

QUT Digital Repository:
<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/>



Bruns, Axel (2008) *Citizen Journalism in the 2007 Australian Federal Election*.
eJournalist: A Refereed Media Journal, 8(1). pp. 75-89.

© Copyright 2008 ejournalism.au.com, Faculty of Informatics and
Communication, Central Queensland University

Citizen Journalism in the 2007 Australian Federal Election

Dr Axel Bruns
Creative Industries Faculty
Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane, Australia
a.bruns@qut.edu.au

The 2007 Australian federal election campaign ought to be remembered for a number of reasons – as only the second time that a sitting Prime Minister lost his seat, as the first time for many younger voters to experience a change in government, and as completing the Labor party domination of territory, state, and federal parliaments. Beyond this, however, it must also be seen as marking a transformation of the Australian mediasphere, towards a substantially greater role for online and citizen media forms – a trend also observed in the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign, but here, with its own, uniquely Australian inflection.

Here as there, such transformations did not arise out of the blue, of course – long-established news and commentary blogs from *Road to Surfdom* to *John Quiggin* had gained some prominence already, and public intellectual and citizen journalism sites from *On Line Opinion* to *Crikey* have been instrumental in developing an alternative public sphere for those who sought them out. The potential of such developments had also been well recognised by some key institutions in the media and journalism industries – *Crikey* was sold to corporate media interests in 2005, *Road to Surfdom*'s Tim Dunlop accepted a position in *News.com.au*'s line-up of opinion blogs, and *ABC Online* gradually developed a range of experiments in citizen media, including expanded discussion and commentary functions for its readers and a number of blog-style opinion sections involving staff and guest writers.

2007 has seen a further broadening of citizen journalism approaches to the coverage of Australian federal politics, however, and it is possible to point to signs of a marked impact on the Australian mediasphere of such extended citizen involvement in political coverage, debate, discussion, and deliberation.

Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism in this context in the first place describes what Herbert Gans depicted as a “second tier” of media organisations, complementing the mainstream media and

each reporting on news to specific, fairly homogeneous audiences. ... Their news organisations would have to be small [for reasons of cost]. They would devote themselves primarily to reanalysing and reinterpreting news gathered by the central media – and the wire services – for their audiences, adding their own commentary and backing these up with as much original reporting, particularly to support bottom-up, representative, and service news, as would be financially feasible. (318)

Gans's second tier describes much of the reality of citizen journalism, from news-related blogs to more elaborate, community-based sites, in Australia and beyond. It acts primarily as a watchdog and corrective for the mainstream – its participants act as gatewatchers (Bruns, *Gatewatching*), observing and analysing what material passes through the publication gates of the journalism industry and other ‘official’ sources, and highlighting interesting and relevant news for their own communities.

On these community sites, this material is then examined, analysed, and critiqued, placed in the context of other reports and further background information, tested for bias and inaccuracy, and debated at length from a variety of viewpoints. This process relies not on the abilities of a small number of staff journalists, but is instead crowdsourced to the community of participants, each of whom may contribute only a small, “random act of journalism” (Lasica 71), but in combination generate a diverse, multiperspectival form of news coverage – provided the community itself is large and diverse enough. Participants in such sites thus take up a hybrid role as both user and producer of content – they become *producers* (Bruns, *Blogs*).

Over time, however, where such produsage-based forms of citizen journalism have proven to be successful both in generating quality news coverage and in attracting sizeable communities of users, they have been able to transcend the second tier of Gans's model and

have established themselves as key news sources in their own right. This is the case for example for the South Korean news site *OhmyNews*, which relies on the combined efforts of some 20,000 citizen journalists as well as a group of professional staff editors. *OhmyNews* has become the central news source on the progressive side of Korean politics (outgoing president Roh granted his first interview to the publication, in a snub to conservative mainstream media), and in doing so has exchanged a role merely on the perimeter of the South Korean mediasphere for one as opinion leader; it has even developed subsidiary sites in English and Japanese (even if the Japanese site appears to have failed to live up to its parent).

Such developments should be profoundly disturbing for mainstream media organisations, as they indicate that it may ultimately be impossible to confine citizen journalism to a second-tier status, and that it is feasible for its sites to compete with the mainstream without adopting mainstream journalistic practices altogether (see Bruns, “Gatewatching, Gatecrashing”). At the same time, these developments provide hope for national mediaspheres – like Australia’s – where current journalistic standards leave room for improvement.

Citizen Journalism in Australia: Four Case Studies

In the Australian context, no site comparable to *OhmyNews* exists as yet; this, however, should be seen less as an indication of the benign and satisfactory nature of Australian mainstream media than of the overall role of politics in Australian society – especially when compared to a country such as Korea, divided by war and the last remnants of the Iron Curtain, and living with the ongoing threat of a nuclear crisis. The so far relatively low-key nature of citizen journalism in Australia may well be attributed to an overall apathy towards politics and political parties in the electorate – an apathy which appears to have subsided to some extent only during the unofficial and official phases of the federal election campaign of 2007.

The subsidence of this apathy towards political debate and involvement can be charted through a number of case studies, ranging from the well-established leftist group blog *Larvatus Prodeo* to the surprisingly popular *Possums Pollytics*, and beyond these to new ventures emerging into this climate: to sites such as *Youdecide2007* and *ABC Online*’s blogs. In examining these sites, however, it also remains important to keep in mind the special nature of the 2007 election year – questions about the long-term sustainability of such sites, especially during quieter political times, must also be considered.

Policy Analysis for PJs: Larvatus Prodeo

Left-of-centre group blog *Larvatus Prodeo* can be seen perhaps as a quintessential example for the mainstream of Australian political blogs. Founded by Brisbane sociologist Mark Bahnisch and involving about a dozen regular contributors, *LP* regularly appears as a central site for the Australian blogosphere (see e.g. Bruns, “Methodologies”): a large number of other blogs (both those of comparable stature to *LP* itself, and those which engage with political matters only occasionally) frequently link to, discuss, and follow on from what has been covered there, while bloggers contributing to the site also follow up posts made on other key Australian and overseas blogs. This can be described as a form of gatewatching in its own right, and serves to further strengthen ties of recognition and cooperation within the domestic blogosphere, often to the point that extended conversations between bloggers are conducted through a series of interlinked posts on their respective Websites.

Larvatus Prodeo contributors also conduct gatewatching of a more conventional form, however, by observing, analysing, and critiquing the information which becomes available in mainstream news publications and from government and other official sources. Notably, contrary to more basic gatewatcher sites, which focus mainly on identifying interesting material elsewhere as a means to kick-start a discussion in commentaries attached to their original post, *LP* writers frequently combine this gatewatching work with substantial original material, thereby transcending a line from pure gatewatching to public intellectualism and community deliberation on political topics. It is this advance beyond a mere highlighting of third-party material (or beyond what the proprietor of U.S. citizen journalism site *Kuro5hin*, Rusty Foster, has called “mindless link propagation”), alongside the quality of the material presented on *LP*, which is responsible for the site’s status in the Australian blogosphere.

Larvatus Prodeo's success and longevity amongst Australian political blogs are due mostly to its consistency, then – much like any other media product, the site addresses the needs of a specific section of the audience, and does so without much experimentation. Indeed, even when the site was forced offline by persistent spamming in the final weeks of the 2007 election campaign, with contributors and users switching to a back-up site on a Wordpress.com server during most of November and December, content publication and community interaction at what was called *Larvatus Prodeo in Exile* continued virtually unchanged. While underlining the resiliency of the site and its committed userbase, this also points to a likely limitation for its further development: *LP* is, and remains, quintessentially a political commentary blog, and while some of its contributors (most notably founder Bahnisch, who also serves as contributor to *On Line Opinion*, *New Matilda*, and *Crikey*) have gained additional status as pundits and commentators beyond *LP* itself, no such avenues for transcending the Gansian second tier appear to be open to *Larvatus Prodeo*.

While this is relatively unproblematic for *Larvatus Prodeo* itself, which is likely to continue as it exists today for some time to come, it does mean that the site should not be expected to gain a substantially larger audience over time, even in spite of its frequently highly insightful political commentary. It provides a complement and corrective to mainstream punditry, therefore, only to the extent that audiences stumble upon it accidentally, or already possess the participatory media literacy and enthusiasm to deliberately seek it out – this could be seen to further broaden the divide between the politically more and less well-informed. For the U.K. context, but translating well to Australia, Stephen Coleman has described this divide as a continuum between the extremes of news-addicted “political junkies” (PJs) and politically apathetic *Big Brother* watchers (BBs) – this does not pick on BBs as such (fans of *Australian Idol* or many other similar shows would substitute just as well), but simply points out that while many BBs are clearly deeply involved in following the show and voting for their favourite housemates, they are nowhere near as committed to their electoral choices in the political contest.

As Coleman asks,

what is at risk if the uncomfortable chasm between the engaged and the disenchanting is left unreconciled? Democracy is ultimately unsustainable when the *demos* is estranged from it. ... A strategy for liberating political democracy from its current cultural ghetto requires a new conception of two-way accountability; a creative and exciting use of the new technologies of interactivity; and the nurturing of genuine respect between PJs and BBs. (756-758)

Larvatus Prodeo users as well as its contributors must certainly be seen as situated substantially further towards the PJ end of the continuum than towards the BB end. However much the PJ/BB model may simplify the true complexity of Australian political participation, this much remains true: *LP*, and many other sites like it, serve a constituency already deeply involved in the political process, and does little to increase political participation across the continuum.

Pros and Amateurs: Psephology at Possums Pollytics

Indeed, for a citizen journalism site to achieve even broad recognition in the wider Australian populace currently still requires the willing or unwilling participation of a mainstream media organisation. This has certainly proven true for what was perhaps the best-renowned political blog of 2007 in Australia (and simultaneously one of the least likely topical blogs to reach a wide audience): the psephologist blog *Possums Pollytics*. Operated by the pseudonymous Possum Comitatus, a Queensland-based scientist specialising in psephology (the statistical analysis of election trends and results), *PP* offered a running commentary on opinion poll results and cross-tabulated these with other sociodemographic information as available from a variety of sources.

While in its own right, this information may have appealed only to a handful of cognoscenti, it was the positioning of *Possums Pollytics* (and a small number of fellow travellers, including for example *The Poll Bludger*, *OzPolitics.info*, and *Mumble*) as a lone voice opposed to the mainstream press's supposedly commonsensical interpretations of polling trends which gradually attracted a larger audience. Indeed, for many Australians following the then still undeclared election campaign, it would have been only the events

surrounding an editorial in *The Australian's* on 12 July 2007 which drew their attention to the psephologist blogs. Evidently exasperated by the blogs' persistent criticism of *The Australian's* habitually partisan, pro-Coalition interpretations of the polls, that day the paper published an extraordinary article openly attacking bloggers and other "sheltered academics and failed journalists who would not get a job on a real newspaper" (*The Australian*, 12 July 2007), ostensibly for daring to voice their disagreement with *The Australian's* own journalists' and pundits' reporting on the political mood of the electorate as expressed in the polls. Understood to have been authored by the paper's editor-in-chief, Chris Mitchell, the article denounces grassroots online commentators as "out of touch with ordinary views", and culminates in the remarkable statement that "unlike Crikey, we understand Newspoll because we own it". (A later article by the newspaper's political editor Dennis Shanahan in turn departed from this position, and appeared altogether to dismiss the opinion polling conducted by Newspoll and other organisations as generally unreliable.)

Adding further controversy, when *News.com.au's* lone leftist blogger-pundit, Tim Dunlop (the operator of popular blog *Road to Surfdom*, recruited from the blogosphere to write for the *News.com.au* site) posted an article critiquing *The Australian's* editorial, that article was removed from the site within hours of publication – but rather than silencing the debate, that retraction served only to highlight *The Australian's* inability to cope with grassroots criticism of its journalistic standards. (Adding insult to injury, a watchful commentator at *Larvatus Prodeo* reposted Dunlop's article in full almost immediately upon its removal from *News.com.au*.) Widespread coverage of these events throughout the blogosphere and in other online publications, as well as the exposure gained through *The Australian's* editorial itself, would have brought substantial numbers of new users to *Possums Pollytics* and other psephologist blogs.

The irony that – while citizen journalists are often depicted as amateurs attempting to do the work of professionals – it was professional journalists, but manifestly amateur psephologists, who were criticising professional election analysts should not be ignored in the present case. Indeed, the case of *Possums Pollytics* provides ample support for veteran blogger-journalist Dan Gillmor's well-known statement that "my readers know more than I do" (vi): for virtually any topic in the news, opinion polling and election speculation included, it is now possible to find bloggers and citizen journalists specialising in that field and providing deeper insights than is possible for a journalist operating under the pressures of the modern newsroom.

Given these pressures (of available staff hours and resources, and other considerations), news analysis, in particular, is indeed likely to move further away from the core duties of journalists, and towards those specialising in the topics under analysis. Specialist bloggers and citizen journalists outside of the mainstream industry may be better placed to conduct a considered analysis of available information; this was evident in the case of *Possums Pollytics* especially in his in-depth evaluation of the "OzTrack 33" report which had been compiled for the Liberal Party campaign strategists, and was subsequently leaked to *Crikey* (Possum Comitatus, "Capitulation"). With responses to the "OzTrack 33" leak in the mainstream press limited to a number of relatively superficial reports focussing chiefly on a characterisation of then-PM John Howard as "old and dishonest" in the report (and in this building on the Australian Associated Press newswire story which first reported the leak), or picking out a few other juicy quotes, only *Possums Pollytics* (and *Crikey*, where the story co-published) offered a more insightful reading of the report, and included key graphs from the pollsters' document.

"Oz Track 33" should be seen here only as a particularly salient example for a wider trend; *Possums Pollytics* performed similarly strongly against the mainstream press in its day-to-day analysis of opinion polls as it did in this case. Here, too, journalists frequently focussed only on the most obvious, most basic facts (minute shifts in two-party preferred percentages, or Howard's continuing good performance in the electorally meaningless 'preferred Prime Minister' rating), while omitting crucial information about error margins from their stories, failing to demonstrate any understanding of the impact of polling methodologies on eventual poll results, and conveniently ignoring their own polling predictions when these became no longer sustainable (that is, when, one by one, the "end of the honeymoon" for Kevin Rudd, the "budget bounce" following the federal budget, the "narrowing" of polling margins after the official beginning of the election campaign, or any impact from various perceived scandals failed to impact on opinion poll results).

In marked contrast to such amateur psephologists, Possum Comitatus and his fellow bloggers offered their readers a virtual masterclass in psephology, providing detailed analyses of polling data as well as background information about margins of error, polling methodologies and their respective biases, and the track records of leading Australian pollsters. Towards the end of the election campaign, even the mainstream press finally began to accept that they had been bested by these professionals acting as citizen journalists: gradually, information about margins of error (long called for by the pseph-bloggers) did appear in news reports, and one journalist writing for Brisbane's *Courier-Mail* even broke ranks with the general antipathy towards the psephologists in News Ltd. publications, and substantially used *Possum Pollytics* and similar blogs as sources for a story on the polls (Atkins).

The work of blogs such as *Possums Pollytics* can be seen as reaching out across the PJ/BB divide, then: it has made the intricate details of opinion polling palatable to a wider audience. This is evident from readers' comments on these sites themselves, and on other blogs and Websites which discussed the rise to prominence of psephology. One reader comment at the ABC's "Club Bloggery" series covering the election is representative for many others in saying that "I believe that Possum and Bryan at Ozpolitics.info have given me more honest and concise information about this year's political climate than all of the other media websites put together" (qtd. in Bruns *et al.*, "Blogging"). That said, as noted earlier, even these professional blogs continue to rely on exposure – good or bad – in the mainstream media if they are to develop a broader readership; and while popular interest in psephology may once again subside now that the election has taken place, these bloggers' strong performance during the campaign has made it more likely that mainstream journalism will draw on their work in providing longer-term analysis of electoral trends in the future.

Politics Where It Matters: Youdecide2007

While *Larvatus Prodeo* and *Possums Pollytics* are constructed around specific intellectual interests and pursuits, the election-year project *Youdecide2007.org* (not to be confused with News Ltd.'s election site *You Decide 2007*, or similarly-named sites in the United States covering the presidential primaries) takes a very different approach to its attempt to foster Australian citizen journalism. The first phase of a three-year ARC Linkage research project into participatory journalism and citizen engagement in partnership with SBS, The National Forum, Cisco Systems, and the Brisbane Institute¹, *Youdecide2007* employed a hyperlocal methodology to its election coverage: it provided contributors with the tools and platform to cover their local electoral races for a wider audience. This is particularly appropriate to the Australian electoral system, which (for the lower house) ultimately breaks down into 150 individual contests for local electorates.

Youdecide2007 contributors were encouraged to interview their local candidates (including but not limited to those of the major parties), conduct vox-pops with local voters, and report on the issues central to their own electorate; these reports were posted on the site in text, audio, and video format. Additional material, some of which transcended individual electorates, was also prepared by YD staffers, who also appeared on a number of state and national radio broadcasts and in a weekly election talk show on Brisbane's community channel *Briz31*.

While YD had a relatively short run-up to the election, it nonetheless managed to attract citizen journalists in roughly half of all Australian electorates, including many which had been largely overlooked by election coverage in the national press. The site's most active contributor, in fact, Kevin Rennie, reported from the remote Western Australian electorate of Kalgoorlie (which also holds a distinction as the world's geographically largest electorate). This placed it well as a hyperlocal complement to the national coverage of both industrial journalism and topical citizen journalism, and enabled it to cover stories and feature candidates otherwise excluded from journalistic coverage.

In a number of cases, indeed, such reporting became newsworthy on a wider level: perhaps *Youdecide2007*'s best-known story was an interview with the Liberal member for the Queensland seat of Herbert, Peter Lindsay, who blamed young people's "financial illiteracy" for the credit crunch experienced by many younger voters. "I remember my own case," he

¹ The author is one of the Chief Investigators for this project, alongside Terry Flew and Stuart Cunningham (all QUT).

continued. "We sat on milk crates in the lounge room until we could afford chairs. We had makeshift shelves to put ornaments on and so on, but you did that in those days. You waited until you could – you didn't live beyond your means and you didn't try to keep up with the Joneses. Things were more responsible" (Lindsay interviewed by Wilson, "Interview"). These comments also became the basis for a question in parliament to PM John Howard by Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd, who asked, "apart from the milk crate solution, what is your plan to deal with Australia's housing affordability crisis or is it simply to blame the states?" (Wilson, "Youdecide2007").

Though extraordinary, this incident highlights the potential inherent in hyperlocal and other forms of citizen-journalistic news reporting, especially where citizen journalists are able to build on a solid set of resources and tools for their work. In a political context, it makes elected representatives and rival candidates more directly accountable to reporters who act in a double role as both citizens and journalists – and this similarly applies for fields other than politics as well –, and by relying on a broader community of citizen journalists, it is able to uncover a wider range of stories than is accessible to the limited workforce of the journalism industry; some of these stories, in turn, may prove to be of significance beyond the local environment, but even where they are of interest to locals only, such citizen journalism offers an important addition to the material available from the mainstream press.

In spite of such achievements, *Youdecide2007* cannot be described as an unqualified success; it serves in the first place as a proof of concept for further hyperlocal citizen journalism experiments. This is hardly surprising – most produsage sites and projects in citizen journalism and elsewhere take years to generate a sustainable, committed community with shared values and protocols, while *YD* operated for just under three months between its launch and the election date. This brief pre-election lifespan left little time for the site to establish a reputation which would have allowed its contributors' work to be picked up more regularly by mainstream news outlets (including project partner SBS), so that most of the mainstream media coverage of the site occurred through third-party mentions (as in the case of Kevin Rudd's 'crate-gate' question in federal parliament) or through reports which focussed on the *Youdecide2007* project itself, rather than on individual political stories published on the site by its citizen journalists.

However, *Youdecide2007* offers one model for transcending the Gansian two-tier system and Coleman's PJ/BB divide. By engaging in original reporting which fills a gap left open by the national news media, hyperlocal citizen journalism sites are able to position themselves outside of such frameworks altogether: they operate from a third place which is neither necessarily in opposition to nor supportive of the mainstream journalism industry, and neither limits itself to analysis and commentary only nor avoids extended discussions of topics of relevance to its contributors. A well-established network of committed citizen journalists operating across the nation would appear to be able to make a significant contribution to Australian journalism, and it is likely that further phases in the ARC Linkage project which produced *Youdecide2007* will pursue such possibilities.

Watching the Watchers: The ABC Online Blogs

The development of such new approaches to journalistic coverage also depends on favourable responses from the established journalism industry, however – and in light of considerable apathy (and, at times, open antipathy) towards citizen journalism amongst many commercial news operators in the country, it is unsurprising that Australia's public service broadcasters so far appear to have made the furthest inroads into working with citizen journalists or developing their own quasi-citizen journalism projects. (This experience mirrors that in various other countries, chiefly perhaps in the United Kingdom, where the BBC has begun to openly invite contributions from its users.)

As part of its election coverage, *ABC Online* has operated a number of blog-style projects, including its "Opinion" and "Unleashed" sections of invited contributions from a diverse range of commentators, its "Unleashed" *YouTube* video channel, and *The Poll Vault*, a blog written by a number of its online staffers, as well as a *Rural Election Blog* and chief election analyst *Antony Green's Election Blog* (Green was also an occasional commenter on his fellow psephologists' blogs *Possum Pollytics* and *The Poll Bludger*).

Though operating under a pre- rather than post-moderation policy which slowed the free flow of conversation, many of these blogs were open to user commentary and feedback – a crucial component of citizen journalism models, which operate under a produsage

philosophy that sees even the published story as an inherently unfinished artefact which is open to further improvement through a process of discussion and debate. (In keeping with *ABC Online* operating policy, comments have been removed now, however.) Such user feedback opportunities may continue to be seen as risky by conventional journalism operators, but are crucial to attracting a community of regular readers to blogs and similar citizen journalism sites.

During the election, the ABC blogs were useful on the one hand in opening up the news process to their users; they offered a space to publish not only stories about the election promises from either side of the political contest, but also about the campaigning efforts themselves. On the other hand, they also provided useful pointers to external sites with additional information – many posts on the “Opinion” and “Unleashed” sections, for example, as well as in *The Poll Vault* and other blogs, offered links to relevant outside blogs (frequently including those of the psephologists) and thereby provided users with further context and background material to complement *ABC Online*’s own coverage. Frequently, such sites also offered further opportunity for readers to discuss and debate the election campaign, of course – thus providing at least a link to spaces for the open and controversial debate which may have been deemed too difficult to policy within the operational frameworks of *ABC Online* itself.

In this context, it is important to note that the Websites of the ABC and similar national broadcasters and major media organisations necessarily operate under different constraints than do the blogs and community sites of citizen journalism, at least at present. Where sites with established, committed communities of users (from *Larvatus Prodeo* through *Possums Pollytics* through to vast collaborative projects such as *Slashdot* or *Wikipedia*) are now usually in a position to allow the community itself to police effectively against disruptions and vandalism, the same is not true for *ABC Online*, *BBC Online*, and their various counterparts. At least for now, the absence of efficient self-moderation tools, and the very obvious presence of editors and moderators in the discussion fora, largely prevents the emergence of self-policing community protocols; additionally, due to their status as the online outlets of nationally recognised news organisations, such sites also constitute prime targets for vandals and trouble-makers (that said, the same is true for *Wikipedia* and other key community-based sites). A recent speech by Peter Horrocks, head of the BBC newsroom, which discusses the problem of how much user commentary to allow in a *BBC Online* forum debating the assassination of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto offers valuable insights into this dilemma.

General-purpose news sites such as those of the BBC and ABC may never be able to develop a ‘native’ community that is sufficiently stable and self-aware to allow their editors to devolve a substantial component of their moderation duties to the community itself. Increased collaboration with citizen journalists within and beyond the *ABC Online* news and opinion environment could help to overcome such limitations. Overall, what emerges from such projects is an opportunity to transform the Gansian two-tier system into a multi-layered model. Here, the ‘riskier’ elements of citizen journalism (such as reporting on hyperlocal events and specialist topics, which limited staffing makes difficult to verify through means other than a community-based, crowdsourced fact-checking process, or unmoderated or community-moderated discussion, debate, and deliberation) are conducted by citizen journalism organisations that operate at arms’ length, but perhaps with institutional support from the mainstream news organisation. Quality content emerging from these environments, as identified by staffers observing the citizen journalism process or highlighted through a community-based ratings system, could then be taken up in hybrid, *OhmyNews*-style, editor-assisted citizen journalism sections within *ABC Online* and similar sites, with the best and most important material from there further filtering through to the conventionally edited mainstream news. Similarly, it should be expected that many mainstream news stories would filter through to the internal and external citizen journalism sites for further discussion, evaluation, and development, thus completing a feedback loop that may lead to the emergence of follow-up stories which may again filter through to the mainstream news.

Conclusion: Beyond the Great Divide

Citizen journalism in Australia remains in a relatively embryonic state, especially compared to the status it has now achieved in the United States. The 2007 federal election marked a milestone for its development, much as the 2004 U.S. election did; there is no automatism

which demands that Australian citizen journalism should follow a similar trajectory to that of its American counterpart, nor do the markedly different political systems make such a development overly likely (a comparison with the U.K. experience may be more appropriate, in fact). Perhaps the most significant challenge for citizen journalism in this country is to overcome its status as a pastime for those already situated on the PJ end of Coleman's societal continuum, and to develop a substantially broader demographic basis; by offering a space for sustained political discussion and deliberation, by making the science of psephology accessible to average citizens (and, one is tempted to add, even to journalists), by pursuing a hyperlocal model which allows citizens to engage with the news where it matters to them the most, and by providing a bridge from the imprint of the national broadcaster to the community spaces of news produsage, respectively, the projects discussed here may each contribute their part towards this aim, and in combination open further avenues for the development and deployment of new journalistic models involving representatives of both industry and citizenry.

Indeed, as a result of such projects, another divide – that between professionals and amateurs – can also be seen to be closing: while in their struggle to maintain their superiority in interpreting the opinion poll results, professional journalists were ultimately cast in the role of hapless amateurs attempting to criticise professional psephologists, in many other cases the distinctions are even less clear-cut. The professionals and experts publishing their commentary on *ABC Online*'s blogs and opinion sections, though not trained as journalists, are ultimately better placed to provide insight than many of the journalists with whom they work, while some of the commentators on *Larvatus Prodeo* and elsewhere have now assumed dual roles as bloggers and writers for other media outlets. Further, because of the hyperlocal nature of their concerns, the citizen contributors to *Youdecide2007* often simply have no counterparts in the industry, yet make use of many of the tools and strategies of professional journalists, as these have been made available to them on the site.

The professional/amateur debate which has long been a staple of journalism research is quickly losing its relevance, therefore – and this is now recognised by many journalism scholars and practitioners themselves: British scholar and media commentator Roy Greenslade, for example, has expressed his belief that “though journalism does indeed matter, journalists do not” in a recent article for *The Guardian*, and predicted that “we are surely moving towards a situation in which relatively small ‘core’ staffs will process material from freelancers and/or citizen journalists, bloggers, whatever (and there are many who think this business of ‘processing’ will itself gradually disappear too in an era of what we might call an unmediated media)” (n.pag.).

The journalism we will see in the future, then, is much more likely to operate along the lines of what Leadbeater and Miller have described as a Pro-Am model, and what may be seen in existence already in the hybrid editor-assisted citizen journalism model of *OhmyNews*. This does not mean that either fully ‘professional’ journalism or entirely community-based citizen journalism are likely to disappear any time soon, however – as noted above, both are able to enter into fruitful partnerships with the intermediate models that are likely to emerge between them. As these models emerge and multiply, though, we should expect these ‘pure’ models to be pushed gradually towards either side of the continuum of available journalistic models, with Pro-Am news organisations accounting for an increasing share of the news mediasphere. The future of journalism lies in hybrid models which were only hinted at in some of the sites covering the 2007 Australian federal election.

Acknowledgement

Many thanks to Debra Adams for her feedback on an earlier draft of this paper.

References

- Atkins, Dennis. "Labor to Lose? Don't Bet on It." *Courier-Mail* 26 Sep. 2007. 5 Oct. 2007 <<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,22480941-27197,00.html>>.
- Australian Associated Press. "NSW: Howard 'Old and Dishonest' Secret Lib Party Report Says." *General News* 5 Aug. 2007.
- The Australian*. "History a Better Guide than Bias." 12 July 2007. 10 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,22058640-7583,00.html>>.
- Bruns, Axel. *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.
- . *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
- . "Gatewatching, Gatecrashing: Futures for Tactical News Media." In Megan Boler, ed., *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 2008.
- . "Methodologies for Mapping the Political Blogosphere: An Exploration Using the IssueCrawler Research Tool." *First Monday* 12.5 (May 2007). 7 Jan. 2008 <http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue12_5/bruns/index.html>.
- Bruns, Axel, Jason Wilson, and Barry Saunders. "Blogging outside the Echo Chamber." Club Bloggery. *ABC Online*, 12 Oct. 2007. (The reader response cited here has since been removed from the *ABC Online* site, as part of that site's routine removal of comments after three months.)
- Coleman, Stephen. "A Tale of Two Houses: The House of Commons, the *Big Brother* House and the People at Home." *Parliamentary Affairs* 56.4 (1 Oct. 2003): 733-58.
- Foster, Rusty. "FAQ – Article Submission Questions." *Kuro5hin.org* 2003. 22 Oct. 2004 <<http://www.kuro5hin.org/?op=special;page=article>>.
- Gans, Herbert J. *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Vintage, 1980.
- Gillmor, Dan. "Foreword." In Shane Bowman and Chris Willis. *We Media: How Audiences Are Shaping the Future of News and Information*. Reston, Va.: The Media Center at the American Press Institute, 2003. 21 May 2004 <http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/download/we_media.pdf>.
- Greenslade, Roy. "Why I'm Saying Farewell to the NUJ." *Guardian Unlimited*, Media: Blogs, 25 Oct. 2007. 8 Jan. 2008 <http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/greenslade/2007/10/why_im_saying_farewell_to_the.htm>.
- Horrocks, Peter. "Value of Citizen Journalism." *BBC News: The Editors* 7 Jan. 2008. 8 Jan. 2008 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2008/01/value_of_citizen_journalism.html>.
- Larvatus Prodeo*. Repost of Tim Dunlop's censored *News.com.au* blog post by contributor Darryl Rosin, in comments to: Mark Bahnisch. "Government Gazette Fights Back." 12 July 2007. 12 July 2007 <<http://larvatusprodeo.net/2007/07/11/government-gazette-fights-back/#comment-384146>>.
- Lasica, J.D. "Blogs and Journalism Need Each Other." *Nieman Reports* Fall 2003: 70-4. 4 June 2004 <<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/03-3NRfall/V57N3.pdf>>.
- Leadbeater, Charles, and Paul Miller. *The Pro-Am Revolution: How Enthusiasts Are Changing Our Economy and Society*. London: Demos, 2004. 2 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/proameconomy>>.
- Possum Comitatus. "Capitulation." *Possums Pollytics* 7 Sep. 2007. 8 Jan. 2008 <<http://possumcomitatus.wordpress.com/2007/09/07/capitulation/>>.
- Shanahan, Dennis. "Polling Accuracy a Matter of Opinion." *The Australian* 4 Sep. 2007. 5 Oct. 2007 <http://blogs.theaustralian.news.com.au/dennisshanahan/index.php/theaustralian/comments/polling_accuracy_a_matter_of_opinion/>.
- Wilson, Jason. "Interview with Peter Lindsay MP (LP, Herbert)." *Youdecide2007* 10 Sep. 2007. 8 Jan. 2008 <<http://www.youdecide2007.org/content/view/135/101/>>.
- . "Youdecide2007 Influences National Debate!" *Youdecide2007* 19 Sep. 2007. 8 Jan. 2008 <<http://www.youdecide2007.org/content/view/168/>>.