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A Citizen Journalism Primer

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ABSTRACT

Citizen journalism is a hot topic at present, but there remains a degree of conceptual wooliness about its definition and meaning, with everything from lifestyle blogs to live footage of freak weather events being included in this category. This paper will identify factors underpinning the emergence of citizen journalism, including the rise of Web 2.0, rethinking journalism as a professional ideology, the decline of 'high modernist' journalism, divergence between elite and popular opinion, changing revenue bases for news production, and the decline of deference in democratic societies. It will consider case studies such as the Korean *OhMyNews* web site, and connect these issues to wider debates about the implications of journalism and news production increasingly going into the Internet environment.

What is Citizen Journalism?

Citizen journalism can in one sense be defined by some of its more conspicuous examples. The Korean *OhMyNews* site (http://english.ohmynews.com/), which was established in 2000, has as its slogan "every citizen is a reporter", and accesses only 20 per cent of the content for its online site from its employed staff, with the balance coming from the estimated 50,000 South Koreans who post news stories onto the site. The *malaysiakini.com* site (www.malaysiakini.com) was established in 1999 by two young journalists, Steven Gan and Premesh Chandran, who had become disaffected with the degree of state control over and self - censorship within Malaysia's print and broadcast media, and saw an opportunity to 'use the Internet to provide free and fair news to the Malaysian public and to set new standards in journalism as well as to support the development of freedom of speech, social justice and democracy in Malaysia' (Malaysiakini 2007; c.f. George 2006). In the United States, bloggers are variously credited with the political demise of the Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott for remarks he made supporting racial segregation, and with revealing that a story run by CBS news anchor Dan Rather claiming that George W. Bush avoided the draft was based on forged documents. In Britain, the BBC is promoting a citizen journalism model linked to community activism from within its own portal, through its *Action Network* initiative (www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/), while *The Guardian* promotes user interaction through its *Comment is Free* pages. In Australia sites such as *Crikey* (www.crikey.com.au), *New Matilda* (www.newmatilda.com.au) and *On Line Opinion* (www.onlineopinion.com.au) seek both to promote new stories and to

generate alterative means of gathering and aggregating news and opinion online. Internationally, the *Indymedia* network (www.indymedia.org), founded in the U.S. in the context of the 1999 'Battle of Seattle' protests against the inaugural meeting of the World Trade Organisation, is a global, activist-based network of print, satellite TV, video and radio that is all user-generated, and has over 150 independent media centres worldwide, across over 30 countries.

Is there then a new model of citizen journalism emerging around these various new media initiatives? There are a number of influential voices who think so. Dan Gillmor, founder of the Centre for Citizen Media, argues in *We the Media* that whereas conventional 'Big Media … treated the news as a lecture', the new models of citizen journalism enabled by Web 2.0 technologies will see an evolution towards 'journalism as a conversation or seminar', as:

> The lines will blur between producers and consumers, changing the role of both in ways we're only beginning to grasp now The communication network itself will become a medium for everyone's voice, not just the few who can afford to buy multimillion-dollar printing presses, launch satellites or win the government's permission to squat on the public's airwaves (Gillmor 2006: xxiv).

Bowman and Willis (2003) refer to the rise of *participatory journalism*, which arises from 'the result of many simultaneous, distributed conversations that either blossom or quickly atrophy in the Web's social network' (Bowman and Willis 2003: 9). They define participatory journalism as:

The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires' (Bowman and Willis 2003: 9).

Couldry (2003) has explored the wider implications of the relationship between participatory media, alternative forms of journalism and questions of media power. Arguing that media power is best understood as a form of *symbolic power*, or the power to construct and communicate dominant ideas, Couldry finds the potential significance of user-generated media as lying in its capacity to accumulate organisation and economic resources that can be used to tell different stories, and generate alternative sources of influence. To achieve substantive changes in the concentration, organisation and uses of media, what needs to be looked for are:

1. *New ways of consuming media*, which explicitly contest the social legitimacy of media power;
2. *New infrastructures of production*, which have an impact upon who can produce media and in what circumstances;
3. *New infrastructures of distribution*, which change the scale and terms on which media and other forms of symbolic production in one place can reach other places (Couldry 2003: 44).

For Couldry, the potential arises for new forms of media production and consumption associated with the Internet and user-generated content to generate 'new hybrid forms

of media *consumption-production* … [that] would challenge precisely the entrenched

division of labour (producers of stories versus consumers of stories) that is the

essence of media power' (Couldry 2003: 45).

While it is important not to see citizen journalism as simply an outgrowth of the

Internet and new media, three elements of digital media technologies are critical to the

rise of citizen journalism and citizen media. The first is *open publishing*. The

development of an open publishing architecture by Mathew Arnison and others

involved in the 'Active Sydney' group in 1999, and the adoption of such open source

models by the Independent Media Centres (*Indymedia*) that year was a landmark

development in enabling new forms of news production. Arnison (2003) drew

parallels between open publishing and the free software movement, arguing that the

key to open publishing, as with open source software, was that the process of

production was open and transparent. Second, *collaborative editing* is vital to citizen

journalism. In his taxonomy of peer-to-peer (P2P) publishing, and the extent to which

a site and a news practice can be deemed to be open and participatory, Bruns (2005)

differentiates such sites on the basis of the scope for user participation at the input

stage (contributing stories), output stage (ability to edit or shape final content),

response stage (ability to comment on, extend, filter, or edit already published

content), and the extent to which specific roles (editor, journalist, user, reader) are

fixed in the production process. This generates a continuum of openness across online

news sites, from mainstream online news sites where a division between the

producers and users of news remains even if there is scope to comment on stories,

through to 'gatekeeping lite' sites that promote user contributions and some

collaborative editing, through to the editor-assisted open news model of Korea's

OhMyNews and *Media Channel* in the United States, and completely open and decentralised sites such as *Indymedia*.

Figure 1

A Continuum of Openness for Online News Models
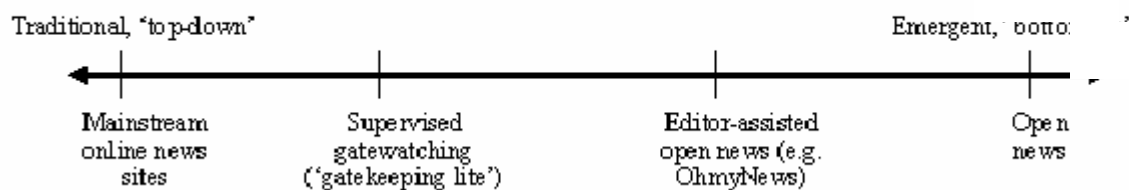

Source Bruns 2005: 124.

A third factor promoting citizen journalism is *distributed content* through RSS (Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication) feeds. The great virtue of RSS is that it can take the work out of accessing new and interesting information, as users can establish an ongoing link with the sites that generate content that is of interest to them, and link to it on their own sites as they see fit. While RSS development has occurred at some distance from the concerns of citizen journalism, it greatly assists it by reducing the search costs associated with accessing valuable information and insight from trusted sources, as well as building user communities, thereby transforming news and information distribution from a hierarchical, top-down model with high barriers to entry to a more decentralised and networked model.

Deuze (2003) has proposed that the diversity of forms of Web-based journalism can be conceived of as operating across two axes of control and connectivity. One relates

to *content*, and the extent to which online news content is primarily or exclusively sourced from the organisation's staff of employed journalists with published content subject to established editorial protocols, as compared to sites that source content widely an emphasise the forms of network *connectivity* that arise from a diversity of sources participating in providing content to the site. The second relates to the *cultures* in which content is generated, and the extent to which participatory communication is highly moderated, as compared to sites where comment and participation is open and largely unmoderated. For Deuze, this generated the following differentiation between the online news sites of mainstream news organisations such as CNN, BBC and MSNBC, index and category sites such as the *Drudge Report* or *Crikey*, meta-comment sites such as *MediaChannel*, and share and discussion sites such as *Slashdot*.

Figure 2

**Categorising Online News Sites by Content and Communication**
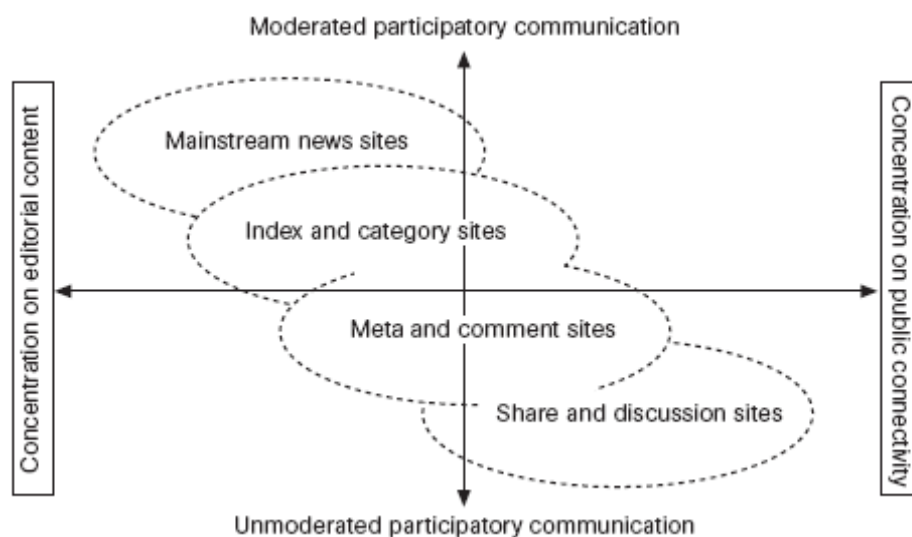
Source: Deuze 2003: 205.

For Deuze, this in turn raises the question of what it means to transfer news production and distribution to the online environment. He suggests a four-fold typology of ways in which online news media is related to the content-connectivity access on the one hand, and journalistic culture is open or closed on the other. To take the four types outlined in Figure 3 below, (1) *orienting* online journalism is largely a repurposing of pre-existing media content; (2) *monitorial* online journalism is principally driven by news organisations seeing better user demographic data; (3) *instrumental* online journalism is useful for the journalist involved, as it enables him/her to better understand their audience, but does not generate new models for how news and information content is developed into the future; and (4) *dialogic* online journalism that opens up new models for news production, collaborative editing and filtering, and user participation in site development.

Table 8.3

Types of Online Journalism
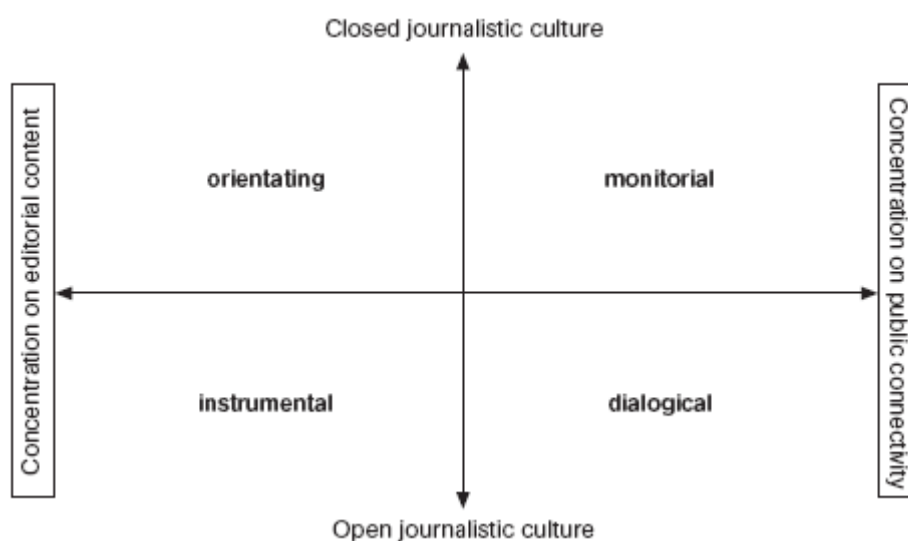
Source: Deuze 2003: 218.

Eight Contextual Factors behind the Rise of Citizen Journalism

1. From CAR and Public Journalism to Web 2.0 and the Public's Journalism

At one level, journalists quickly identified the potential of the Internet to enhance their professional capacities, as it gave them vastly expanded access to information and new channels for distribution. The Internet also emerged at a time of perceived crisis for journalism, arising from a sense of growing disconnect between journalism as an organised and institutionalised professional practice and the audiences and communities it intended to serve.

Two key developments in the 1990s to this environment of opportunity and threat were computer-assisted reporting and public journalism. *Computer-assisted reporting* (CAR) enabled a triangulation of reporting, where journalists could cross-check information provided to them by key informants with other sources of information and data that were on the public record and now readily accessible through the Internet. CAR aimed to make journalism a more scientific practice, and is advocates looked for a new era of 'precision journalism', where the truth-claims of journalists would be backed up by thickets of verifiable data (Cox 2000). The second development was the rise of *public journalism*, also known as civic journalism. The core principle underpinning public journalism was that of 'seeing people as citizens rather than as spectators, readers, viewers, listeners or an undifferentiated mass', in order to act in ways that can 'bring a genuine public alive' (Rosen 2000: 680, 683). Campbell (2000) saw experiments in public journalism as aiming to: '(1) treat citizens

as experts in their own lives and aspirations … (2) treat citizens as political actors who create public knowledge by deliberating together … [and] (3) create new forms of story-telling and reporting to enrich information' (Campbell 2000: 693). Public journalism had the aim of reinvigorating the democratic and participatory nature of democratic society by emphasising journalism's social responsibility remit of 'encouraging citizens to engage each other in a search for shared values' (Glasser 2000: 683).

Despite their differences, both nonetheless rested upon a common assumption that there exists a unique and powerful professional grouping – journalists – who may or may not choose to use new media to better serve another constituency – audiences, or the general public – and that the choice to do so essentially rests with the profession itself. It is this dynamic that has been eroding quickly with the rise of Web 2.0 and social software, to the point where advocates of public journalism, such as Witt (2004), observed that 'public journalism', where journalists, academics and news editors could met and discuss what to do next, into 'the public's journalism', where a new generation of new media users were taking matters into their own hands.

2. Questioning Journalism as a Professional Ideology

The technological developments associated with the rise of citizen journalism have occurred at a time when claims to the uniqueness of journalism as a profession have been contested. Zelizer (2004, 2005) has argued that journalism has to be ultimately understood as a culture, and those who self-define as journalists 'employ collective, often tacit knowledge to become members of the group and maintain their

membership over time' (Zelizer 2005: 200). Other definitions of what constitutes journalism and journalists – as a profession, an industry, an institution or a craft – are, for Zelizer, inadequate, as they always present boundary issues as to who is included and excluded. By contrast, the cultural definition clarifies why, how and by whom these boundaries about what is journalism and who is a journalist emerge, linking the them back to the culture of journalism itself, and the 'connections [that] are made that link internal mind-sets about how the world works with the external arrangements by which social life is set in place' (Zelizer 2005: 201).

Deuze (2005) has argued that journalism is ultimately an occupational ideology shared among those who self-classify as journalists. Ideology is understood here in the dual sense of being 'a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular group, including – but not limited to – the general process of the production of meanings and ideas within that group', and as a process whereby 'the sum of ideas and views – notably on social and political issues – of a particular group is shaped over time, but also as a process by which other ideas and views are excluded or marginalised' (Deuze 2005: 445). Deuze tests this hypothesis by identifying five common claims that are made about journalism by journalists themselves and by those who research journalism as a profession, and testing these against two potentially disruptive influences upon journalism: the impact of new media technologies, and multiculturalism, or the implications of greater cultural diversity in modern societies.

Table 8.4

Journalism as a Professional Ideology: Deuze's Analysis of

Change Factors

Core elements of journalists' professional self-definition	Underlying concepts and applications in practice	Impact of new media technologies	Impact of multiculturalism
Public service	Acting as 'watch-dogs' or 'alert services' to the wider public	'The public' is increasingly using new media to tell its own stories	Need to actively seek new angles and voices from undiscovered communities
Objectivity	Need for neutrality, fairness, impartiality and 'professional distance' from sources	Interactivity presents the journalist with multiple and conflicting points of view	Need to move from binary ('both sides of the story') to multiperspectival approaches
Autonomy	Freedom from censorship, whether by governments, companies or colleagues	Collaborative production models increasingly becoming the norm	Need for more community-based reporting and awareness of entrenched social inequalities
Immediacy	Information needs to be produced and disseminated quickly in order to have value and currency	Reflection, complexity and ongoing editing and updating of news becomes possible, involving users in the process	Speed tends to negate recognition of diversity, in terms of newsroom cultures, sourcing, and how news is distributed
Ethics	Need to be guided by a formal code of ethics as collectively agreed to by one's peers in the organisation and/or relevant professional body	New media tend to evoke an 'ethics on the run', as online site moderation cannot mirror an internally derived organisational ethic/culture	Issues about what is/is not 'suitable' content become more complex as societies become more diverse, and mechanisms for dialogue need to be established

Source: Deuze 2005.

3. The Decline of 'High Modernism' in Journalism and the end of 'Journalist as Hero'

Hallin (1994) has argued that the period from the 1960 to the late 1980s marked a period of 'High Modernism' in American journalism, as 'an era when the historically troubled role of the journalist seemed fully rationalised, when it seemed possible for the journalist to powerful and prosperous and at the same time independent, disinterested, public-spirited, and trusted and beloved by everyone, from the corridors of power around the world to the ordinary citizen and consumer' (Hallin 1994: 172). The 'journalist as hero' had a clear image in the popular consciousness, as Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford portrayed the *Washington Post* journalists Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward in the 1976 film *All the President's Men*, about the reporting of the Watergate scandal and the resignation of Richard Nixon. The image was that of young investigative journalists with a commitment to late nights at the office, checking their facts and sources closely, and linking up with well-connected insiders, who could bring down the U.S. President. Through the 1970s and 1980s, the wages of high-profile journalists continued to rise, particularly in television, as the cult of the 'journalist-as hero' was embraced through programs such as *60 Minutes*.

Hallin noted that there were inherent problems with journalists seeking to fill a vacuum in political institutions and public debate. One reason is that journalists are often 'too close to the powerful institutions whose actions need to be discussed' (Hallin 1994: 175) Another problem is that the commercial nature of news makes it difficult for journalists in large, mainstream organisations to veer too far from what

they perceive to be 'public sentiment', or to get too far offside with any major political entity, for fear of losing audience or market share. Hallin also argued that the journalistic ideal of objectivity tended to generate a focus upon 'attributions, passive voice constructions, and the substitution of technical for moral or political judgements [that] is largely designed to conceal the voice of the journalist' (Hallin 1994: 176). Hallin argued for new forms of journalism that aimed to be in dialogue with the wider public rather than 'mediating between political institutions and the mass public', and where 'the voice and judgement of the journalist … [are] more honestly acknowledged' (Hallin 1994: 176). Hallin wrote *We Keep America on Top of the World* before the rise of the Internet and blogging; many advocates of blogging would argue that it has sought to fill the vacuum in 'high modern' journalism that Hallin identified.

4. The Hand That Feeds: Journalism and its Sources – From Contact to Capture

Access to quality information sources has long been at the heart of quality journalism, but this reliance upon contacts generates its own problems. It is no coincidence that Woodward and Bernstein worked at the *Washington Post*, and not in Montana or Arkansas; being located in the heart of the American political beast – Washington D.C. – and with a well-resourced newspaper behind them, they could successfully pursue source-led investigative journalism. But this insider access generates its own forms of capture. At its most overt, as with the concept of 'embedded journalists' developed during the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, journalists stand accused of essentially reporting the U.S. military point of view as the condition of access to combat zones. More generally, one can simply count the number of phrases such as

'Sources close to the Prime Minster/President say', 'Government officials say', or 'Well-placed insiders say' in the stories of many feature writers, columnists, political correspondents, and front-page newspaper stories to get a sense of the extent of the reliance of much mainstream journalism upon official sources, and the relations of dependence this generates. This has become increasingly sophisticated in recent years with the rise of what Ward (2003) terms the 'PR state', where government management of media through public relations moves beyond issue-based 'spin' to highly co-ordinated information management strategies, and where large-scale government advertising aimed at 'selling' new policies becomes a vital part of the revenue stream of commercial media organisations (Young 2006). [i] Indeed, some have noted that it is increasingly political satire, as seen in U.S. programs such as Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and Australia's *The Chaser's War on Everything*, to irreverently comment on developments in politics that one would expect leading political journalists to be more attuned to.

5. Implications of Eroding Revenue Bases for Traditional Media

The media business has traditionally been a highly profitable one, with major media outlets realising rates of profit well above industry averages. But there are several signs that the business models that served media so well in the second half of the 20th century are less robust in the early 21st century, and this has implications for how news production is to be financed. In the case of newspapers, classified advertising has traditionally provided the 'rivers of gold' that cross-subsidise other activities within the organisation, but this is now seriously challenged by the rise of sophisticated search engines such as Google that can be both global and hyper-local,

and by direct selling of products and services through sites such as eBay. Broadcast television has lost significant market share to cable and satellite-based subscription services throughout the world, and there are fewer and fewer opportunities to reach the mass audiences that were once the lifeblood of commercial television. More generally, television is now in serious competition with other media for audience attention, not only with the personal computer and Web-based services such as *YouTube* and *Joost* (ww.joost.com), but with the other ways in which the television itself can be used, including console-based gaming and DVD viewing.

This is not to proclaim the end of mass media, as a number of high-profile analysts wrongly prophesied in the 1990s (e.g. Gilder 1994; Negroponte 1995). This over-estimates the significance of changing media consumption patterns for particular demographics in countries where media such as television is long-established, and under-estimates the significance of the growth of access to television and other mass media on a global scale. Moreover, it conflates the media as distribution conduits with media as program content; theorists of 'TV III' (Rogers *et. al.* 2002; Creeber and Hills 2007) point out that successful TV content, whether it be *The Sopranos*, *Big Brother* or live feeds of World Cup soccer, are now accessed across multiple platforms, ranging from TV to DVDs, networked personal computers, mobile phones and other wireless and handheld devices, and is repurposed in multiple formats to best 'fit' the relevant media form. The issue is rather with advertiser spending, and the extent to which it is migrating from media forms to technologically-driven niches, and the implications of this for cross-subsidy of various form of journalism within organisations that produce news. One feature of blogs and citizen journalism is that they are typically a lower-cost means of generating content than traditional news

practices (e.g. hiring feature writers, high-profile on-air presenters and opinion journalists), and this is certainly attracting the attention of established news media outlets.

6. Expanding the Definition of Journalism: Lifestyle, Entertainment and Celebrity Journalism

The space that is increasingly occupied in media of all forms by lifestyle, entertainment and celebrity journalism is clearly observable, from the plethora of new magazine titles devoted to these topics, to their prominence in the online environment, although we currently lack an authoritative academic analysis of these forms (on celebrity and journalism, Turner 2004; Hermes 2005; Marshall 2006). Many accounts of these developments tend to critically reflect upon how the rise of this space is 'eroding' journalism, rather than upon these forms of journalism themselves, which dominate the magazine industry, are increasingly central to television, and occupy a growing space within the print media industries, particularly in their online versions (see Turner 1999, 2005 on 'tabloidisation' debates in relation to journalism). Bloggers are of course well represented in these fields, as seen with widely-accessed sites such as *Welcome to Perez Hilton* (http://perezhilton.com). At the same time, it is very notable how prominent the celebrity, entertainment and lifestyle formats are on the online versions of the established news media sites. There is a study yet to be done about whether the prevalence of this content is greater on these sites than it is in the print and broadcast equivalents, and what should be made of it. Related to this is the need for more detailed information about how news and information is consumed online. One theory is that online news is frequently consumed in small chunks by

office workers, and this fits well with the format that has evolved with celebrity magazines, which get through a lot of stories very quickly, and which typically require little background or context, as readers typically know who the celebrities already are (Newson 2006).

7. The Crisis of Democracy and the Decline of Deference

It has been argued that, in the established democratic nations, there is increasingly a *crisis of democracy*, where 'old styles of representation have come under pressure to change … [as] traditional structures and cultures of policy formation and decision-making are perceived as being remote from ordinary citizens' (Coleman and Gøtze 2001: 4; c.f. Castells 1998; Giddens 1998). Coleman and Gøtze have observed that:

> As citizens have become less deferential and dependent, and more consumerist and volatile, old styles of representation have come under pressure to change. There is a pervasive contemporary estrangement between representative and those they represent, manifested in almost every western country by falling voter turnout; lower levels of public participation in civic life; public cynicism towards political institutions and parties; and a collapse in once-strong political loyalties and attachments (Coleman and Gøtze 2001: 4).

It was argued in Chapter Five that, overall, blogs are a positive factor in the development of social capital, with their mix of subjectivity, interactivity and connectivity (McNair 2006: 122-124). Similarly, since more active participation by citizens in the policy process is believed to lead to both better public policy and

greater public trust in its implementation (OECD 2003; Coleman 2006), it can also be argued that citizen journalism formats that are widely accessible, independent of powerful vested interests, and can have wider public influence, will have a positive impact upon reinvigorating the democratic public sphere. This is even acknowledging that they are often more partisan and feisty, as reflective of a wider decline in deference to established forms of elite authority, from political leadership to opinion-leading journalism. As McNair observes, 'If one function of the public sphere is to render power transparent before the people … it is better from the democratic perspective to have an excess of critical media scrutiny … than a deficit' (McNair 2006: 73).

8. New Opportunities to Express Alternative Views in Countries with State-Controlled Media

The significance of the Internet as an alternative source of news and information is even starker in those countries that are not democracies, or are recent democracies, and where there is a history of state control (direct or indirect) over official media sources. The relationship between the rise in Internet use in Indonesia and the gradual, complex democratisation of Indonesian society and politics in the period following President Soeharto's 'New Order' provides a fascinating case study of this. One consequence of the fall of the Soeharto government in 1998 was an explosion in independent journalism during the subsequent period of *reformasi* (Romano 2003). The Internet has been quickly embraced as a toll by political activists and reformers, and has been a vital element of scrutiny and commentary on elections and political

affairs generally since the first free elections in Indonesia in 1999 (Hill and Sen 2005).

George (2006) has discussed the role played by the Internet in enabling *contentious journalism* in Malaysia and Singapore. Both Malaysia and Singapore are countries that have held formal democratic elections, but where the same political organisations – the United Malaysian National Organisation (UMNO) and the People's Action Party (PAP) in the Singaporean case – have held power continuously since independence. A variety of controls over the media have been important components of this continuous rule, including Internal Security and Official Secrets Acts, defamation laws, the allocation of print and broadcast media licences, close personal connections between media owners and government officials, and controls over media access and sources (George 2006: 43-54). The Internet has opened up a space for dissenting points of view and what George terms contentious journalism, in countries where dissenting journalists 'have enough space to practice their craft openly on the Internet … but not constitutional protection from political censorship or politically motivated reprisal' (George 2006: 3). The ability to do this has been driven in part by the commitment of governments in both countries to rapid development of the Internet and a leading position in the global information economy, through Singapore's *Intelligent Island* policies and Malaysia's *Vision 2020*, but George's book documents the continuing precariousness of Web sites dedicated to alternative points of view, with *Malaysiakini.com* being the most notable survivor over time, while *Sintercom.org* was ultimately forced to operate outside of Singapore (George 2006; c.f. Lee 2006 on Singapore).

We need to be careful about easily equating the rise of the Internet with moves towards greater democratisation, media freedom and citizen journalism. Kalathil and Boas (2003) have discussed how governments can widen the population's access to the Internet while simultaneously maintaining political and media control, citing China and Singapore as case studies. Even without the elaborate network of controls and filters that have developed in China, which critics have dubbed the 'Great Firewall of China' (Human Rights Watch 2006), Kalathil and Boas note that the Internet need not constitute a wedge which threatens dominant political forces since: (1) most Internet traffic does not have an ostensibly political purpose; (2) there are periodic crackdowns by governments on some forms of Internet use; (3) mechanisms for content control and filtering can be developed for online content akin to those of other media within a national information infrastructure; and (4) state authorities can use the Internet to more effectively deliver their own messages and enhance their own legitimacy. Indeed, in the case of both China and Singapore, Internet censorship ahs occurred alongside measures to improve citizen access to government services online and some citizen-government direct interaction. Nonetheless, when crises of control do emerge, as occurred in China and Hong Kong SAR during the 2003 SARS outbreak, the Internet emerges as a vitally important source of alternative information (Nip 2006).

Citizen Journalism, a New Public Sphere, and Journalism as a Human Right

In Jürgen Habermas's classic account (Habermas 1995), the public sphere is envisaged as a domain of our social life through which public opinion can be formed out of rational public debate, so that informed and logical discussion and debate could lead to democratic decision-making arising out of an informed public consensus. Authors such as Carey (1995) have argued that the commercial imperatives of news media and the need for 'instant news' have undercut journalism's claims to be contributing to Habermas' modernist vision of a rational public sphere. But the question has been asked as to whether new media developments can generate a new public sphere? The example of Korea's *OhMyNews* demonstrates one possibility that it might. In a similar vein, the Qatar-based media service *Al-Jazeera* has been identified as contributing to an Arab and Muslim public sphere, through its presence as a clear alternative to highly censored Middle East media, its willingness to address controversial issues, its positioning as an outlet for dissenting and oppositional voices, and its capacity to provide voice to those elements of civil society and popular opinion not represented by the governments or the state-controlled media outlets of the region (El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; El Oifi 2005).

In considering whether the Internet can constitute a public sphere, Papacharissi (2002) makes the important qualifying point that 'a new public space is not synonymous with a new public sphere', since:

As public space, the Internet provides yet another forum for political deliberation. As a public sphere, the Internet could facilitate discussion that promotes a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions. A virtual public space enhances discussion; a virtual sphere enhances democracy (Papacharissi 2002: 11).

With this qualification in mind, Papacharissi concludes that the Internet could not yet be considered a virtual public sphere due to inequalities of access, difficulties in bringing together conflicting points of view, and some of the limiting imperatives of reliance upon commercial funding models from large-scale distribution, but that it certainly advances the possibility for such a public sphere to emerge. Importantly, she emphasises that the nature of the medium itself, and the relationship between interconnectedness, real-time discussion and communication at a distance make it unlikely that the Internet would ever conform to the Habermasian modernist ideal of a public sphere. She instead speculates that 'the Internet will not become the new public sphere, but rather something radically different [that] will enhance democracy and dialogue, but not in a way that we would expect it to, or in a way that we have experienced in the past' (Papacharissi 2002: 18). It is more likely to be, as Brian McNair (2006) has also argued in relation to this question, a more crowded, noisy, chaotic, competitive and rancorous communications space than was envisaged for the modernist public sphere, but that does not in turn dismiss the potential to generate something more akin to a globalised and democratising public sphere.

The British journalist and editor Ian Hargreaves has argued that '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: 4). In a similar vein, Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts that everyone has 'the right to freedom of opinion and expression', and the right to 'seek, receive and ***impart*** information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers' (United Nations 1948 – emphasis added). Hartley (2008) has drawn upon these arguments to propose that the right to practice journalism is a human right, and one that user-generated content, participatory media and the turn from 'read-only' mass communications to 'read-write' citizen media is accelerating this possibility. This complements the turn to opinion, subjectivity and the personal found in the rise of blogging as an alternative form of reporting and commenting on events to the traditional journalism paradigms. Hartley argues that a major barrier to the further development of citizen journalism in these forms is in fact professional journalism itself, which has evolved into a representative function, acting on behalf of the public rather than as a part of the public (Hartley 2008).

McNair (2006) has argued that citizen journalism and user-generated news content needs to be understood in the context of a wider shift in the underlying paradigm of journalism and news production from what he terms the 'control paradigm' to 'cultural chaos'. Drawing upon the rise of 'chaos theory' in the natural sciences, McNair refers to *cultural chaos* in the context of 'a contemporary communications environment in which, as in nature, chaos creates as well as destroys, generating in the process enhanced possibilities for progressive cultural, political and social evolution, as well as trends towards social entropy and disorder' (McNair 2006: xii). McNair argues that as we are moving from information scarcity to information abundance and from closed to open information systems, and as the competition for

providing news and accessing audiences for news increases, this challenges the entrenched authority of both political institutions and established media organisations. With the capacity to produce and distribute news, information and journalism is becoming more and more available to more and more people, the sheer proliferation of voices and opinions enabled by new media generates 'a significant augmentation of the degree of diversity of viewpoints available to users of the globalised public sphere' (McNair 2006: 201). Even while most media organisations remain hierarchical and centralised, as do many of the political, business and other institutions that they report on, the combination of the networked structure of the internet and 24-hour, real-time news 'produces an environment where information cascades become more unpredictable, more frequent, and more difficult for elites to contain when they began' (McNair 2006: 202).

Scott (2005) has questioned the saliency of the business models underlying much online journalism, noting that online news services can potentially lead to a further 'tightening' of news content in order to better meet the demographic targeting of news audiences by advertisers, with online site content increasingly driven by the marketing divisions of news organisations rather than by their journalists. This would connect to two concerns about the Web 2.0 environment for the future of news, namely that it will on the one hand further promote celebrity, entertainment and lifestyle journalism at the expense of investigative journalism and 'hard' news (e.g. Beecher 2006), and on the other that it further de-professionalises news production by promoting the 'cult of the amateur' (Keen 2007).

Against, this gloomy scenario, it can be argued that the conversational imperatives of online journalism, combined with the sheer proliferation of vices and outlets, can collectively raise overall standards, even as it enables poorly sources and more opinionated content to flow. It has been argued in this paper s that if mainstream news media organisations responds to the threat/opportunity matrix that they face by stripping back online news provision to the bare bones in order to cut costs, they will be met by a new generation of competitors for 'access to eyeballs' in a rapidly changing new media environment. It has also been argued that claims to the uniqueness of journalism as a profession have been in part ideological (i.e. the question of who is a journalist is determined by journalists themselves as a self-selecting culture and peer group), and that this has been historically buttressed by the concentration of news media outlets in an era of mass media restricted by technical and economic limits to content diversity. What is becoming apparent is that debates about the relationship between democracy, citizenship, news and journalism have acquired a new intensity in the 21st century, as the impact of new media shifts the underlying paradigms that have informed journalism and news production in the 20th century age of mass media and mass communication.

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[i] In Australia, the value of Federal government advertising went from $5-10 million in the first half of the 1990s to $20-100 million in the late 1990s and 2000s under the Howard government. $100 million was spent on advertising in June 2000 when the new Goods and Services Tax (GST) was introduced, and advertisements to publicise new government policies involved $60 million of expenditure at the time of the 2001 and 2004 Federal elections (Ward 2003; Young 2006).