

CITIZEN MEDIA AND INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM..... 4

INTRODUCTION 4

Why is this thesis necessary?..... 6

Research methodology 6

CHAPTER 1 - THE CRISIS 7

What's wrong with investigative journalism? 7

Industry Factors 7

Political Factors 10

Factors within journalism 12

Cynicism..... 14

Empowerment – Making the media useful 15

Empowerment – letting people get involved 17

Participatory media..... 17

Problems with participatory media 20

Multiperspectival news 22

CHAPTER 2 – WHY CITIZEN MEDIA?..... 23

What is citizen media?..... 23

Iterative media 32

Beyond interactivity to intercreativity 34

Blogs..... 35

Wikis 39

Vlogging 39

Video sharing..... 40

Podcasts 40

Vodcasts 40

CHAPTER 3 - INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND CITIZEN MEDIA 41

What can citizen journalism offer investigative journalism?.....	43
Transparency	43
Accessing the hive.....	44
Specialist Analysis.....	45
Multiple Perspectives	46
CHAPTER 4 - MODES OF COLLABORATION.....	47
Non-collaboration or replacement	47
Criticism	48
Punditry	48
Contextualisation.....	49
Amplification.....	50
Pro-Am/Network journalism	52
Standalone Journalism or journalist-as-brand.....	53
CHAPTER 5 - WAYS ONLINE JOURNALISM HAS CHANGED THE NEWS	
PROCESS	54
Gatewatching.....	54
Dialogic and deliberative journalism.....	55
Network journalism	56
Redactive journalism	57
CHAPTER 6 - CASE STUDIES.....	58
Wikis and contextualisation.....	58
Wikinews.....	58
Wikipedia	60
SourceWatch.....	60
News publications	61
Indymedia and the opposition to corporate globalisation	61

Crikey and the Mark Llewellyn documents.....	64
Outragedmoderates	65
The Memory Hole	66
TPMMuckraker	67
ShareSleuth.....	70
NewAssignment	72
The Sunlight Foundation	74
CONCLUSION:.....	76
REFERENCES:	78

Citizen Media and Investigative Journalism

What are the threats posed to investigative journalism? Can investigative journalism benefit by working with citizen journalists?

Introduction

The image of Woodward and Bernstein is often held up as the epitome of investigative journalism: two young newspaper journalists, going up against a corrupt president, using secret sources to bring shocking information to light.(BBC, 2006a) Closer to home we have *4 Corners* taking down a corrupt Queensland government. (Fitzgerald, 1987) Another popular image is Pilger-style ‘crusader’ journalism that publicises underreported news, particularly of human rights and social justice issues. (Pilger, 2005)

Investigative journalism is widely held to be necessary for healthy democracy for a number of reasons.(Waisbord, 2006) Investigative journalism ranges from the routine investigation of documented or witnessed evidence in order to hold government, business and prominent individuals to account in a given community, to the revelation of government and corporate corruption, institutional abuse and cover-up. It can topple governments(BBC, 2006a; Fitzgerald, 1987), destroy companies, undermine wars (Borger, 2006) and release innocent people from prison. It can reveal unsafe medicine, (Knightley, 1997) unsafe vehicles (Nader, 1973) and pollution.(Carson, 1970) Investigative journalism holds power to account, and asserts the values of democracy and oversight against authority and corruption.

...investigative reporting is one of the most important contributions that the press makes to democracy. It is linked to the logic of check and balances in democratic systems. It provides a valuable mechanism for monitoring the performance of democratic institutions as they are most broadly defined to include governmental bodies, civic organizations and publicly held corporations.

Investigative journalism also contributes to democracy by nurturing an informed citizenry. Information is a vital resource to empower a vigilant public that ultimately holds government accountable through voting and participation. With the ascent of media-centered politics in contemporary democracies, the media have eclipsed other social institutions as the main source of information about issues and processes that affect citizens' lives.

(Waisbord, 2006)

However, these world-changing pieces of investigative journalism are coming few and far between nowadays. Economic pressures and changing news audiences and formats are threatening these forms of investigative journalism.

Why is this thesis necessary?

Investigative journalism is an essential part of the journalistic practice. It is threatened by political, economic, social and industry factors. As the practice of journalism changes, so will investigative journalism. The purpose of this thesis is to see how investigative journalism can survive the coming years, by adopting different attitudes, different work practices and different formats.

Research methodology

This thesis falls broadly into the field of journalism studies, but refers heavily to cultural studies and sociological perspectives. This is because the field of journalism studies has been limited by a strong exclusionary culture that rejects outsider critique. (Hartley, 2006)

The thesis begins with a literature review that examines the problems within journalism and investigative journalism, and how those problems might be resolved, with reference to Gans' and Bruns' work on multiperspectival journalism. It then looks at citizen media, what it is, the theoretical arguments for its existence and its incorporation into journalism. Then it looks at how citizen journalism can help investigative journalism. Finally, there are some case studies of citizen journalism projects that contribute to or practice investigative journalism.

Chapter 1 - The Crisis

What's wrong with investigative journalism?

Investigative journalism is costly to produce -- an expose can be months in the making -- and media companies are under pressure to cut costs. Besides, it rarely works, in the sense that any spike in circulation or viewer numbers as a result of the story is short-term. Invariably, litigation follows. This can tie up reporters for months as they do further digging to defend themselves in court, led by legal teams costing tens of thousands of dollars a day.

(Day, 2006)

As Mark Day notes, the journalism emerging from the internet age is 'soft, easy, cheap, shared and increasingly packaged to feed our needs for self-assurance and gossip.' (Day, 2006) He argues this is due to a number of reasons; these are elaborated below.

Industry Factors

One of these is the drive by media companies to find a place in the new media market with emerging technical platforms. Day asks whether media companies have lost sight of journalism's core role: that of the public watchdog. (Day, 2006) Other industry factors such as the drive to cut costs (often by cutting staff) made it even harder to do quality reporting. He notes that when Fairfax recently shed 50 journalists, Fairfax CEO David Kirk justified the cuts by saying there was no direct relationship between the number of journalists and quality journalism. (Day, 2006) The recent retooling of

Channel Nine's *Sunday* program is also evidence of this trend – the current affairs program was recently relaunched with only 14 staff after Channel Nine chief Eddie McGuire fired 100 staff, the majority of which were from news and current affairs. (Field, 2006; SMH, 2006)

As investigative journalism is time consuming and expensive, it is always impacted first by newsroom cuts and budget crises. Industry factors have impacted the two traditional sources of investigative journalism – TV and newspapers – in very different ways.

TV journalism has been threatened by a number of factors. One that has drawn a lot of coverage in the US is revelation that 21% of people under thirty received much of their 2004 (election) campaign information from comedy shows such as the *Daily Show* and *Saturday Night Live*. This compared with 23% who got their campaign information from network news. (Jenkins, 2006) Jenkins notes that Jon Katz of *Rolling Stone* had identified this trend in 1994, arguing that it was due to entertainment programs better reflecting the perspectives of younger viewers. He viewed this as a positive development as news programs' ideological perspectives had fallen under corporate control. (Jenkins, 2006)

It is worth noting a study undertaken in 2006 found that the *Daily Show* actually presents *more* news content than cable networks (Bangeman, 2006) – showing that effective news coverage *is* possible within the satire format. However the *Daily Show* does not perform *investigative* journalism.

Newspapers have been threatened by different factors. A major threat to newspaper revenues in the US (and therefore threatening expensive investigative journalism) is the loss of revenue from classified advertising. The rise of online classifieds such as *Craigslist* [<http://craigslist.org>] has stripped a substantial portion of revenue from newspapers. (APC, 2006)

Newspapers have also suffered from changing audience tastes – more and more people get their news from multiple sources – websites, blogs, TV, comedy programs and so forth. When people are at risk of information overload already, they are unlikely to go and pay for a newspaper to find out things they already know.

Newspapers, with their daily turnaround (few papers do afternoon editions anymore) are often behind television and websites in getting news out there first – further reducing any need to purchase a newspaper. For people growing up with online media, the physical form of the newspaper is foreign – numerous respondents to a survey about newspaper consumption reported not wanting ‘all that paper.’ (Bonne, 2005)

Newspapers and television have both suffered from the rise of cable television, online media, broadband internet and blogs. People can now source their news from many different places, and are less likely to watch the same news program or read the same newspaper every day. It also effects *how* we consume media.

It's clear to me that the media onslaught is the default. We're so used to having the white noise of TV and the web that not only can't we live without it; we assume no one else can either. What's also clear is nobody really WATCHES it anymore (especially the commercials.) It's just there.

I remember how special a TV show (any TV show) was in 1966 when I first started watching TV seriously. How everyone remembered every commercial and we all watched the same shows. I still remember some Batman episodes like they were yesterday... but I have no idea what CNN broadcast yesterday in the gym.

(Godin, 2004)

This rise of ubiquitous media has powerful effects on investigative journalism – but as we will see, these effects are not necessarily negative.

Political Factors

Day also notes that government spin doctors who offer recycled scoops instead of allowing real scrutiny and court suppression by companies and governments stop investigative journalists from doing their jobs. (Day, 2006) The *2006 State of the News Print Media in Australia* report noted that despite Australia being a democracy, government information management has become a significant trend. (APC, 2006)

It is exemplified in a number of ways; failure to apply Freedom of Information Acts as intended (inevitably to be exacerbated by the recent High Court decision confirming the power of a Minister to issue a Conclusive Certificate

denying access to government information), specious use of the Privacy Act, pervasive, deliberate media management, and other special purpose illiberal legislation. On every side there are examples of limitations on access to information that, in the public interest, newspapers ought to be able to publish.

New Australian security and sedition laws, in the name of terrorism, have the potential to be used secretly to lock up people, without anyone being allowed to know, let alone test the rightness of such action in the courts.

(APC, 2006)

As *Media Watch* documented, not only could John Pilger be locked up for suggesting American, British and Australian troops were legitimate targets for Iraqi resistance, but *Lateline* host Tony Jones and the *Lateline* production team could also be held liable for allowing *Pilger* to say that on air. (MediaWatch, 2005) The chilling effect that this may have on legitimate investigative journalism (in a world of terrorism, violence and government media management) is powerful.

Investigative journalists in the US have to deal with other issues, ranging from the insistence on ‘embedded’ reporting in war zones to the creation of a Pentagon ‘media war’ unit designed to monitor news media and citizen journalism and counteract ‘inaccurate’ news stories. (BBC, 2006c) It doesn’t take much cynicism to see that ‘inaccurate’ means ‘not toeing the party line.’

An unfortunate side-effect of the rise of the citizen mediasphere is that governments can claim that journalists do *not* represent citizens – and therefore refuse to answer journalists. George W. Bush’s attitude to the press is illustrative – in his first term as president he only gave 12 press conferences, very few serious interviews and his ‘townhall’ meetings are screened so that only his supporters show up.(Marshall, 2004) When GW Bush visited Australia in 2003, not only were members of the public excluded from Parliament, but protestors were moved so that Bush was unable to hear any protests.(Riley, 2003)

Factors within journalism

Of the programs that do still practice a form of investigative journalism, it is easy to see a tendency to focus on stories that are cheap to produce, and are unlikely to result in lawsuits. This is evident in programs such as *Today Tonight* and *A Current Affair* that focus on consumer affairs and do exposes of mostly working class tradespeople (dole bludgers, dodgy builders) and organisations that already have bad reputations (banks, supermarkets). This tendency was frequently satirised by ABC’s news satire *CNNNN*.

A Chaser Affair this week exposes the con man builder whose kitchen germs are making our kids obese. Now he wants welfare! And the miracle diet that turning our fat kids into dole cheats.

(CNNNN, 2002)

A Current Affair and *Today Tonight* have a strong focus on consumer stories because they are cheap, and they give good ratings. As Peter Meakin notes:

Investigative journalism doesn't have a particularly good strike rate; it's expensive to do and litigation is almost guaranteed. But doing consumer stories – what's good and bad for you, product analysis and the like – is not a sign of cowardice. TT still takes on major players such as supermarket chains, banks and oil companies, and we do not buckle under commercial pressure. We're about catering to an audience, not imposing our standards on people.

(Day, 2006)

Consumer journalism itself comes out of a strong tradition of investigative writing and journalism, going back to Ralph Nader's work with Public Citizen in the US. (Nader, 1973) Certainly, consumer journalism can be a powerful form of investigative journalism, however modern forms such as that practiced by *Today Tonight* and *A Current Affair* tend to expose transgressions of the lower classes and individuals rather than corporate and government elites. For journalism to fulfil its self-appointed role as enabler of democracy, powerful transgressors must be held to account as well.

Also, as Christopher George argues:

... investigative reporting in the regional and local press is truly in its heyday. And at the national level, investigators at papers like The Washington Post and the New York Times have in recent years made an important commitment to explaining the news rather than breaking it. But while the national media

advanced many of the major stories of recent years, in only the rarest of cases did they uncover the scandal. For example, while investigative reporters at The New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times have filed approximately 800 stories since 1989, nearly 85 percent of them have been follow-ups or advances of leaked or published government reports. "Most of what we call investigative journalism these days," explains former Atlanta Journal and Constitution editor Bill Kovach, "is really reporting on investigations."

(Georges, 1992)

Reporting on investigations is necessary, and as Hartley notes, redactive journalism is becoming more important in an age of information overload. (Hartley, 2000) It is unsurprising that reporting *on* investigations would generate more journalism than original investigations, but it does show that investigative journalists are becoming more reliant on outside sources and investigations. As Schafer notes, many of the investigative follow-up stories are covering investigations from non-profit groups such as the Center for Public Integrity. (Schafer, 2006)

Cynicism

People find news that they are unable to do anything about disempowering. In our representative democracy, many people feel the only way they can express political power is through their consumer choices. (Klein, 2000) As Schechter notes, this alienation of citizens from the political process may be due to the gatekeeping practices of the media. (Schechter, 2005) As Gans notes, media that prioritises the voices of the powerful contributes to the disempowerment of citizens. (Gans, 2003)

If people appreciate *Today Tonight* and *A Current Affair* because they give people useful information in the only area of their lives they still have control – consumption – then the question that investigative journalism must address is not how to gain audience share or how to make their programs funky/fun/controversial, but how to make them *empowering*. This also means that investigative journalism must recognise that people must be *empowered* for investigative journalism to be useful. If this is the case, we need to think about what investigative journalism does, what it can do, and how it might be made more empowering.

Empowerment – Making the media useful

One area we might address is investigative journalism's role in negotiating the masses of information that we are exposed in today's information saturated world. As Gans notes, information is not empowering – knowledge is. So if investigative journalists seek to explain the information that is publicly available, that brings investigative journalism into the realm of providing empowerment. It also allows us to bring the reactive reporting-on-investigations firmly into the fold of investigative journalism.

This then is a model of journalism that aligns with Hartley's notion of redactive journalism – journalism that is *made by editing*. (Hartley, 2000) Redactional journalism is the result of searching/browsing existing texts and making new ones out of them – from handouts and PR briefings, via Googling and internet search, to recontextualisation and reversioning. Redactional journalism is everything from the cut-and-paste of bloggers to the remix news of *The Daily Show*. It is also journalism that makes sense of publicly available information.

For journalists to adequately do this job, they will need more editors, more journalists, and more specialists to make a creative practice out of editing; reducing the billions of pages and sources out there to intelligible narratives and digests. This is what online news mastheads like the *Guardian*, *BBC* and the *ABC* have started doing.

As Sloan and Thompson note, all of the information necessary to uncover Enron's lawbreaking was publicly available – but no one had put it all together. (Sloan & Thompson, 2006) To be fair, they note that even the forensic accountants brought in to figure out what happened had trouble piecing it together – perhaps this is an indication that investigative journalism needs more specialists, and that perhaps we need journalists who specialise in financial, scientific, medical and political analysis.

Gans also points out the one-sidedness of economic coverage: it focuses on issues relevant (and therefore empowering) to business people, not workers. (Gans, 2003) This therefore might be an area where expanded coverage and analysis could provide relevant, empowering knowledge and analysis to workers, therefore expanding their audience.

Empowerment – letting people get involved

Gans also argues that for journalism to fulfil its role as facilitating democracy (and therefore empowering people to be involved in democracy) people must become involved in the news production process itself. (Gans, 2003) ¹

For investigative journalism to become empowering, citizens must become involved. For citizens to become involved in investigative journalism, the media in general must strive to become participatory and multiperspectival.

Participatory media

Participatory media is media that allows non-journalists access. It is *not* ‘public journalism’, where control still lies with the journalists. It is journalism where the public are involved in the publication process. Traditional journalists find the concept of participatory journalism somewhat alien.

...often journalists treat participators as deviants rather than citizens, and whether they intend to or not, the news media discourage participation more than they encourage it. Participatory news requires a reversal of these practices and should rest on the assumption that citizens are as relevant and important as public officials.

(Bruns, 2006a; pg 13)

¹ This motivation has long informed the values of community media. As Hartley notes, the community media movement has long sought to involve citizens in the news production process, with varying degrees of success. (Hartley, 2006)

There are a number of tendencies in the mainstream media which discourage citizens from becoming engaged in news media production. One is the top-down structure of mainstream news coverage – stories are framed in a way that ‘authorities’ are consulted first when covering a story. (Bruns, 2006a) This means that the perspective portrayed is that of those ‘at the top’.(Gans, 2003; pg 46) Even when journalists are critical of what their sources say, those sources are still consulted first – putting the respondents (non-authority figures) in the inferior, reactive position. (Bruns, 2006a; Gans, 2003; Saunders, 2003) This tendency to ‘follow the power’ leads to journalists who are removed from ‘the citizenry’ and unable to report on or even determine what issues are important to them. Margot Kingston’s anguish at being caught unaware by the rise of Hansonism in Australia, and her subsequent re-engagement with the citizenry through her *Sydney Morning Herald* weblog [<http://webdiary.com.au>] are instructive here (Saunders, 2003)

Gans argues that mass media must change their way of reporting and interacting with the public to fulfil their perceived role as facilitators of democracy. He critiques mainstream journalism as performing a supporting role of representative democracy, discouraging active participation of the citizenry and posits the introduction of ‘participatory media’ to offset top-down coverage (Gans, 2003; pg 95). Therefore participatory media is associated with a move toward participatory democracy. (Pierce, 2002) This move also requires that journalists recognise that the mainstream mode of journalism as representative may only be a transitional point (Hartley, 2006) on the way toward participatory media *and* participatory democracy.

This model of participatory media calls for a reversal of the journalistic tendency to treat 'participators' as deviant, and recognize that public participation in democracy, via public meetings and protest is a legitimate democratic process. (Bruns, 2006a)

Again, we can see the parallel with Australian media – the coverage of the World Economic Forum protests in 2000 showed how legitimate peaceful protest is often portrayed as deviant, and how protests are framed as a story of (violent) conflict. (Barrett, 2000) Even when the coverage recognises the protest as peaceful, the focus is often on the event, not the issues raised. (Saunders, 2003)

There is a need then for media practice that recognizes that citizens are as relevant and important as public officials. (Gans, 2003) This means that journalists must also encourage and facilitate public participation in democratic process – which means a lot more than voting. (Saunders, 2003) Journalists should report on and encourage letters, emails and public calls to public officials. Journalists can report on planned demonstrations and include information for readers who may want to participate without 'taking sides' (Gans, 2003; pg 97).

The popularity of programs like *Media Watch* on *ABC TV* and segments like *Spin Cycle* on *ABC Local Radio* along with the practice of airing emails and SMS messages from listeners, as well as talkback calls, are all part of this of critiquing and broadening media content - at least on the part of publicly funded broadcasters. (Saunders, 2003)

It is important to note that the examples above – *Media Watch*, *Spin Cycle* – while not necessarily investigative journalism, certainly come from a journalistic tradition of holding people in power to account. Indeed, investigative journalism and participatory media's attitude towards the powerful is quite similar.

Problems with participatory media

Given that participatory media projects have been tried numerous times before, in community broadcasting, alternative newspapers and the like, it is important to ask whether the problems associated with those projects may not be repeated.

Community media often suffers from differences in opinion and expectations. The legalisation of community radio in Australia was ironically a major problem for some community broadcasters – having a legal status meant adopting a government approved corporate structure, which clashed with the anti-authoritarian values of many volunteers. Online media is less concerned with this, as having a legal entity is not necessary to run a website. There are no broadcast restrictions and frequency allocations online.

Arguments over direction and missions often hamstrung community stations. This was in part because community broadcasters were formed around a geographical location, and often a shared political and/or cultural identity. Online projects don't have to be geographically located (thus reducing access problems – community broadcasters are often centred in larger cities, thus excluding rural audiences) and are often formed around a community of interest.

In talking about distributed projects, Leadbeater notes that ‘collaboratives’ (as opposed to *collectives*) work for a number of reasons.

First, these new collaboratives are emerging in information, software, entertainment, culture and media, which are among the fastest growing sectors of the developed economies. These sectors are not marginal but central to modern economies and indeed modern life.

Second, while these new patterns of organisation are still emerging, the larger ones - and there are plenty that stay very small – nevertheless seem to have some powerful and durable features. They are driven by cheaper, more distributed technologies. They speak to values of individuality: they allow people more scope to express what matters to them and makes them distinctive.

Third, they do not depend – as earlier efforts at collaborative self-organisation did – upon people buying into alternative or altruistic values. These collaboratives grow because they work: their chief selling point is their practicality.

(Leadbeater, 2006)

Multiperspectival news

Multiperspectival journalism is news that:

Ideally... encompasses fact and opinion reflecting all possible perspectives. In practice, it means making a place in the news for presently unrepresented viewpoints, unreported facts, and unrepresented, or rarely reported, parts of the population.

...multiperspectival news is the bottoms-up corrective for the mostly top-down perspectives of the news media...

(Gans, 2003)

Gans argues that by adopting this model the media can eliminate the continuing racial and class bias in the news. (Gans, 2003) He argues that this model can be achieved by hiring more journalists from different racial and class backgrounds, and presenting news in ways that appeal to the various racial and ethnic groups and classes (Gans, 2003; pg 102). While this approach is usable, and has been adopted by many newsrooms (though offset by continuing cuts to newsroom budgets), the burgeoning citizen mediasphere has implemented multiperspectival journalism more effectively than mainstream media organisations have. (Bruns, 2006a, 2006c; Saunders, 2003) This multiperspectival journalism is enabled by the iterative nature of online citizen media.

Chapter 2 – Why Citizen Media?

What is citizen media?

Citizen media is a broad term, usually taken to refer to media produced by non-professional media producers. Citizen media is everything from blogs to wikis, home movies on YouTube [<http://youtube.com>] to pro-am partnerships like NewAssignment [<http://newassignment.net>]. Citizen *journalism* is citizen media that replicates or augments functions of journalism – be that breaking news, expert opinion, commentary, background or feature writing.

Far too much writing about citizen journalism has focussed on whether or not it ‘is journalism’ (Bruns, 2006b; Farmer, 2006) – rather than using this frame, it is better to think about citizen journalism as part of what I think of as the *grand project of journalism* – enabling democracy, educating of the people, being the Fourth Estate – or as Hartley has it, the ‘sense-making practice of modernity.’ (Hartley, 1996; pg 33) This framing of journalism as *practice* rather than *profession* is more useful when thinking about the modern mediasphere. (Rosen, 2004a) It also rejects the common denigration of citizen journalism by traditional journalists:

The very term... (citizen journalism)... is a somewhat insulting assumption. Journalists suffer a similar fate to teachers in that everyone is or has been exposed to their work on a very regular basis - everyone's got an opinion and they're not afraid to share it. As a bit of a reality check, when was the last time

you encountered a "citizen doctor", valued a report by a "citizen researcher", took off in a plane flown by a "citizen pilot" or saw justice meted out by "citizen policeman"?

(Farmer, 2006)

As Bruns points out, you also don't see freelance doctors or pilots, but you *do* see freelance journalists – so clearly journalism *isn't* a profession the way medicine is. (Bruns, 2006b)

Ultimately, journalism is no more a profession than politics - an area of public life to which it is closely related, of course. Where, ideally, politics conducts dialogue, debate, and deliberation between differing opinions, journalism faithfully reports this process (ideally, again, by representing all relevant perspectives). And if it is so 'insulting' for journalists to be denied status as a profession, and to be reduced to the level of 'mere' citizens, then why does the same not apply to what is arguably the far more important field of politics? We may not have seen any citizen doctors or citizen pilots, but we entrust the fate of nations to what we may call 'citizen politicians' (and we indeed complain bitterly if they turn out to be 'professional politicians' ready to adjust their beliefs according to where the greatest majority can be found). Into what twisted reality have journalists retreated if 'citizen' has become a dirty word for them?

(Bruns, 2006b)

As Nguyen notes, the media's role as a third party to mediate in the communication of public affairs is no longer inevitable. It follows that the power to govern the public sphere is no longer the sole prerogative of the media – which has led to the rampant speculation about the death of journalism. However, as Nguyen argues, this is excessive technological determinism:

PP, (participatory publishing) when closely examined, can even intensify the crucial role of journalism – a more reactive and responsive journalism, to be exact – in the information age. As much as the fledgling online public sphere is potentially powerful in improving public debate, it has shown itself to be as potentially detrimental.

(Nguyen, 2006)

The critique of journalism as a profession is also developed by Hartley, who cites British journalist and editor Ian Hargreaves (former editor of *The Independent* and the *New Statesman*,) to argue that journalism should be understood as a human right. (Hartley, 2006)

In a democracy everyone is a journalist. This is because, in a democracy, everyone has the right to communicate a fact or a point of view, however trivial, however hideous.

(Hargreaves, 1999)

As Hartley notes, this view raises the question, if everyone is a journalist, how can journalism be confined as a practice to trained or otherwise authorised experts?

(Hartley, 2006)

Hartley traces the animosity of journalists towards citizen journalists to a culture of separation between insiders and outsiders, noting that journalistic notions of a ‘nose for news’, ‘gut feeling’ and ‘born journalists’ take journalism out of the realm of a practice, a craft, even a profession – rather, it is closer to an *ethnicity*. (Hartley, 2006) Journalism research and education as “restrictive practice” (Hartley, 2006) has led to a belief that outsiders should be kept out of journalism. (Bruns, 2006a; Gans, 2003; Hartley, 2006) This belief neither conforms to practice (where the right look can be more important than training) or the interests of liberal democracy. (Hartley, 2006)

The societal objection to professionalism is that restricting journalism to those who’ve qualified by whatever process is tantamount to licensing the expression of ideas, which is simply anti-democratic.

... The laudable desire to have competent practitioners and an explicit understanding of the practice is directly at odds with both industry and democratic imperatives.

(Hartley, 2006)

Of course, journalists themselves have resisted the professionalisation of journalism. When the notion of journalism as a profession first arose (in the 1920s!) there was talk of creating a class of professional journalists. Journalists would have had to take a

test similar to the attorney bar exam. As Saltzman notes, the plan was dropped because “too many journalists were afraid this would become a form of licensing that might be antithetical to freedom of the press.” (Saltzman, 2005)

As Henningham notes journalists have become a threat to press freedom (Henningham, 1992), and contribute to the “*refeudalisation of the public sphere*” (Habermas, 1996) where organisations strive for political compromises with the state and with one another, as much as possible to the exclusion of the public.

All this turns the very justification for the very existence of journalism – its mission to act as the independent watchdog of public affairs... into a modern fallacy.

(Nguyen, 2006)

Hartley argues that journalism ‘as we know it’ may in fact be a *transitional* form, created in the conflict between the democratic potential (that everyone has a *right* to practice it) and the technological ability to do so. (Hartley, 2006) The technological development of the internet has reduced the barriers to publishing, allowing more people to practice journalism – which threatens the values of those who argue in favour of professionalism and the associated insiders’ culture. This also lays bare the attitudes towards change inside journalism. Or, as a poster named ‘Old Hat’ on the Washington Monthly put it:

I find it really journalisticly fascinating when journalists are given the chance to journal about the greatness of journalism and the journalistic skills of their journalistic peers in regards to the journalistic protection of journals and journalistic rights vis-a-vis the future of journaling journalism and the best in journalistic journalism journals.

("OldHat", 2005)

The idea that journalism is a human right has strong roots in a model of participatory democracy. (Pierce, 2002; Rushkoff, 2003; Saunders, 2003) As Hartley notes, “many of the most progressive and important initiatives in journalism since Milton (1644) were undertaken by men and women who claimed journalism as a human right *by practising it.*” (Hartley, 2006) Similarly, legal arguments in the US regarding the application of the Californian journalists shield law to bloggers have found that “*being a journalist is about doing journalism.*”(Woo, 2005)

This association of participatory media and participatory democracy has been prefigured in the community media movements beginning in the sixties, and in the independent and alternative publications associated with civil rights, social justice and identity politics. (Hartley, 2006; Saunders, 2003)

...it was in the context of identity politics that 'user-led' and 'consumer-created' journalism first became a significant topic, via the zines of subcultures and countercultures, and the counterpublic spheres proclaimed in the feminist, anti-war and environmental movements (Felski 1989, quoted in (Hartley, 2006).

If journalism is a human right then it is necessary not only to theorise it as a craft that 'everybody' can practice, but also to extend what 'counts' as journalism beyond the 'democratic process' model to encompass much more of what it means to be human; especially the world of private life and experience, and the humanity of those lying outside favoured gender, ethnic, national, age or economic profiles that are targeted by corporate news media.

(Hartley, 2006)

It is also worth noting that, as Tom Coates argues "in fact news journalism is etymologically a subset of "journalism" - i.e. journal writing - making news journalism in many ways a 'special case' / subset of weblogging." (Coates, 2003)

Viewing traditional journalists and citizen journalists as part of a broad mediasphere utilising the practice of journalism towards a goal of enabling democracy allows us to accept these differing practices as part of a whole. I would argue that traditional journalists and citizen journalists *all* contribute to journalism as a sense-making practice of modernity. (Hartley, 2006) This view also gives us a better frame for evaluating emerging Pro-Am partnerships.

Much of the animosity towards citizen journalism from traditional journalists may also be due to the sometimes overwhelming criticism of mainstream media from citizen journalism. While traditional journalists may be affronted by this threat to their authority, this criticism is an important part of modern journalism. I argue that it is also a *collaborative* process, regardless of the animosity involved. Journalists and citizen journalists are all involved in creating the massive, iterative mediasphere we have today. Once we recognise that these interactions are *all* collaborative, we can begin to look at how these collaborations can benefit the project of journalism, or the ‘sense-making practice of modernity.’”

Finally, most citizen journalists don’t *want* to be identified as journalists. (Bowman & Willis, 2005)

Most citizens don’t want to be journalists but do want to contribute in small and meaningful ways. Citizens are interested in participating and contributing to subjects that traditional news outlets ignore or do not cover.

(Bowman & Willis, 2005)

It is also worth noting that the term citizen journalism is contested. As Costanza-Chock argued in a post to the IMC-Video email list entitled “Please stop using the term ‘citizen video’!”

OK, I don't have time to write a long post about this right now, I will do so later. But coming through the largest wave of street mobilizations in US history, which was the immigrant rights marches in the spring of 2006, when millions of non - citizens marched for their rights to be treated as human beings no matter what their status in the eyes of the state, it really makes me angry to hear people supposedly on the left talk so much about 'citizen journalism.' I recognize that some people argue there's another conception of citizenship that isn't based on the nation-state, but the reality is that the dominant (hegemonic) use of the term refers to the rights granted individuals based on their legal status as recognized by a nation-state, with non-'citizens' denied those rights.

So, can we please, please stop using the term 'citizen journalism?' Try any one of the many alternatives: grassroots. people's. bottom-up. horizontal. decentralized. independent. social movement. indy. whatever. just, not 'citizen.'

(Costanza-Chock, 2006)

However, citizen media and citizen journalism have become terms in common usage, and serve as reasonably accurate shorthand to describe this broad movement/ mediasphere/phenomenon. I will be using these terms in this thesis, but I ask the reader to think of “citizenship that isn't based on the nation-state”, or as “the people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen, 2006d) rather than the narrow legal definition. The notion of ‘cultural citizenship’ advanced by Burgess, Foth and Klæbe is also useful here. (Burgess, Foth, & Klæbe, 2006) One thing all of these definitions

have in common is a self-motivated, *active* conception of citizenship that is determined by *participation*, not legal status. Participation has become possible due to a number of factors, one of which is the iterative nature of citizen media.

Iterative media

Blogs, wikis and many news websites are iterative – that is, they allow multiple versions of a story to exist on a website. For a blog, the iterations tend to be linear – someone posts a story, someone posts a comment. Someone may then post an updated version of the story, which links back to the original version. They may incorporate information from the comments into the new version of the story.

On wikis, the iterations tend to be new versions of the same page. A blog allows you to read the current iteration of the story, a wiki allows you to go back and read previous iterations as well. Why is this important?

This acceptance of audience participation and publication makes iterative media multiperspectival. Anyone with an internet connection can contribute to the story that they are reading – whether they are posting a comment, publishing a reinterpretation of the presented data or pointing people to further background material, they are taking part and contributing to multiperspectival coverage. It is important to note that does not leave no space for traditional journalism – indeed, much of the source material for citizen media comes from traditional journalism. However, iterative media forms allow the creation of Gans' second tier of media, for citizen participation and feedback. (Gans, 1977)

While cable news has had the ability to implement multiperspectival journalism, it has never really sought to. Cable news is less constrained by time and space, and therefore has the space to allow multiperspectival coverage. Channels such as Sky News have also incorporated a minimal form of interactivity via the Foxtel Digital platform, where viewers can vote on stories and choose from several news options. (SkyNews, 2006a) However, this does not allow citizens to submit news, to evaluate research or to comment on existing stories except for the occasional viewer poll. There is no transparency and there has been no effort to incorporate multiple perspectives. While they do have programs that mimic talkback radio, these programs are still subject to the constraints of broadcast media – discussion is controlled by the presenter, and the questions are within the bounds of acceptable discussion. Therefore, cable news is not interesting to us as an example of multiperspectival news. (It should be noted however that Sky News did experiment with a blog [<http://skynews.typepad.com>, since closed] where audience members could comment on stories that have been aired.) (SkyNews, 2006b)

Meikle notes that blogs and wikis are intercreative and unfinished – that is, they are not intended to be finished. (Meikle, 2002) They are a conversation, not a speech. They accept that media is never definitive, never ended – and that acceptance of this nature of news is an important step towards addressing some of the problems of traditional journalism. (Bruns, 2006c; Meikle, 2002) It's no longer 'and that's the way it is' – rather, it's 'that's as much as we know, right now.'

Bruns also notes that blogs and wikis, by rejecting the notion of a finished story, call into question the very notion that a story *can* be finished.(Bruns, 2006c) This approach, also championed by Indymedia, says that there is never a definitive explanation – there are always other perspectives, other analyses, and a complete coverage of a story would seek to provide these other perspectives, rather than trying to find one ‘true’ account.(Bruns, 2006c) This brings us back to the notion of multiperspectival journalism – something that iterative media generates by default.

Beyond interactivity to intercreativity

This process of dialogue has been greatly facilitated by the technical abilities of the internet. As Meikle (2002) notes, much of the interest in the internet for community media is due to its facility for ‘interactivity’ – using the internet is often a two-way process, as opposed to the one-way broadcast model of media. According to Meikle, interactivity and more importantly intercreativity open up different spaces for people to analyse their relationship with media. Where interactivity is an extension of old media that allows us some choice in the way we consume it (Flew, 2002), intercreativity empowers us to be a part of the creation process (Meikle, 2002).

Blogs and wikis encourage intercreativity in that an article is never ‘finished’ – one can always come back and add extra comments to further explain and explore the concepts expressed. (Saunders, 2003) Articles tend to be open, in that each article is the original post plus all of the comments, corrections and arguments – leading to an article that may be long, messy and contradictory – but has multiple perspectives presented and addressed. (Saunders, 2006) In this way, there is no authoritative ‘article’ as such, there is no ‘truth’ (Bruns, 2006c), rather a variety of perspectives

that provide a balanced rendition of the different views that exist – and therefore the article becomes multi-perspectival. Meikle's notion of intercreativity then correlates with multi-perspectival media. As long as people take the opportunity to take part, each article that is published is a multiperspectival treatment of an issue.

Blogs

Blogs are regularly updated websites, often utilising a publishing engine like Blogger, Typepad or Livejournal. The writing tends to be informal (though it may not), opinionated, personal and often for a specialist audience. Blogging is often defined negatively – as though the most important thing about blogs is that they are *not journalism*.

As Rebecca Blood notes, blogging is not (traditional) journalism for a number of reasons. Bloggers rarely do interviews; they rarely produce first person accounts. (Blood, 2003) Glen Reynolds notes that bloggers do far more commentary than journalism (Lasica, 2003b), and argues that traditional journalistic values of objectivity, balance etc are not present in most bloggers output. While Lasica argues that bloggers are often responsible for 'random acts of journalism', for the most part, blogging does not constitute journalism. (Lasica, 2003b) However, these arguments are based on a view of journalism as a *profession* – if we view journalism as a practice, we can see blogs as contributing to journalism.

The majority of bloggers experience news via mediation and first hand reporting is possible but not common. (Bruns, 2006a) The first hand reporting that *does* occur tends to be either ‘micronews’ – that is, news of little interest to people outside of a small circle of friends – or world events – events that affect large amounts of people directly.(Bruns, 2006a)

If we conceptualise news as spanning a scale reaching from key world events through to the most mundane stories that affect only a handful of people, first hand reporting in news related blogs can usually be found at either extreme of this scale.

(Bruns, 2006a)

Bruns notes that mediated news blogging makes up the bulk of news blogging between micronews and world events.

(It)engages predominantly in the commentary on, and collation and notation of, news reports in other news sources : commonly, bloggers briefly summarise the issue or event in their blog posting (where possible linking to other blogs’ or professional news sites’ reports) before adding their own views or drawing connections between issues that appear to have been underrepresented in existing reports.

(This form...) is especially powerful in covering continuing events since the blogs model of posting ad hoc updates is better suited to continuous coverage. The ephemerality of TV means viewers can't catch up with earlier coverage.

(Bruns, 2006a)

So we can see blogging can be an effective form of coverage. Bloggers also have other important roles in the modern media ecosystem. As Lasica notes, bloggers provide a valuable contribution in a number of different ways, which are elaborated below.

Pushing the envelope

Weblogs expand the possibilities for economic structures of journalism organization. From the donation-supported war journalism of Christopher Allbritton (Lasica, 2003a), the advertising-supported gossip blogging of Gawker to the subscription supported journalism of Crikey, bloggers and online journalists have paved the way a wide variety of funding models for online media. (Rosen, 2006b)

Influencing at the edges

Blogs keep stories alive by covering them, repeating them and developing them further.(Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005) This allows stories that might have fallen off the radar to stay around, and even bubble up to the mainstream media, as they did with the racially insensitive remarks of Senator Trent Lott. (Bruns, 2006a; Lasica, 2003b; Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005)

Enhancing reader trust

MSNBC, The Providence Journal, The Dallas Morning News, and The Christian Science Monitor have all incorporated blogs as part of their editorial operations – allowing their “newsrooms to become more transparent, more accessible, and more answerable to their readers.” (Bruns, 2006a; Lasica, 2003a)

Repersonalising journalism

Blogs allow journalists to express thoughts and reportage outside of the format of a traditional news report. They allow readers to hear a journalist's voice and personality. (Lasica, 2003a)

Fostering community

When journalism becomes participatory, audiences become empowered partners with a stake in the end result. Blogs allows participatory journalism to occur. (Bruns, 2006a; Lasica, 2003a)

While blogging does threaten traditional journalism – as a disruptive technology, as a new way of working and in its attitude to journalism in general, it is important not to view traditional journalism and citizen journalism as enemies. Rather, we should focus on how collaborations between these two fields can reinvigorate news coverage and journalism.

Wikis

Wikis are user-editable web sites. Each page has an 'edit this page' link, which users can click to bring up the source code for that page. They can then edit the source code and save the page – their changes are then incorporated into the page.

Wikis are iterative, but unlike blogs. In blogs the iterations tend to be linear – the blogger posts an article, readers post comments. On a wiki, each time the page is edited, *that* page becomes the new article. (Saunders, 2006) The iterations can be viewed by reading the history of the page, whereas the iterations of a blog can be seen by reading the article, comments and the corrections. (Saunders, 2006)

Wikis lend themselves to documentation and collaborative knowledge sharing – it is unsurprising that the biggest wiki is the Wikipedia, a user created Encyclopaedia.

Vlogging

Vlogging or video-blogging is blogging with user-created video. Utilising consumer grade video cameras or webcams, vloggers create video clips of themselves talking about topics of interest to them and upload the clips to video hosting sites like YouTube or Ourmedia. The videos may be syndicated via a separate blog or by an inbuilt blogging system in the host site.

Video sharing

Predating vlogging, groups such as UnderCurrents, Indymedia and Infowars utilised file sharing networks, Bittorrent distribution and direct downloads as a way of publicising non-mainstream issues and politics. More explicitly political than most vlogging, the content was usually independent documentaries and newsmagazines.

Podcasts

Podcasting is simply the combination of two pre-existing web technologies – mp3s and RSS. MP3s are compressed audio files, small enough to be easily downloaded. RSS is a syndicating tool that allows people to subscribe to a feed that is automatically updated. Podcasting syndicates mp3s via RSS – allowing people to set up subscribable audio feeds. These feeds can be dedicated to any subject, and may include music, commentary, news, current affairs and humour. Many public radio broadcasters have begun releasing their programming as podcasts, and media organizations not traditionally associated with broadcast have done so as well.

Vodcasts

Vodcasts are quite similar to podcasts, except that they are syndicated video rather than audio.

Chapter 3 - Investigative journalism and citizen media

We now have a clearer idea of what citizen journalism is. So how then does all this relate to investigative journalism?

I argue investigative journalism is best expression of the values of journalism.

Investigative journalists are concerned with major political stories; they uncover corruption, reveal leaked documents and take down governments.

(Investigative journalism is) ... reporting, through one's own initiative and work product, matters of importance to readers, viewers or listeners. In many cases, the subjects of the reporting wish the matters under scrutiny to remain undisclosed.

(Weinberg, 1995)

It is important to note however, that investigative journalism can take many forms – it is not only practiced by major newspapers and television stations. As Hartley notes, investigative journalism can be and is practiced by community broadcasters, alternative journalists, academics, activists and ordinary citizens. (Hartley, 1982; pg 134-135) These different forms may have different foci, different styles and different audiences, but they are still practising investigative journalism. Similarly, traditional journalists who are not officially investigative journalists may still practice investigative journalism. Indeed, it has long been a tenet of journalism education that *all* journalism is investigative, as I.F. Stone was fond of saying. (Ladd, 2001)

This perspective can lead us to ask whether celebrity and lifestyle journalism *is* journalism – though we won't address that perspective here.

So then, if investigative journalism is the best expression of the practice of journalism, and not simply something undertaken by investigative journalists, it allows us to look at how investigative journalism can take different forms.

One of the most iconic examples of investigative environmental journalism was *Silent Spring*, a book written by Rachel Carson, a biologist.(Carson, 1970) The release of photos and information about American soldiers killed in Iraq was due to research and FOI requests filed by a Russ Kick, a blogger and writer with the Disinformation Company.(Kick, 2004) The Boggo Road Jail riots in Queensland were started after community radio station 4ZzzFM broadcast tapes smuggled out of the jail that detailed the poor treatment prisoners were receiving. (Liddell, 2003)

It is also important to note that investigative journalism may not appear as a story or a television program. As noted before, journalism as we know it may be a transitional form – therefore it would not be unreasonable to expect the form of investigative journalism to change. We have already seen investigative journalism in books, magazines, newspapers, television programs, documentaries, blogs, websites and radio programs. In the future, journalism may also be a *database* or some other form we haven't yet seen. Similarly, investigative journalism may also become multiperspectival.

What can citizen journalism offer investigative journalism?

Many of things citizen journalism offers traditional journalism also hold for investigative journalism. Some are less appropriate.

Transparency

Transparency is a difficult concept for many newsrooms to come to grips with. The strong insider culture, (Hartley, 2006; Henningham, 1992) the rejection of participation, (Bruns, 2005, 2006a; Gans, 1977) and the drive for competition and secrecy all oppose transparency. Investigative journalists also have particular problem with transparency.

Heidi Evans: As an investigative reporter, although I think every journalist would like a few more paragraphs, extra space to tell certain things, I can't imagine wanting to give my adversary certain details about what really happened, especially since there are lawyers for your adversaries who are just waiting for one little detail to sue you.

(Robinson, 2005)

While that is a legitimate problem, particularly with the exposure of secret sources and contacts, there should be no problem with making other aspects of the news process public. All source documents can be released – allowing citizens to do their own analysis, as happened in the Rathergate case, or allowing them to pick another focus, as happened with the 9/11 memos. (Borger, 2006) While this does go against the competitive nature of investigative journalism, investigative journalists must

recognise that releasing documents to the public in the age of information overload is not a problem any more. As we get further into an age of redactive journalism, making source documents available with your analysis will become a necessity.

Accessing the hive

Drawing on the ideas of Bruns and Leadbeater, accessing the hive is the term used for utilising the distributed intelligence of producers.² As Dan Gillmor puts it ‘my readers know more than I do.’ (Rosen, 2004b) For investigative journalists, this offers a powerful resource for collecting information, deciphering statistics, and on the ground fact gathering.

Accessing the hive can range from journalists monitoring blogs for story ideas and reactions, to the large distributed journalism projects of the Sunlight Foundation. (see case study) Examples of journalists accessing the hive for investigations include:

- Jane’s Magazine posting an article on Cyberterrorism to Slashdot, then using the criticisms and comments to correct and rewrite the story. (Leonard, 1999; Roblimo, 1999)
- Journalists covering the Rathergate scandal using blogs to track down typewriter experts for commentary
- The BBC asking American citizens to report their experiences on polling day (BBC, 2006b)

² Producer: a combination of the terms producer and user. Used to describe users who contribute to the product or environment eg: Sims designers, citizen journalists, wiki contributors.

Specialist Analysis

Journalists are often generalists, or if they have a specialisation, it is in politics, law or journalism itself. As we move further into a world overwhelmed with information, it will become necessary to analyse financial data, (Sloan & Thompson, 2006) corporate and scientific reports, (Mosaddeq Ahmed, 2006) computer software and code. (Feldman, Halderman, & Felten, 2006)

It is unreasonable for journalists to be expected to be specialists in all the fields they work on – but specialist knowledge *is* required to do proper analysis. This is where citizen journalism can come in. Citizen journalists are often specialists in other fields.

The example given above, of Janes Magazine asking Slashdot readers to proofread their article on Cyberterrorism is a great example. Slashdot readers are often computer science/IT specialists, and were able to point out the (numerous) flaws in the article, written by a non-specialist. This led to the journalist completely rewriting the story, incorporating all the corrections.

There was an outcry from some traditional journalists at the time:

Some commentators sniffed at the fact that Jane even submitted the original story to Slashdot, deeming it pusillanimous journalistic behaviour. In his weekly online column for PBS, Robert X. Cringely pontificated that Jane's strategy was "ultimately flawed."

"The only way to write the news is to write the news," wrote Cringely. "You have to do it the best that you can then take the heat, because the censorship of the nerderati is still censorship. That's why newspapers make corrections."

(Leonard, 1999)

However, this attitude is outdated in a time when stories are going to get pulled apart by citizen journalists *anyway*. If Jane's had published the article first, then had it corrected, Jane's would have lost some respect from technologically oriented readers. By engaging with citizen journalists and specialists during the news process, Jane's encouraged participatory journalism, allowed people to have their voice heard *and* created more accurate journalism. By associating technical accuracy with censorship, Cringely does journalism a disservice. Fact checking is not censorship.

Multiple Perspectives

As noted above, for journalism to become empowering, it must become multiperspectival. This holds for investigative journalism as well – if people can become involved in holding their elected members to account, they will feel empowered, which leads us towards empowering, participatory democracy.

Allowing multiple perspectives also allows citizens to express their views and expertise in analysing investigative journalism – indeed, for contentious issues, the more perspectives that are expressed; the better we can understand all sides.

Chapter 4 - Modes of collaboration

Non-collaboration or replacement

This mode of operation is that adopted by Indymedia – where the publishers have a specific political problem with traditional journalism. This is a multi-pronged critique, ranging from the way news is produced, the choices in coverage, the tone of coverage, the makeup of the newsroom and so on. Organisations like Indymedia set themselves up in opposition to traditional news media, advocating community oriented coverage of news with a specific activist bent. News is viewed as partial, political, and activating. (Saunders, 2003, 2006)

While this model is advocated by Indymedia, in practice the content on Indymedia sites tends alternate between original coverage during protest events, and reverts to media criticism and gatewatching at other times. Some Indymedia sites have become basically press release repositories. (Saunders, 2006)

Online news magazines like Salon, Slate and AlterNet also fit into this category of non-collaboration, though they have adopted some of the technological trappings of iterative media.

Criticism

This model of collaboration is used by media critic organisations like *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting* (FAIR) and *MediaChannel* on the left, *Factcheck* in the centre and *Accuracy in Media* (AIM) on the right. This model is simply that of media criticism based on political, ethical and/or moral standards. While media criticism predates the internet, these organisations have substantially extended their reach by utilising technological aspects of the internet. Where media criticism was previously limited to programs like Media Watch, newspaper columns (often by ex-journalists) and letters to the editor, using online publishing allows everyone to publish their criticisms of the news media to a global audience.

Criticism also comes from ordinary citizens who may have one simple issue they wish to complain about. Criticism may be based on technical details, misinterpretation of scientific or statistical data or poor translations.

Punditry

This is the area where much news blogging takes place. As Bruns notes (Bruns, 2006a) much of the news output of blogs is punditry and commentary. Exemplified by sites like *Instapundit* and *Lavartus Prodeo*, this mode of collaboration often relies on the mainstream media for its subject matter, linking heavily to traditional news media stories. Its collaborative model is one of reinterpretation and contextualisation, criticism, expert commentary and amplification.

Pundits may be specialists, like John Quiggin, PZ Myers or Juan Cole (economics, biology and Middle Eastern politics, respectively) or politically motivated generalists like *Armchair Generalist*, *DailyKos*, *Atrios* and *LittleGreenFootballs*. The strong showing of specialists and experts means that this area is host to numerous debates, often of greater intellectual depth than the news media, which may be limited by space, economic, organisational or ideological constraints, or simple oversight. John Quiggin's analysis of the economics news coverage is illustrative here – he details how a scarcity of quality economic analysis and a conservative political climate in the US has restricted the economic writing within major media to purveyors of supply-side 'voodoo economics'. This has led numerous economists to publish their work online. (Quiggin, 2006)

It is worth noting however that Quiggin credits the Australian news media with more substantial coverage of economics issues – which has led to a more collaborative situation in Australia where economics bloggers' efforts contrive to create a more nuanced coverage. This is in contrast to the American situation, which is much more conflict based. (Quiggin, 2006)

Contextualisation

Contextualisation is a mode of collaboration that numerous bloggers and wikiers use. From pundits explaining news stories, to journalist-bloggers providing background information, to Wikipedia volunteers providing background material and source documents, this mode of collaboration is one of the most common ones online.

Amplification

This mode of collaboration has gotten a lot of press – particularly because it occurs at the site of journalism’s *raison d’être*. Amplification occurs when bloggers and citizen journalists keep covering an issue till the traditional news media takes notice.

Examples include the Trent Lott incident, where ill-advised comments about Strom Thurmond were picked up by bloggers and repeated until the mainstream media started covering them (leading to his resignation)(Perlmutter & McDaniel, 2005) and ‘Rathergate’, where documents used in a story about George W. Bush’s military career were analysed by bloggers and found to be suspicious. (Eberhart, 2005)

This mode of collaboration really depends on mainstream journalists to cover stories that citizen journalists are covering. Mainstream media organisations have begun covering blogs, though it is usually limited to a ‘What the bloggers are saying’ segment that replaces the *vox pop*. (FifthEstate, 2006) It takes substantial effort on the part of citizen journalists to get an issue covered in the mainstream press – though when it is, it has a powerful impact that so many people are talking about it. That old rule of thumb that one letter of complaint is equal to 100 concerned people can be transferred to the blogosphere.

Nguyen argues that for citizen journalism to be effective, it must be filtered up into mainstream journalism. That does not require a professional colonisation of the citizen mediasphere, nor does it require a preservation of the top-down communication model of mainstream media. (Nguyen, 2006) Rather,

...it is a call for a reverse process, one in which journalists are no longer mere agenda-setters but also let the public set the agenda for themselves. That is, in addition to seeing their professional duty and obligation as informing and educating the public, journalists now would need to be directly informed and educated by the public in their daily operation.

(Nguyen, 2006)

This model calls for citizen journalists to initiate dialogue or ‘buzz’, and then for mainstream journalists to respond and work together to address these concerns in a broader democratic context. (Nguyen, 2006) This model also addresses some of the problems with the replacement model, and the wholesale rejection of the mainstream media that some ‘blogvangelists’ like to indulge in. As Nguyen notes:

... a close look at what has happened in the biggest scoops of online participation so far will reveal how this asynchronous coordination between mainstream journalism and PP (participatory publication) is exactly the case. It was true, for example, that OhmyNews initiated the attacks to American military presence in South Korea and forced the mainstream media to pay attention but the outcome of all this – the regime change and the national movement against the American presence – was rather the result of joint efforts between OhmyNews and mainstream media, which spread its messages much far beyond its still comparatively small, although huge in number, community to the general Korean population. Similarly, it was true that the mainstream media at first did not pay much attention after Trent Lott made the

racist comment that America would have been much better off had it chosen Strom Thurmond as its President in 1948, when Thurmond's campaign was centred on an opposition to equal rights for blacks and whites. But when the rising blogosphere fiercely reacted, professional journalists did bring the issue to their agenda, leading to Lott's resignation. Too often, we attribute these victories to OhmyNews and the blogosphere without acknowledging the crucial contribution of the mainstream media, which is just unfair. While the need for professional journalism might be no longer inevitable, it is at least still indispensable.

(Nguyen, 2006)

Pro-Am/Network journalism

One of the most promising modes of collaboration, Pro-Am or network journalism seeks to use the strengths of professional and citizen journalists to improve the news coverage of the traditional and the citizen mediasphere. Projects such as NewAssignment set up collaborations between traditional journalists and citizen journalists to cover stories. One example of possible story is covering polling day – asking citizen journalists to document ballot protection and abuse, campaign ads and dirty tricks. (Rosen, 2006a) Obviously no one journalist can cover every polling booth – but with the distributed efforts of citizen journalists, that information can be collected.

Standalone Journalism or journalist-as-brand

An extension of network journalism the standalone journalist relies on their reputation, which may be developed in the mainstream media or in citizen media.

Examples of this approach include *Back to Iraq*, *HotZone* and *Talking Points Memo*.

While the notion of the journalist-as-brand existed before the rise of the Internet (particularly celebrity journalists such as Woodward and Bernstein), the technological capabilities of the internet allow these journalists to have their own publications very easily. The low cost of entry for online publications also allows developing journalists to leapfrog the newsroom hierarchy and develop a distinctive voice without reference to house style.

The journalist-as-brand can also manifest in the rise of supported journalism such as *ShareSleuth* - where businesspeople or public figures may support an individual journalist. *ShareSleuth* is supported by Mark Cuban, who justified his support by arguing that he needs quality investigative business reporting to invest wisely.

(Cuban, 2006)

Chapter 5 - Ways online journalism has changed the news process

Gatewatching

As Bruns argues, the explosion of available news and information has led to changes in the news process for traditional and citizen journalists. He says “it is now possible only to provide pointers to the news that may be most *important* to read, in the journalists or bloggers judgment.” (Bruns, 2006a) This process can be thought of *gatewatching*.

This move to gatewatching over gatekeeping thus significantly reduces the power of the journalistic profession to affect public opinion.

Gatekeeping is the mass media age exerted a measure of control over the public arena, but when gatekeepers lose their power to control the content of that symbolic arena, and when they are joined by an influx of alternative gatewatchers, “shared decision-making at the stage of gate-keeping changes the journalistic power balance ... and demonstrates a reconfigured world order at the press/media power centres, leading to a blurring of lines between the centre and the periphery in a critical journalistic practice”

(Bruns, 2006a)

Bruns further notes that gatewatching is iterative – the output of gatewatchers is watched by other gatewatchers, which feed into the new process of other media sources. (Bruns, 2006a) News bloggers form “a distributed community of commentators who will engage with one another’s views on the news as much as with those expressed in other news.” (Bruns, 2006a)

Dialogic and deliberative journalism

Bruns notes that while it is valid to ask whether the reposting of established source material from the mainstream media simply re-legitimises those sources as the authentic sources of news (Bruns, 2006a), the framing of the source material in the blog context creates a different sense of the news than exists in traditional media sources. (Bruns, 2006a) Commentary and annotation, interlinkage and engagement, native to citizen media turns citizen media into a more discursive form of news reporting than the traditional media. In the process it comes closer to what Heikkila and Kunelius have described as dialogic or deliberative news.

[dialogic] journalism must openly encourage different reading (and search for news modes of stories that do so) and it must commit itself to (the) task of making these different readings and interpretations public. That challenge is to make the accents and articulations heard, to give them the power and position they need to argue on particular problems and to make them the objects and starting points for new emerging public situations and conversations.

(Heikkila & Kunelius, 2002)

Bruns notes that citizen media moves beyond dialogic journalism to deliberative journalism. It does just *present* different readings but enables people to “engage with each other directly and contribute to public deliberation”. (Bruns, 2006a) Noting that deliberative journalism highlights the variety of ways issues can be framed, Bruns notes that:

This removes distinctions of status and expertise from the participants in the deliberation, much as news blogging undermines the privileged position of professional journalists as commentators on the news: “in a deliberative situation expert knowledge has no privileged position. All the participants are experts in the ways in which the common problem touches their everyday lives. This, opinions and knowledge expressed in deliberation articulate the experiences of participants.”

(Bruns, 2006a; pg 17)

Network journalism

As noted earlier, network journalism is a way for journalists to access the resources of citizen journalists and volunteers. Recognition that analysis of highly technological subjects in an increasingly technological world is necessary, many media organizations have sought the services of pundits and the ‘commentariat.’ A move towards truly participatory media requires that journalists recognise that citizens have as much right to take part in analysis, as do the paid pundits and lobbyists.

Redactive journalism

As noted earlier, redactive journalism is journalism creating by editing. While redactive journalism did not arrive with online media, it has become more useful with the explosion of public information available online. As more and more journalists utilise online resources such as Google and the Wikipedia, and rely on recorded video available via YouTube, the more common this mode of journalism will become.

Chapter 6 - Case studies

Wikis and contextualisation

Wikis work best as a form of contextualisation of stories published elsewhere. Citizen media that tries to create news coverage or commentary using wikis don't tend to work so well. Commentary tends to be an expression of one person's viewpoint – trying to condense different perspectives into one article doesn't work particularly well. (Roderick, 2005) The primary example of wiki based news publication is Wikinews.

Wikinews

Wikinews is a news publication that tries to create balanced news coverage.

Wikinews insists on the NPOV or Neutral Point of View doctrine:

This Neutral Point of View (or NPOV) doctrine clearly sets Wikinews apart from virtually all of the other collaborative online news sites and blogs we have discussed here, then – where the other sites are often clearly partisan and reflect the views of their enthusiast communities, critiquing the first tier of mainstream news media and adding multiple alternative perspectives, Wikinews, while also encouraging a more multiperspectival coverage of the news, aims to synthesise these

multiple perspectives in a more inclusive and unbiased way than is offered by the mainstream media.

(Bruns, 2006c)

Bruns notes that Wikinews adherence to the NPOV doctrine has risen almost to the point of ideology. This has led to a situation where very little discussion of the news takes place – even though the article ‘talk’ pages are suited to such a purpose. This differs from other collaborative online news sites such as Slashdot, where commentary and discussion take up far more space than the stories themselves.

(Bruns, 2006c)

Sadly, this approach seeks to replicate the values of traditional journalism, at the expense of the benefit of the format. By seeking a synthesis of multiple perspectives rather than multiperspectival coverage, Wikinews loses the discussion, analysis and argument that is intrinsic to truly multiperspectival coverage. By adhering to the Neutral Point of View policy, Wikinews encourages the false balance that is the hallmark of supposedly ‘objective’ news. (Saunders, 2003)

Oddly enough, Wikipedia provides more multiperspectival news coverage than Wikinews does.

Wikipedia

Wikipedia, the massive, user-edited online encyclopaedia, provides an accessible resource for fact checking. This central repository of knowledge makes fact checking much easier – something that raises the base level of knowledge for all journalists. No longer reliant on in-house files and expensive databases, journalists can easily go online and get essential background information on their topic. Also, the user-created nature of Wikipedia allows journalists to add to Wikipedia entries – adding to the knowledge on that person. This means that journalists and citizen journalists can build on the work that has been done before, rather than simply repeat stories that have already been published.

The iterative nature of the Wikipedia means that articles grow over time, and are refined as new information is added. (Saunders, 2006) It also means that other perspectives can be added easily. This means that news coverage, traditional and citizen, all becomes iterative. (Saunders, 2006) Coverage feeds into the Wikipedia; the Wikipedia is used by other journalists, whose work feeds back into the Wikipedia.

SourceWatch

SourceWatch (previously the Disinfopedia) is a wiki focussed on documenting the PR industry, ‘astroturf’ groups and people who “shape the public agenda”. (SourceWatch, 2006) It differs from the Wikipedia in that it is specifically focussed, where Wikipedia is a general interest encyclopaedia. SourceWatch is a good source for journalists to refer to when using material from think-tanks, commentators, lobbyists and politicians. It allows journalists to evaluate information, to see if it is biased.

News publications

Indymedia and the opposition to corporate globalisation

From its humble beginnings as an open message board system, through its evolution as a network of multimedia rich news portals, its clashes with police, the FBI, and its contribution of software, newsroom models, revolutionary newsroom practice and independent media, Indymedia has been at the forefront of the new media revolution. One particularly important development is the emergence of a hybrid model of journalism.

(Saunders, 2006)

Indymedia is a network of open publishing websites, set up in response to perceived shortcomings of the mainstream media. (Bruns, 2005) It sought to correct biased coverage, to allow ordinary people to have a voice. A proponent of the replacement methodology, it sought to replace and correct mainstream coverage.

As Indymedia has evolved, it has developed a number of aspects that enhance and complement mainstream media coverage.

Indymedia was one of the first open publishing websites – and definitely the first one devoted to user-generated content. (Bruns, 2005) Now we have Blogger – which supports open publishing and user-generated content, and sites like Flickr, Myspace, Livejournal and Typepad, all of which are devoted to supporting user created

content. ...Indymedia was also an early adopter of feedback mechanisms such as commenting and forums which are now offered by many present day platforms such as Blogger.

Indymedia also succeeded in showing that the corporate media have a conflict of interest when it comes to globalisation and corporate issues, and that they are prone to believing authority figures over ordinary people. (Bruns, 2005) It also showed the power that participatory media projects have, to contradict, criticize and correct the mainstream media, long before Pajamas Media went after Dan Rather.

(Saunders, 2006)

Indymedia is also notable as an early proponent of recontextualisation and reinterpretation of mainstream news articles. Participants often repost stories from the mainstream media to analyse, correct and reinterpret them. However, Indymedia has lost many participants due to its poor application of rules and misunderstanding of what free speech entails. (Saunders, 2006)

Perhaps it's useful to ask what constitutes effective communication. By any remotely sane definition, both telling and receiving are necessary. But the burden to communicate effectively belongs to the active party--the teller--not the audience. This is as true in one-on-one settings as it is in mass media. But the Indymedia mission doesn't mention audience. Instead it's all about the creation and the telling. Maybe this is, in part, where the problem lies. With the focus placed so strongly on the

"tellings of the truth," the reader/watcher/listener is left to fend for herself. And if we have so little respect or concern for our audience, what on earth are we doing working in a medium based entirely in communication?

(Whitney, 2005)

As Whitney notes, Indymedia has failed in helping readers navigate the site, to find useful, usable information. The failures of Indymedia extend beyond the problem of readability and quality. Numerous Indymedia sites have to contend with racist spam, trolling, poorly written articles and a tendency to treat the newswire as a place for press releases, reposting of uncontextualised articles from other publications, porn and legally actionable material (ranging from libel to death threats). (IndymediaWatch, 2006; Whitney, 2005)

While members of the Indymedia movement have posited the idea of open editing (Arnison, 2002) this has mostly manifested in the creation of features columns on the front pages of Indymedia sites (IndymediaGlobal, 2006) and the creation of aggregator sites like Oceania Indymedia (OceaniaIndymedia, 2006). While this has allowed for a more pleasant reading experience, it does not address any of the problems listed above – it simply hides them.

While Indymedia may be a useful source for story ideas and a good source of coverage during particular events, it is now a poor example of what citizen journalism can be.

Crikey and the Mark Llewellyn documents

Crikey is an independent email newsletter, with a strong focus on political news, analysis and gossip. It doesn't incorporate many of the technical features of iterative media (though the new owners have started to incorporate forums and comments on the Crikey website.) What makes it interesting is its use of citizen and pro-am journalists, bloggers and commentators for a large percentage of its coverage. Each email contains email addresses to send tips and gossip to.

In the June 26, 2006 email, Crikey published an affidavit by former Channel Nine Director of News and Current Affairs, Mark Llewellyn. The document was prepared for the NSW Supreme Court for a case against Channel Nine, which had been trying to prevent him leaving for Channel Seven. (Crikey, 2006)

In the email, Crikey actually published the majority of the document, allowing readers to read the entire document and make up their own minds. The document was very quickly taken down due to the threat of legal action,³ but the damage was already done- the Australian press picked up on the unflattering portrait of Eddie Maguire very quickly. His use of the term 'boned' in relation to the planned sacking of newsreader Jessica Rowe was picked up by a press already sceptical of his handling of Channel Nine. He was soon denying reports that he too was going to be 'boned'.

This is an example of how small online publications can undertake investigative journalism that has a powerful effect on political players, by bubbling up to and being amplified by mainstream publications.

³ though it can still be found online at <http://www.badongo.com/file/1331490>

Outragedmoderates

In mid 2005, Blogger Thad Anderson filed an FOI request to the Department of Defence, requesting DoD staffer Stephen Cambone's notes from a meeting with Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on the afternoon of September 11, 2001. (Anderson, 2006a) He received partially redacted copies of his notes on February 10, 2006. Cambone's notes had been cited heavily in the 9/11 Commission Report's account of the day's events. The documents revealed that Rumsfeld had ordered General Myers to:

(find the) "[b]est info fast . . . judge whether good enough [to] hit S.H. [Saddam Hussein] at same time - not only UBL [Usama Bin Laden]"

... "Go massive . . . Sweep it all up. Things related and not."

(Anderson, 2006a)

What makes this interesting is that Anderson is not a journalist, columnist or researcher. He is a *law student* who keeps a blog that covers issues ranging from biofuels, fantasy sports to North Korean nukes and torture. The majority of the articles are commentary and contextualisation, linking heavily to mainstream media stories and source documents. (Anderson, 2006c)

The DoD story is a clear example of investigative journalism – he tracked down government documents that directly contradicted the US government's statements and undermined the case for war on Iraq – but it was undertaken by a non-professional citizen journalist. It is also a 'random act of journalism' – journalism undertaken by

someone who is not a journalist, and whose output is not predominately journalism. (Bruns, 2006a) It also shows how random acts of journalism can be effective – the story was covered by numerous blogs and news aggregators, bubbling up to the Guardian, Time and the New York Times. (Anderson, 2006b)

The Memory Hole

The Memory Hole is a website run by Russ Kick that archives documents, photos and information in the public interest. The documents and photos range from leaked documents, publicly available documents that have been re-classified and materials attained through Freedom of Information requests.

In March 2003, Kick filed a FOI request for all photos of coffins returning from Iraq, specifically:

All photographs showing caskets (or other devices) containing the remains of US military personnel at Dover AFB. This would include, but not be limited to, caskets arriving, caskets departing, and any funerary rites/rituals being performed. The timeframe for these photos is from 01 February 2003 to the present.

(Kick, 2004)

The request was rejected completely. Kick appealed, and the photos were released. (Kick, 2004) While this was a fairly simple example of an interested citizen filing a FOI request (as they are legally entitled) it shows how the rise of citizen media allows

interested citizens to get their stories into the mainstream media. The photos were published on Kick's website, and were quickly picked up by mainstream press such as MSNBC, the New York Times and others. They were picked up quickly because media organizations have been banned by the Pentagon from taking photos of military coffins since 1991. (CBS, 2004)

The publication of the photos not only showed the scale of military casualties in Iraq at the time, but raised the issue of the propriety of the ban itself. Supposedly in place to protect the sensibilities of bereaved families, many viewed the imposition as an attack on free speech (CBS, 2004) and part of a propagandistic approach. (Kennedy, 2004) This publication by the Memory Hole not only showed people the impact of the Iraq War, it led people to question the control the Pentagon was exerting over the release of important information. This is clearly in line with the aims of investigative journalism.

TPMMuckraker

The TPMMuckraker is a site started by Josh Marshal of Talking Points Memo. Funded by advertisements and contributions, it seeks to continue the tradition of muckraking journalism in the blog format. The stories combine journalistic research with the blog format – allowing anyone to submit story ideas and research. The TPMMuckraker site doesn't allow comments – the sister site TPMCafe is the discussion site where anyone can take part.

TPMMuckraker accepts story ideas and materials from readers, and then researches and completes the stories. This is Pro-Am journalism. In October 2006, just prior to the Pennsylvania senate race, a reader of TPMMuckraker received some suspicious campaign material, and submitted it to the site to see if they could find out who was behind it.

TPM Reader TC, who lives there (Pennsylvania), sent us a scan of a mailer he received Saturday... The mailing purports to be from a group called The Progressive Policy Council, which, according to the mailer, "is a not-for-profit organization seeking to educate the public and to advocate for progressive public policy solutions for contemporary social issues," and provides bullet points to show that Democrat Bob Casey and Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA) are both against gay marriage, stem cell research, and "common sense gun controls."

...

Whoever is behind the group, which was formed in mid-June, has taken care not to leave any public traces.

(Kiel, 2006b)

The submitter was concerned that the material was *not* from a progressive group as claimed but was Republican material aimed at convincing people to support the incumbent, Rick Santorum. The citizen's research showed the website didn't work, the domain name was privately registered and none of the contact numbers worked.

In a very short time, the bloggers at TPMmuckraker had figured it out.

Records with the Virginia State Corporation Commission show that the group's charter was filed by a man named Jason Torchinsky of Holtzman Vogel. And who is he?

...

Jason Torchinsky recently joined Holtzman Vogel PLLC with a primary focus on campaign finance and election law. During the 2004 election cycle, Jason served as Deputy General Counsel to Bush-Cheney '04 and Deputy General Counsel to the 2005 Presidential Inaugural Committee.

Immediately before joining the firm, Jason was Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division at the United States Department of Justice. Jason has also served in other positions at the White House and at the United States Department of Justice. At the White House, he worked for now-Attorney General Alberto Gonzales in the Counsel's Office. At the Department of Justice, Jason served as a Special Assistant to the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division and in the Eastern District of Wisconsin as a Special Assistant United States Attorney....

Jason's prior political experience includes the Republican National Committee Counsel's Office, the Dole-Kemp campaign, the 1996 Republican National Convention and Congressman Herb Bateman's re-election campaign.

(Kiel, 2006a)

This is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, these bloggers were able to research a non-profit group sending out campaign material in a state they did not reside in. The campaign material was locally distributed and therefore unlikely to end up on the desk of the investigative journalism team at the New York Times.

The citizen journalist lived locally, and had already done some research before contacting the bloggers at TPMuckraker. The bloggers were able to build on the research completed by the submitter, and by utilising web-based research methods they were able to find the person responsible for the material.

While this story is not a government toppling story, it *is* a story of political significance. It showed that high level Republican operatives were seeking to confuse voters by posing as progressives, a dishonest political tactic during Congressional elections. Whether Jason Torchinsky is held to account or not, by revealing his involvement voters now know that the campaign material they received is partisan political propaganda, *not* independent information.

ShareSleuth

ShareSleuth is an investigative blog bankrolled by Mark Cuban. Its mission is to “do nothing but try to uncover corporate fraud.” (Cuban, 2006)

Business is an easy place for me to start because the fraud and sithlord (sic) wannabes uncovered can not only create great stories of interest for the website and HDNet World Report, but also allow me to buy and the sell the stocks of the company. A journalistic conflict you say? Not any more. Not in

this world. It will be fully disclosed and explained. This site is for the profit of its owners and we will buy and sell stocks that are discussed, before they are made available on the site. So make any decisions based on this information accordingly.

Facts are facts. Right is its own defence. If we can uncover companies whose stock is public and that can be bought or sold and that allows us to pay for more in depth research and effort. I'm good with that.

(Cuban, 2006)

While Sharesleuth is published in a blog format, the majority of its content is straight journalism. It is an example of stand-alone journalism. Chris Carey, a long time business reporter with the St Louis Post-Dispatch, is the sole journalist and editor. The structure of the site and the operating procedures are completely transparent – all evidence is published or linked to. This is something investigative journalists can struggle with, (Robinson, 2005) however Carey has managed to do so. The site also allows citizen journalists to submit story ideas, analysis, comments and research materials – allowing for pro-am partnerships to take place.

NewAssignment

NewAssignment is a project led by Jay Rosen to organize collaborations between professional journalists and citizen journalists. It also utilizes open source methods to generate story ideas.

The site uses open source methods to develop good assignments and help bring them to completion; it employs professional journalists to carry the project home and set high standards so the work holds up. There are accountability and reputation systems built in that should make the system reliable. The betting is that (some) people will donate to works they can see are going to be great because the open source methods allow for that glimpse ahead.

(Rosen, 2006c)

As Rosen notes, this approach differs from public broadcasting such as NPR in that public participation does not end at the donation stage.

New Assignment says: here's the story so far. We've collected a lot of good information. Add your knowledge and make it better. Add money and make it happen. Work with us if you know things we don't.

(Rosen, 2006c)

This approach ties together a number of ideas from the citizen mediasphere. Firstly, there is recognition of the necessity to involve citizens, and the power that distributed creativity and ‘accessing the hive’ can have. There is also recognition of the necessity of bringing traditional journalists into the fold and working with them.

I just think journalism without the media is at this point a practical idea, worth testing. By raising money and “raising” great stories that are worth the money, NewAssignment.Net makes it possible for the people formerly known as the audience (I’ve been writing about them lately) to originate outstanding work. The design assumes no antagonism at all between “citizen” users and “professional” journalists. The assumption is we need both, and ways for them to work in tandem. A journalist who can’t work with people and tell them the truth isn’t right for New Assignment. Visitors who cannot accept an account at odds with prior belief will not be happy participants, and they certainly won’t donate.

(Rosen, 2006c)

NewAssignment is a new project, and as yet has not published any articles. A Pro-Am partnership that *has* published articles is the Sunlight Foundation.

The Sunlight Foundation

The Sunlight Foundation was created with the goal of providing Internet and IT tools

... to enable citizens to learn more about what Congress and their elected representatives are doing, and thus help reduce corruption, ensure greater transparency and accountability by government, and foster public trust in the vital institutions of democracy.

(SunlightFoundation, 2006)

Among its projects are the Congresspedia (done in conjunction with Sourcewatch) a wiki which documents the US Congress, and a number of distributed reporting projects which utilise citizen journalists to document pork barrelling and nepotism.

Some 19 current members of the House of Representatives pay their spouses out of their campaign war chests, totaling more than \$636,000 in the current election cycle, a study by citizen journalists working with the Sunlight Foundation has found. Phase one of the "Is Congress A Family Business?" investigation is now complete.

...Using an innovative tool developed by Sunlight Labs, about 40 volunteers investigated anywhere from one to as many as 155 members, uncovering those who, by hiring their spouses to work for their campaign, allow special interest cash to enter their family budgets.

(Allison, 2006)

This project utilised a pro-am approach, with 40 volunteers investigating members of the US House of Representatives. The web-based tool developed by the Sunlight Foundation allowed volunteers to access the biographical information (including spouse names) of members of Congress. (Allison, 2006) They could then look up campaign expenditure information at the Center for Responsive Politics websites [<http://opensecrets.org>] to see if their spouses were being paid by the campaign.

This approach allowed volunteers to be involved and to hold their own representatives to account. It also shows the power of distributed reporting – using volunteers is a much more effective way of documenting a large number of people. (The US House of Representatives has 435 members.)

Conclusion:

In the course of this thesis, we have seen how investigative journalism is threatened by government restrictions, corporate priorities and changing attitudes towards media consumption. In a world of ubiquitous media, newspapers and current affairs programs have lost their hold on the public consciousness.

However these tendencies do not mean that investigative journalism will disappear. Certainly, we can see that quality investigative journalism is essential to the working of democracy. To regain its role and its strength, it can accept that public participation is necessary and that it can draw on the resources of the growing citizen mediasphere.

We have seen that citizen journalists are already contributing to investigative journalism, collating evidence, filing FOI requests, publishing leaked documents, analysing software and documents and interviewing politicians. Investigative journalists should not feel threatened by this – they should be heartened that ordinary people appreciate the role of journalism so strongly that they are keen to do it themselves.

These case studies have shown that there are numerous ways for investigative journalists to collaborate with citizen journalists. Investigative journalists can draw from and contribute to massive information repositories such as the Wikipedia and Sourcewatch. They can ask for help with technical analysis and request on-the-ground assistance for geographically distributed research. They can find out what readers want to read about and request funding to do that research. They can partner with citizen media groups to develop tools to research politicians and business, and can

share these tools with citizenry. All of these options allow investigative journalists to reconnect with citizens and make their journalism more empowering, more powerful and more effective.

Investigative journalism can continue to exist in the world of ubiquitous media and information overload. It will require investigative journalists and citizen journalists to recognise that they all contribute towards the ‘sense-making project of modernity’ and that they should work together rather than competing. There will always be a need for investigative journalism and investigative journalists – but there is a growing need for redactive journalism, citizen and distributed journalism. Investigative journalism will benefit by incorporating these methodologies, and by collaborating with practitioners of them.

Investigative journalism forms and methods may change, but the practice of investigative journalism will remain an important part of journalism and democracy.

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