheer amount of information available emphasizes its "ephemerality" as it would be impossible for someone to archive or even to keep up with it, as well as the fact that journalists and news organizations cannot own the news anymore (Sambrook, 2005). News is already available on demand, almost anywhere and anytime, as long as there is connectivity. So decisions about what, where, when, how to access the news depend more on the individual consumer rather than the journalist.

Furthermore the radical changes in the working practices of journalists in online newsrooms and the reconfiguration of their relationship with the "audience" have significant implications on issues of professionalism as well as on the role of journalism in society. Journalists are losing their privileged role as "gatekeepers" of the news as the emergence of "participatory" or "citizen" journalism has fundamentally blurred the borderlines between news providers and receivers. While this has been hailed by a number of commentators as a "democratization of journalism," it has also raised questions about professional ideals, trustworthiness, and responsibility. And though these values cannot be considered an exclusivity of "traditional journalists," they have gained greater significance in an environment characterized by information overload. Therefore, we can argue that the journalist as the professional who is expert in processing information and has a sense of responsibility and of the professional ideals that have been developed during the history of media, has still a very important and crucial role to play.

## Notes

- 1 *The Daily Mail* owned by Associated Newspapers and which has been resisting an Internet expansion for many years finally launched its online version in 2004.
- 2 BBC News Online has been by far the most popular UK news web site (Robinson, 2010).
- 3 See Franklin, 1997; Littleton, 1992.
- 4 Though among the cost-cutting measures announced by the BBC in 2011 was also a 25% cut in its online budget. This was widely seen as a response to industry criticism that the BBC news web site's dominant position, due to its licence fee funding, creates unfair competition with other commercial information providers on the Internet (Revoir, 2011).

- 5 In January 2011, the figures for UK-only traffic were 38% for MailOnline, 35% for telegraph.co.uk, 40% for guardian.co.uk, and 49% for independent.co.uk. Only mirror.co.uk among the subscription-free newspaper web sites had more users from the UK with 60% (Kiss, 2011).
- 6 Even before digital newsrooms were introduced, the BBC tried to make its news workforce “bi-media,” asking journalists to report for both radio and TV. This early experiment toward editorial newsroom integration was attempted between the BBC’s radio and television journalists during John Birt’s tenure as Director General. This was largely abandoned later because of concerns over quality (Cottle, 1999).

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# J-blogging in China: Development, Significance, and Challenges

Jin Shang and Hao Zhang

The Internet has been developing at a high speed in China; many new channels of communication have been created and the Internet has enabled significant improvements in information interactivity. Various new media channels increasingly convey news that is beyond the scope of that available through the mass media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV. Journalism blogging,<sup>1</sup> or j-blogging, is one such channel gaining in popularity in China today, as it gives individual journalists, including “citizen journalists” (Rettberg, 2008: 84) greater opportunity for individual expression. With the availability of alternative channels for receiving news, more and more individuals from mass media audiences are showing an interest in participating in journalism, not only as readers but also as contributors. This is undoubtedly a milestone as it has helped journalism to gain both greater significance and value. This article aims to look into the development of j-blogging in China and to examine the extent to which this new media channel has contributed toward the development of the nation’s media in general. The work also aims to compare and contrast j-blogging in China and the west, considering the different media systems. This is important because j-blogging is now more accepted as a new trend in “media globalization” (Goonasekera, Wang, and Servaes, 2004: 3) due to its global reach via the Internet.

## **The Origins and Development of J-blogging**

Blogging can be defined as the production of easy-to-create online web pages with short but regularly updated items of information and commentary, usually with links to information and commentary on other web sites (Blood, 2003; Grabowicz, 2003; Lasica, 2003; Wall, 2004, 2005). Blogs can be categorized into different types depending on



their contents and the ways in which the contents are delivered. Originally, j-blogging was a common type of blog, produced by professional journalists who usually worked for newspapers, magazines, radio, television, web sites, or other media organizations. The contents of this type of blog would usually cover news stories and the trivialities of journalists' personal lives, although other contents including their opinions may also be published on the blogs.

J-blogging has advanced substantially since the term "blog" or "weblog" was introduced in the late 1990s (Allan, 2006: 45). In the USA, the birthplace of the blog, Paul Andrews, a well-known IT journalist and columnist for the *Seattle Times* officially became a journalism blogger in November 2001. At the time, he stated that the Internet had provided professional journalists with an opportunity to "take off their heavy cloak" (Andrews, 2001). He pointed out that the role of j-blogging was to ensure that the voice of the people could be fully heard, such that even amateur journalists can practice freely on their own blogs. In the same year, Andrews published his original work titled "Who are Your Gatekeepers?", a work which is often taken as the declaration of j-blogging (Fang and Wang, 2003).

In fact, there are various types of journalism blogs, one particular example being blogs reporting on wars. In 2003, the war in Iraq was recorded and broadcast live on blogs by a number of independent journalists from around the world. According to a poll conducted by Forbes.com, among the five most popular war blogs, there are two journalism blogs relevant to the Iraq War (Fang and Wang, 2003). "Back to Iraq" was created by Christopher Allbritton, who is a former Associated Press (AP) and *New York Daily News* reporter. He became the first war correspondent in independent reporting after the outbreak of the war to update his blog articles each day. After he raised US\$15 000 from his readers, he became the Internet's "first fully reader-funded journalist-blogger" (POV, 2004). The "Iraqi blog" was a blog created by a group of journalists from different countries, who asserted in the introduction to their blog that "we must use our voice to provide you with information on the situation in Iraq" (Fang and Wang, 2003).

Blogs created by mainstream news reporters are another important category; however, it is interesting that the attitude of the mainstream media to the development of blogs on reporting news can be described as a matter of opinion. At the end of March 2006, the issuer of *Le Figaro* argued that the journalism blogs are something worth trying out. He believed the individuality of traditional newspapers and readers' participation can be predominantly enhanced by journalism blogs (Tang, 2006). AP launched its news blog "Far and Wide" in April 2007, aiming to attract young audiences (Chen, 2007). It was updated daily by AP correspondents around the world in order to communicate details of the latest news and events, although it only survived for six months. The final article was posted on October 30, 2007, with a story titled "Hubble captures two galaxies interacting." It was seen as a beneficial endeavor for AP, however, it ceased suddenly and without any announcement.

The video blog, iReport, of the US cable channel CNN, which is updated by the audience, has attracted millions of readers. By July 18, 2011, the number of videos produced by reporters reached 584 623, of which 44 074 reports with a red "CNN iReport" stamp had been vetted and cleared by CNN. This means that they have been selected and approved by a CNN producer to use on CNN, either on air, or on any of

CNN's other platforms (CNN, nd). However, according to an interview conducted by the *Online Journalism Review*, a spokesman of CNN said that "CNN.com prefers to take a more structured approach to presenting the news. We do not blog" (Susan, 2003). CNN does not allow employees to have blogs, but it encourages non-employees to provide information for their special blog web site. This policy can be described as unique indeed.

One representative of the mainstream media that has made a positive response to blogs is the *Los Angeles Times*. In 2007, the *Los Angeles Times* hired the former blog editor, Tony Pierce, as the director of its web site's blog. Pierce was editing a blog, LAist, for reporting local news in Los Angeles before he was employed by the *Los Angeles Times*. Within a year of the opening of the *Los Angeles Times* blog, more than 40 blog spaces had been launched, and the one with the highest number of hits was Top of the Ticket, co-managed by two experienced political reporters. According to Technorati's data, by September 2008, Top of the Ticket had entered the world's top 100 blogs (Gold and Zelas, 2008).

According to research in the USA, most media practitioners, including editors, reporters, columnists, and publishers, have attached great importance to the blog. A survey by Dautrich and Barnes (2005) on media professionals suggested that 83% of respondents used blogs, which is 7% higher than the utilization rate of the general population. During the 2004 US presidential election, blog authors were invited to report on the nomination process for Democratic and Republican candidates as reporters. As a result the popularity of blogs increased, and the number of hits surged. The Bivings report in 2007 showed that among the top 100 circulations in the USA, at least 95 were journalism blogs, of which 88 allow visitors to leave messages or questions (Bivings Report, 2007). From the survey of another US media company, Brodeur, on political journalists in May 2008, 70% of political reporters spent at least an hour each day reading blogs and information from other online media sources (Brodeur, 2008).

A significant breakthrough in blogging came with the involvement of the world's largest news organization BBC. After a long period of internal discussion and experimentation, the BBC opened up its first news blog program in December 2005 in order to promote communications with its audience (Hermida, 2008). The BBC included the content of blogs in their news reporting, and the repercussions of this initiative were significant. Because of the influential role of the BBC as a world broadcaster, it is also seen as an example for the media around the world. The adoption of blogs by the BBC will have a significant influence and will further expand the use of blogs in traditional media.

## The Relationship Between Blogging and Journalism

According to Lowrey (2006), a blog is a frequently updated personal web page with links to related sites, and in many ways blogging has returned to individuals and small groups the power to affect public discourse (Hendrickson, 2007), thereby presenting both a challenge to and an opportunity for journalism (Lowrey, 2006). Blogging has been portrayed as exposing journalism's weak points (Regan, 2003: 69), and as a force

that will “blow open holes in the gatekeepers’ firewalls, and as ending journalism’s reign of ‘sovereignty’” (Rosen, 2005). For instance, the existence of blogging does not alter the vulnerabilities inside journalism, but because bloggers are there as rivals, such vulnerabilities appear even more significant to journalism, which in turn encourages journalists to improve the practices and processes of journalism for the sake of safeguarding their occupation. As J.D. Lasica (2003) put it, bloggers cannot force the traditional media out of business, nor can the latter replace what bloggers provide in the process of journalism, such as follow-up reports with in-depth analysis, alternative viewpoints, and personal accounts of news events, which is not considered a normal practice within journalism. Meanwhile, the traditional media have got something that bloggers could learn from, including accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness. In other words, bloggers and journalists “complement” each other, “intersect” with each other, and “play off” each other (Lasica, 2003). Paul Pedley (2005) notices that blogs, which are an easy outlet for self-publishing, may carry bias or viewpoints because they are accounts of bloggers’ personal thoughts.

The impact of blogging on journalism is reshaping the professional process. In fact, blogs have some advantages: they are relatively inexpensive to produce and have the power to reach large audiences quickly in a way more traditionally associated with the large, complex news organizations that were considered essential for disseminating messages under the traditional definition of “mass communication” (Severin and Tankard, 2000). Meanwhile, Lowrey (2006) pointed out that the vulnerabilities of traditional journalism may be repaired by blogging, for example, by increasing the use of non-elite sources, or making blogs a mainstay of journalistic practice. Problems and goals can be redefined in order to make vulnerabilities irrelevant. The journalism community may try to redefine blogging as a journalistic tool, and bloggers as amateur journalists or journalism wannabes (rather than as a unique occupation). Journalists also publicly emphasize practices that play to the strengths of organizationally based journalism, such as newsgathering and fact checking.

In reaction to the blogging challenge, journalists could change professional practice. For example, more non-elite sources could be used extensively, or more partisan coverage could be provided. However, the constraints of organizational and community dependency structures make these changes unlikely, at least in the short term (Lowrey, 2006). In addition, blogging provides a huge help to journalists in gathering news and ensuring the accuracy of information. As Lowrey (2006) stated, journalists have the resources to conduct these tasks in a thorough and consistent way, while most bloggers do not. Recent rhetoric of journalists shows how they recognize these advantages. In fact, audiences and society have benefitted from the increased recognition of the importance of the tasks carried out by journalists.

In addition, Lowrey (2006) has also stated that the blogging phenomenon has made it more obvious that journalists are more likely to drop stories prematurely in order to move on to fresh topics. Moreover, audiences benefit when news organizations increase specialized expertise and cover stories more thoroughly, and it is more likely that news organizations will try to repair these vulnerabilities by encouraging journalists to monitor blogs, tap into the specialized expertise of the blogosphere, and track stories that have a continuous powerful effect on audiences.

## The Emergence and Development of J-blogging in China

It is evident that the emergence and development of journalism blogs can be seen as an inevitable consequence of the booming blog industry in China since 2002 when *blogchina.com* was launched. At the time, Fang Xingdong, the creator of *blogchina.com*, was still a young IT analyst, but he wanted to use this new method to encourage Chinese intellectuals to share opinions and other relevant information with the public in order to further promote China's democratic reform. Since then, this new system of publishing has attracted a growing number of Chinese Internet citizens, among whom young people form the largest group. According to a recent statistical report on Internet development in China, released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2011), up until June 2010, the number of blog users in China had grown to 231 million, which is an increase on the previous year of approximately 4.5%.

Journalism blogs first came to the attention of the Chinese public during the "Liang Hui" ("The Two Conferences") period in 2006 (Zeng and Xie, 2006). At that time, Wang Xiaoya, a famous news reporter from China Central Television (CCTV), launched her personal blog, "Xiao Ya Pao Liang Hui" ("Xiao Ya's special report on the NPC and the CPPCC") on *blog.sina.com.cn*. Since its inception, this blog has attracted a great deal of attention from Chinese society, and much of the traditional media have reported or commented on it as a new method of journalistic reporting in China. Following this, other famous CCTV journalists, or news anchors, such as Chai Jing, Sa Beining, and Cui Yongyuan, have launched their own special blogs focusing on different topics of discussion during the "Two Conferences" period. Two examples are "Chai Jing Liang Hui Guan Cha" ("Chai Jing's Observations on the Two Conferences") and "Xiao Cui Hui Ke" ("Meeting up with Cui Xiongyuan"). In addition, Wu Xiaoli, Xie Yafang, and Lu Qiuluwei from Phoenix TV, a well-known independent television station based in Hong Kong, have also launched their blogs on *Ifeng.com*, which indicates that journalism blogging had gained momentum as a new media trend in China (Hu, 2007).

The "fever" of j-blogging didn't fade after the "Two Conferences" period. Those journalists who primarily reported the two conferences on their blogs began to shift their focus to other social or public issues, including those relating to China's economic and political development (Zeng and Xie, 2006). For example, Chai Jing removed "Liang Hui" ("The Two Conferences") from her blog header and changed it to "Chai Jing Guan Cha" ("Chai Jing's News Observations"). It is clear that such a title gave her a larger platform on which to discuss a far wider range of news issues on her blog. This topic echoes a news program called "Xin Wen Diao Cha" ("News Probe"), which she hosts on the CCTV news channel. As Hu (2007) comments, the success of blogs during the "Two Conferences" period has stimulated an increase in journalism blogging in China, since other journalists found that this is an effective alternative approach for reporting news stories. More importantly, this alternative method was initiated and promoted by one of the best-known journalists from China's national television station. From then on, other kinds of journalism blogs, such as those focused on sports news, real estate news, entertainment news, and so on, all began to appear, indicating that China's j-blogging had entered a golden era. Furthermore, the blooming of j-blogging

in China has prompted the development of various groups of journalism blog circles pertaining to different regions or professions (Hu, 2007); for example, the Henan media blog circles, financial journalism blog circles, and so on. The traditional media also formed their own blog circles, such as the Southern Weekend journalism blog circle. Undoubtedly the networks within journalism blog circles further enhanced the impact of journalism blogs as a whole.

However, for security reasons, the web servers on which most of the popular Chinese journalism blogs are based are located in mainland China; therefore this has sometimes resulted in some politically sensitive blog posts being removed by webmasters in order to comply with the strict content censorship in this country. According to Hearn's (2009) discussion on the administration context of China's blogosphere, at the present time the main effect of the Chinese regulation system on China's blogosphere is to prompt so-called self-censorship awareness of Internet users and Internet business owners, thereby passing the responsibility from the authorities to the blog service providers (BSPs), and to make the BSPs responsible for what is posted on their blog sites. What bloggers can post on their blogs is subject to the existing legal system in China, and also to the further tightening of administration through the introduction of a vague "code of conduct for bloggers" (Hearn, 2009). There are a few well-known Chinese blog sites based outside mainland China; they don't have to compromise on content censorship. However, the influence of these blog sites is usually very limited in terms of reaching wider audiences inside the country, because the "Great Firewall,"<sup>3</sup> which is a censorship system imposed on China's Internet, limits visits to these web sites.

## **The Main Features of Chinese Journalism Blogs**

According to a survey carried out by Hu in 2007, from the perspective of Chinese users, at the current stage of development, Chinese journalism blogs can be clearly separated into six categories. The first is that of unpublished works. Since media censorship is extensive in China, and as Hearn (2009) has pointed out, censorship and self-censorship are increasingly built into the Internet itself, some works are not permitted for publication in the traditional media if they are evaluated as likely to cause a negative impact on the public. In this case, journalists would publish their work on their own blogs, making their blogs a "second channel" for news reports. The second category includes "stories behind the news," where traditional journalists expand on the details of stories already published in the traditional media. The third category is to add fresh content or other related information to the already existing newspaper reports or television programs. Examples include those truncated parts from the original news content, subsequent feedback reports, or any content that cannot be published in the traditional media due to time or space limitations. Fourth, journalists sometimes publish the contents of newspapers or television programs on their blogs for the purposes of disseminating the information to more people and to create a greater effect. Fifth, journalists use blogs as a platform to share or exchange opinions with their readers so that they can interact with them. Last but not least, journalists occasionally publish some other information or messages regarding their own interests in order to enhance their celebrity status with the public.

According to an investigation by Paul Bradshaw (2008) into 300 journalism bloggers, blogging has influenced traditional news reporting process in many ways. As a consequence, it may have affected some traditional features of journalistic reporting, such as professionalism. However as Feng (2006) indicates, with this new channel of communication, the impact has been positive, rather than negative in China's context. Unlike the journalism blogs in some other countries, most influential journalism blogs in China are created by professional journalists, effectively ensuring that they provide more balanced and informed coverage. For instance, they would usually do some basic investigations using their professional skills, rather than simply reproducing the reports of others without checking the facts. In an effort to keep their blogs current and up-to-date, Chinese bloggers have adopted many methods and technologies, including using the latest mobile or web technologies, for updating their blogs. In order to improve the quality of their blog contents and to enhance the reading experience, they have also provided some extra "push" services, such as adding RSS feeds to the front pages, so enabling access to the blogs through either personal subscription or visiting directly.

Dan Gillmor (2006), in his monograph *We the Media*, implies that reporters have increased communication with their audiences due to the new technologies. The interactions between visitors and journalism bloggers are invariably lively. Journalists are able to obtain more news and information by using blogs, and journalism blogs not only provide the majority of Internet users with a platform for comments, but also provide reporters with direct channels for reflecting the aspirations of the public. Moreover, journalists can use blogs to improve interview quality, which is rather important to their professional work. In fact, some social observers think that using blogs can help to create a so-called "knock-on effect," which refers to a process of rebellion – interview – production – communication – feedback – reproduction. It is believed that this process can help to raise the level of news dissemination (Wu, 2008). Brodeur and Marketwire's (2008) investigation on the effects of blogs shows that 62% of 178 reporters polled saw blogging as an extension of their job. In China, most journalism bloggers are reporters for traditional media or news web sites, and they are professional and familiar with media operations. Compared with low-quality, grandstanding, or emotional blogs, they have more media sources and are able to grasp the essentials of newsgathering (Wu, 2008). More importantly, the contents of journalism blogs, in contrast to the redundant and often disorganized information generally found on the Internet, are more newsworthy and credible. Journalism blogs often show extraordinary insight and wisdom that can demonstrate the authenticity and objectivity of news, and therefore have won the trust of Internet users in China.

## **The Significance of China's Journalism Blogs**

Brodeur and Marketwire (2006) state that blogs have been influencing the traditional mainstream media since they first appeared. The traditional media poured scorn on blogs in the beginning; however, realizing that their growing power could not be ignored, there was a shift in how they were viewed, from being sidelined to being accepted and adopted. Journalism blogs have grown and expanded in influence; columns are dedicated

to them on the web sites of popular portals such as the People Network, CNTV (China Network Television), XinhuaNet, and Sina.com. Many other web sites have added links in prominent places on their front pages. Promoting their own journalism blogs has, therefore, become an effective strategy for the traditional media, for web sites, and for the journalists themselves (Pan, 2008). Journalism blogs act as a bridge linking the media and web sites to their audience. Additionally, plenty of visits and clicks by Internet citizens bring considerable social and economic benefits for web sites. There are obvious advantages to journalism blogs, particularly in terms of improving the visibility and reputation of the media. This is precisely the reason for the cutthroat competition among major portal web sites to attract media stars to allocated blogs in their own spaces. On the other hand, the content of journalism blogs is mostly related to media reports, which have become an extension of, and complementary to, media coverage. According to Lu (2008), as providing journalism blog services brings great benefits for the traditional media's web sites, in order to enhance their influence, some elements of the traditional media would encourage, or even require, their journalists to establish blogs.

### Another stage for journalists

To some extent, j-blogs help to ameliorate the limits on freedom of speech and expression in mainland China (Hu, 2007). Due to the existence of these blogs, the traditional media for which journalists work is not the only place for them to publish their work. According to a report by Yanjie Pang in 2009, for those works unable to be reported in the traditional media, 40% of respondents said they often or always published them on their blogs. As such, blogs have become the "second exit" for news releases that have been "killed" by the traditional media. This essentially breaks the limitations of the Chinese media system, and enables the broadcasting of more information to wider audiences. However, journalists in fact rarely use their blogs to post breaking news; though one journalist in the survey claimed they planned to try to do so in the future.

In fact, journalism blogs may become the "second exit" of a journalist's work. In China, due to the limitations of the news management system, some articles or programs touching on sensitive areas are often buried ruthlessly. The content that journalists are able to publish or broadcast in the traditional media is usually limited by time and space constraints. Where previously journalists had to accept the truncation of their work, now they have the opportunity to publish the stories in their entirety. According to Pang (2009), on October 6, 2008, Sun Chunlong, a journalist from *Oriental Outlook Weekly* published an article on an iron mining accident at Loufan in Shanxi province, titled "A complaint letter to Wang Jun, the acting governor of Shanxi province." This alerted the State Council Premier, Wen Jiabao. The original report was clarified, and rather than being a "natural disaster," it was described as a "major human element accident," and rather than there being "11 deaths" the amended story reported that the "remains of 41 victims have been found." This article courageously revealed the truth, in order to punish the responsible person and to appease the minds of those wounded, as well as providing spiritual comfort to the families of the victims. In fact, Chunlong Sun had previously published this article on his affiliated media, and this was reproduced by many web sites. However, within one night, the related pages became unavailable ("unable to open") on

all web sites reproducing this article. After the publication of Sun Chunlong's investigatory reports on his blog, leaders in the State Council issued important instructions "according to the complaint letter published on blog on concealing the death numbers of a landslide accident in Loufan, Shanxi on 1<sup>st</sup> August", and requested verification by the relevant departments. Some official media agencies including the Xinhua News Agency, China News Service, Guangzhou Daily, and other major media outlets subsequently published articles, giving high praise to the enthusiasm for news, journalistic conscience, and social responsibility illustrated in Sun Chunlong's articles.

In practice, journalists may use their blogs to access news leads multi-dimensionally, or to make news reports by collecting information provided by blog audiences. Chai Jing, the reporter on CCTV's popular program "News Probe" once used her blog to collate audience feedback, and successfully generated a news report. On June 22, 2007, Chai Jing published an article "You are a citizen, and also a journalist" in her blog, in which she proclaimed that "News Probe" was producing a program on the excessive luxury of government buildings and public facilities in all places, and in which she called for pictures and comments from Internet citizens (Pang, 2009). This article received enthusiastic responses, and gained over 70 000 hits within a week. Internet citizens from all over the country provided their pictures of luxury government buildings in their localities, and left over 1500 comments; this action was afterward described as (in English) "one call being echoed by thousands of people." Journalism blogs, as well as being a link for the audience, can be a "gas station" for journalists. Wu Hao, a former journalist of the Yunnan branch of the Xinhua News Agency, has had his blog "Wu Hao speaks news" ranked in the top ten for couple of years at Xinhua.net (Baidu Baika, 2010). Most of his articles are summaries of newsgathering, for example, "Journalists should be the top story tellers," "Economic reports should dig more into related backgrounds," "Two tips for saving the outdated news," "Responsibilities of journalists are far more than the facts," and so on. These practical skills in news reporting are valuable for journalists. "Wu Hao speaks news" caught the eye of much of the media, and its thread has over 200 000 words. Therefore, this example has proved that for journalists, launching a blog may well enhance their professional reputation and strengthen communications with their peers.

### Another window for audiences

Chinese journalists speak for themselves (Zeng and Xie, 2006). They publish, via blogs, otherwise unpublished news works, the "stories behind the news" and content that is not fully covered in newspapers and TV programs. This provides more information to blog readers as well as satisfying the demands of the audience. The emergence of blogs has allowed any person to become an information publisher, and in contrast to other information publishers, the higher quality and professionalism of blogs written by journalists has won the trust of Internet citizens. In addition, because it is widely believed that trained journalists know more than others about how to write articles for their readers, the same information can become more expressive and appealing, and will fit the readers' reading habits, thus meeting their aesthetic needs at a higher level.



Some journalists not only release news information, they record trivial things and life experiences in their blogs. This type of article satisfies the curiosity of the audience about the living and working conditions of media journalists as a professional group (Lu, 2009). More importantly, journalism blogs provide a novel platform for the public to express their opinions on social reforms. An example can be found on CCTV reporter Chen Hongwei's blog, "Hongwei sees NPC and CPPCC," "You are welcome to tell me your expectations of the NPC and the CPPCC through leaving messages and comments, and I will bring some of the views to the attention of the representatives and members of the NPC and the CPPCC, or pass them through our programme for more people." Journalism blogs have become a new channel for Internet citizens to express their demands, and to fully communicate their enthusiasm and opinions.

### Influence on Chinese citizen journalists

According to Hearn's research (2009), while citizen journalists instigated the use of blogs for conveying news, the impetus has now passed to journalism blogs. Citizen journalists can, however, learn techniques for reporting and information presentation from these professionals (Min, 2008). Nevertheless, the study carried out by Pang (2009) suggests that the impact of journalism bloggers on citizen journalists in China is very limited for three reasons. First, most citizen journalists seek out social problems to write about, not the facts as reporters. Second, fund shortages mean that citizen journalists are naturally poorly supported. Third, the present news specialization of citizen journalists is limited; the authenticity of their reports is unconfirmed, and often cannot be recognized by the public.

## **Freedom of Expression: A Comparison Between China and the West**

Although it may sound unlikely to some people, according to a survey conducted by Xing (2009), there are almost no restrictive regulations on journalism blogs in China. Xing found that most media companies or broadcasting units in China have taken a policy of "non-interference" on the development of journalism blogs, while some media companies even encourage their journalists to write blogs because it is believed they will attract a larger audience and raise profits. In the investigation undertaken by Pang, only three of 48 interviewed journalists mentioned that they had received clear information from the leaders of the media companies for whom they worked. One of them, a news anchor from Beijing Television Station, was told by her unit leader that she should not write what she wanted to write without asking for approval. Another, a reporter from the China News Agency, was restricted within his unit such that "the confidential may not be published" on blogs. The third was a journalist, who was told that "writing blogs will be rewarded with extra bonuses." Thus, the conclusion drawn from the results of this research may be that there are no written rules to restrict journalists from writing blogs in China. This is very different from the case in many media companies in the west, where there are often very detailed regulations for journalism blog publications.

Much of the western media has very specific restrictions on journalism blogs. Reuter's global managing editor, David Schlesinger (2007), told his reporters that "journalism blogs are totally different from ordinary peoples' blogs, because they must maintain the accuracy of remarks and professionalism." John Pomfret, a journalist from *The Washington Post*, said in an interview with the researchers that the provision of *The Washington Post* is that "our blog and newspaper use the same standards, but the writing can be specific and indeed they are very different. Journalism blogs and newspaper news differ in terms of the information reported; blogs have more ideas and a more personal 'voice.'" In early 2008, there was a case in which a mainstream reporter was fired as a result of his blog, which attracted huge interest from US academics. In the bi-monthly journal, *American Journalism Review*, the former producer of CNN, Chez Pazienza, was said to have been fired on February 12, 2008. The reason given by his manager was that he failed to fulfil the regulations of CNN, which was that "all works written for non-CNN institutions should also follow CNN's standards and be published by the business department" (Chan, 2008). This means that employees of CNN who wish to publish work outside CNN should seek the permission of CNN and should be published using the company name. Anything published without authorization in the journalist's own name would be in conflict with this principle and may be punished.

Does this mean that blog writers in China have more freedom of expression than their western counterparts? The question cannot be answered without placing it in a wider context. On the one hand, it is true that the development of new communication technologies has, to a large extent, improved the scope of news reporting in China. Since the advent of the Internet and the accompanying technical innovations, there have indeed been increasing opportunities for the development of freer speech in China. For instance, journalism blogs have made it possible for journalists to publish contents censored by the mainstream media, and this has helped them to obtain a higher degree of freedom of speech than ever before. But, on the other hand, in the wider political context, it is actually not about the question of whether journalists can or cannot publish the information they want to publish; it is about whether, and to what degree, they are interested in publishing certain information if it goes against the existing political system. As Hearn (2009) stressed, China's media broadcasting is "unconsciously" under the control of the government, rather than in a direct way, regardless of its level or type of influence, so there is no need for it to be subject to clear restrictions. The director of the General Administration of Press and Publication of the People's Republic of China (GAPP), Liu Binjie, has asserted that China does not need further detailed regulations on the current development of publications because the existing legal system absolutely meets the current needs (Liu, 2008).

A very interesting example is that breaking news seldom seems to appear on journalism blogs, although with the support of new technologies, such as the Internet, news reporting today could be incredibly fast. However, not all sections of the media have made full use of the resources provided by the Internet, and this is especially true in the case of the print media. Usually, after newspapers have been printed, journalists are unable to continue to report breaking news, but what about using blogs? In particular, for those journalists with their own blogs, do they see blogs as a platform for the release of breaking news? Pang's study (2009) demonstrates that about a quarter of the

journalists have never reported breaking news on their blogs. Li Peng, a journalist for *Xiaoxiang Morning* in Hunan, has claimed that he always publishes his work in the newspaper before putting it online, because he believed that this was an unwritten norm or discipline. Journalists who want to keep their jobs in the traditional media must follow the corresponding news discipline, which means they should not put breaking news on their blogs immediately, unless this is made use of by their media companies first due to commercial competition; this is the most basic issue of their professional ethnics. Because of this, journalism blogs are very unlikely to become a platform for the release of breaking news; consequently, the responsibility for coverage of breaking news falls upon ordinary blog authors, or what may be termed the unprofessional “citizen journalism bloggers.”

In another way, compared with the restrictions on journalism blogs in western countries, there are no explicit limitations on the development of journalism blogs in mainland China. It seems that journalism blogging is even freer in news reporting under the special political system in China regarding social news reports. However, because most of the news media in China is the “mouthpiece” of the government, in reporting the news the media should be subordinated to the management of the Communist Party and the government, and it should not say anything that goes against party policy. This is the reason why the western media continue to criticize the relatively limited freedom of China’s press. In these government-run media organizations, journalists’ manuscripts can be “killed” due to their failure to qualify politically, or can be blocked due to their association with sensitive topics, or have to be altered in content to meet with the government’s propaganda requirements. Qu Changying, a journalist for CCTV’s well-known public opinion programme “Focus” explained that many comments from the public fail to meet the supervision requirements and are prevented from being broadcast.

Before the advent of the blog, such news stories would forever lose their opportunity to be disseminated due to the strict limitations on China’s news system. As a consequence of this China’s news freedom has become one of the most focused topics of western media’s criticism. The non-interference policy of most of the news media in mainland China, coupled with the support and encouragement from some in management, has given journalists free space to make available on their blogs news stories that were refused publication in the traditional media. The instructions of Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, on Sun Chunlong’s article in *Oriental Outlook Weekly*, covering the accident in Shanxi reflected the new and encouraging signals for journalism blogs (Pang, 2009). At the regulatory level, in the year 2000, the Chinese government released the Internet Information Services Guidelines on the management of personal communication platforms, such as blogs. Site managers have to apply for a certificate to maintain sites hosting data and publishing content, and they must immediately delete sensitive information if required to do so by the monitoring department of the police (CNNIC, 2000). However, this kind of policy is relatively indeterminate in practice and heavily depends on bloggers’ self-discipline (Xin, 2009). Whether journalists in mainland China will make good use of this free space, and will take a step forward for freedom of speech and expression in China is still a question worthy of further exploration.

## Conclusion

The Internet and its latest technological innovations, such as mobile Web 2.0 applications, are seen as the most important mass media revolutions of the present era. It is widely believed to be the first time in history that the “individual” has moved to the central position in mass communication, and some scholars believe that we are entering a “self-media” era. Journalism, as a particularly important area of the media industry, is now undoubtedly under huge pressures to change in the face of new challenges. “J-blogging” is a novel form of news-casting that is shaping a brand new journalistic trend in the Internet age, surpassing the traditional media in both speed and courage, and dealing with both breaking and sensitive news. However, it is also being challenged by the traditional media in terms of its poor reputation for reliability. The relationship between blogging and the traditional media in China is interdependent, as either of them could replace the other, however, through co-operation, blogging could in some cases liberalize the traditional media from its restrictions by pushing for the transparency of information.

It is believed that the emergence and development of journalism blogs is an inevitable trend in the development of network technology and mass communication. It has already had long-term positive effects on the reform of Chinese news communication. Due to the poor reputation of the reliability of the Chinese traditional media, the journalism blog as a new platform for online communication has attracted much attention since its inception, with many reporters regarding it as a “second stage” and “second exit” for a journalist’s personal expression. Furthermore, audiences regard it as a new window and channel for communicating with news producers, while the traditional mainstream media and Internet media use it to increase their popularity and influence. However, as a new medium for Internet communication, the development of journalism blogs in China has not yet reached a mature stage; indeed, it is still facing many problems. One of the concerns is the attitude of the Chinese government toward online communication in the form of journalism blogs, and as Hearn (2009) has stated, the emergence of blogs and the rapid development of the Internet in general have, in fact, been used to reinforce the central authority of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

Looking at the current normative systems in terms of government administration regarding online behavior, the relevant laws have not yet been introduced in China. Therefore, at the current stage, to a large extent, j-blogging administration in China still depends on self-regulation. According to Pang (2009), although it seems that most Chinese news agencies would want to encourage journalists to actively take part in online communication, the precondition is that the contents published online have to be entirely under their control. Therefore, there is still a large discussion space for the development of transparency in the administration of China’s j-blogs, and perhaps some administration experience from western countries would be of value, particularly with regard to the ways in which people’s freedom of expression can be legally protected but without challenging the country’s basic interests and legal sufficiency (Zhang, 2006).

## Notes

- 1 The use of the term “journalism blogging” is a little ambiguous as it may refer to either “professional journalist” blogging or “citizen journalist” blogging (Papacharissi, 2009: 203). However, in this article the term is used in a more general sense, as both kinds of blogging will be discussed.
- 2 The “Two Conferences” respectively refers to the National People’s Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). During the NPC and CPPCC, major national political and economic decisions are made, and these events spontaneously captured attention from China Central and local media as well as the public. Today journalists usually discuss the proposals raised by representative members in their blogs, expressing their views, and also interacting with Internet citizens to share ideas.
- 3 The Great Firewall is an outcome of The Golden Shield Project. The Golden Shield Project is a censorship and surveillance project operated by the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) as a division of the government of the People’s Republic of China. The project was initiated in 1998 and began operations in November 2003.

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