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## The value of networked journalism

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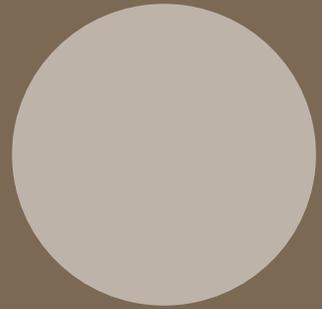
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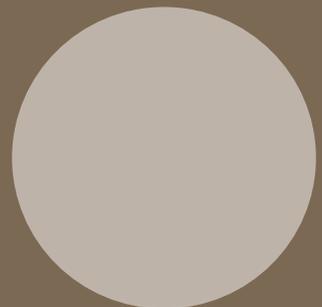
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# THE VALUE OF **NETWORKED JOURNALISM**

*by Charlie Beckett*



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# INTRODUCTION

## Networked journalism has arrived

The British General Election of 2010 has made it absolutely clear that networked journalism has arrived. The journalism about the campaign, the result and its consequences has been a remarkable combination of online and mainstream, professional and citizen media. On Friday 8 May the BBC website alone had more than 11.5 million unique users and 100 million page views. The Internet did not just add to the coverage, it changed it. We now have a political news media that has audience interactivity, participation and connectivity built into every aspect. And it works. This was a uniquely exciting and interesting election for political reasons, but the new news media helped drive the increased engagement. The question now is whether that added value can be produced in the future and in other areas of journalism.

This report is published at the Polis/BBC College of Journalism 'Value of Networked Journalism' conference on June 11th. It is based on four years of activity at Polis, the journalism think-tank in the Media and Communications Department at the London School of Economics. In addition, Polis researchers have also interviewed a range of networked journalists especially for this report. It updates ideas first expressed in my book about networked journalism: *SuperMedia: Saving Journalism So It Can Save The World* (Blackwell 2008). It follows up on the statement on networked journalism at the 2009 World Economic Forum's Global Council which declared that:

There is a need to reconstruct journalism and its relationship with the citizen and society. Public engagement is transforming journalism, offering an historic opportunity to create unprecedented increased value.<sup>1</sup>

By 'Networked Journalism' I mean a synthesis of traditional news journalism and the emerging forms of participatory media enabled by Web 2.0 technologies such as mobile phones, email, websites, blogs, micro-blogging, and social networks. Networked Journalism allows the public to be involved in every aspect of journalism production through crowd-sourcing, interactivity, hyper-linking, user-generated content and forums. It changes the creation of news from being linear and top-down to a collaborative process. Not all news production will be particularly networked. Not many citizens want to be journalists for much of their time. But the principles of networking are increasingly practiced in all forms of news media.

The TV debates were the big 'new' media story of the UK 2010 campaign. They reminded us that television is still the dominant channel for political information and the biggest media platform in general. Live event television is probably the media format that delivers most impact as it happens. However, the TV election debates in 2010 had appeal partly because of their novelty and also because they were different to conventional broadcast news: they were a direct channel to the voter, in comparison with the spin, packaging and partisan bias of so much traditional political media. Those debates were just the tip of an iceberg of networked journalism which helped create a vastly increased space of political conversation between voters, often reacting to and with mainstream media. Across the sectors we saw traditional political journalism becoming networked.

This report does not pretend to be a comprehensive survey. The examples are not supposed to be the only or best instances of networked journalism. They are a selection that we hope shows the increasing effectiveness and diversity of the new forms of news production. When I wrote about networked journalism in *SuperMedia* it was still a relatively fresh concept, but within two years it has become ubiquitous.

This report is designed to stimulate discussion about the state of journalism and to encourage investment in the future of new forms of news production. Above all, it is an attempt to get journalists, citizens and policy-makers to think about what journalism is for. What is its use to society, the economy and the individual? What is its value?

This report and our conference is an attempt to move the debate on. We are in the middle of a sustained crisis for journalism. The global recession has accentuated the business problems for the news media industry in the UK, much of Europe and America. Of course, it is booming in many parts of the world such as India and China and even Africa. However, underpinning the financial problems for journalism is the transformation wrought by digital technologies and the Internet. These will impact upon the news media everywhere eventually. They provide unprecedented opportunities to create and reach new markets and to enhance production. However, these same technologies have brought destructive competition and drastically reduced certain revenue streams.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.weforum.org/pdf/GAC09/council/future\\_of\\_journalism/](http://www.weforum.org/pdf/GAC09/council/future_of_journalism/)

'The internet did not just add to the coverage, it changed it'

## 'Networking with the audience also enhances breaking news-gathering'

This report does not deal directly with the business model. It does not seek to revisit the well-worn debates such as the 'Future of Newspapers'. Instead of asking how we preserve journalism or sustain the journalism business it will ask: 'what is the product and who wants it?' Then we can ask what is the best way to produce it. If we know how the new journalism is valued then we can persuade people to fund it.

Technological and other deep social shifts mean there is no way that journalism can avoid radical change. This seems deeply threatening. Much of what was there will disappear. Emily Bell's prediction of 'carnage' is being realised<sup>2</sup>. The opportunities, however, are much greater. This paper will set out how journalism in the UK is already well on the way to adapting to the change. It will argue that Networked Journalism is already happening and that where it is done well, journalism thrives and adapts. Perhaps it needs to go much further, more quickly.

We will show practical examples of innovation both on the margins and at the heart of the news media. We will also highlight the challenges and the limitations of networked journalism. We will try to set this in a conceptual framework that seeks to define the quality of what is happening and, therefore, how that value might be created beyond these case studies.

Firstly, we will look at the 'live blogging' phenomenon which exemplifies many of the qualities of networked journalism. It is not a brand new format, but it took centre stage for some online news media organisations during recent disasters such as the Haiti earthquake and most of all during the British election. The BBC's live blog and *The Guardian's* Election blog both take the basic agency news ticker-tape concept and use the hyper-textuality of Web 2.0 to turn it into a hub for breaking stories that combines a diverse range of sources to make a wider, deeper and more engaging narrative. It transforms the very idea of what news can be. Then we will look at an individual journalist, *The Times's* Religious Affairs Correspondent Ruth Gledhill. Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger said she was an 'inspired example' of what he called 'layer reporting':

'the most specialist material [is] in the blog (linked to yet more specialist source material on the web – and the most general material in newsprint.) The paper will carry a paragraph on a controversial sermon by the Bishop of Chichester. Gledhill will explain its significance on her blog, and link to the full sermon for those who want the source. Readers can then debate the text on the blog and follow other links. It's called through-editing.'<sup>3</sup>

It would have been easy to have gone then to *The Guardian* itself for any number of examples of networked journalism. Rusbridger's own paper has pioneered creative online engagement with its readers and innovative multi-platform journalism. It has invited entrepreneurs to use *Guardian* content for reuse<sup>4</sup> and launched its own readers' 'club'<sup>5</sup>. Instead we examine how a much more traditionally-minded newspaper, *The Telegraph*, has embraced bloggers and attempted to create an online community that compliments the work of its state-of-the-art digital newsroom.

Networking with the audience also enhances breaking news-gathering. We hear from the Sky newsroom about how online resources are helping to sharpen their journalism. The TV screen remains the priority but the full range of social media is deployed by all journalists to extend their news-gathering and build viewer attention.

Then we look at the other end of the journalistic spectrum and see how networking can contribute to local journalism. It is the foundation of the news media and yet regional and local newspapers especially have been most threatened by the loss of resources. Richard Ayers from Trinity Mirror outlines what he sees as a revival in digital networks while Will Perrin makes the case for the community-based activist hyper-local media.

Finally, we turn to a high-profile example of independent Internet journalism. *Mumsnet* is famous for providing a novel platform for politicians but its real value has been in creating a self-governed network of forums around parenting issues. With its tiny staff it connects hundreds of thousands of parents to talk and report on real lives and opinions.

At the end we try to work out what is different about networked journalism and why it creates value. How far and how deeply has the production process changed? We are still in a transitional phase but there have already seen quite serious shifts in newsroom culture as well as practice. However, there is no inevitability about how thorough-going or successful the transformation will be.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.charliebeckett.org/?p=864>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/jan/25/cudlipp-lecture-alan-rusbridger>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/open-platform>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/extra>

Networked journalism is creating – or some would say reflecting – a new relationship between the journalist and the story and the public. Newsrooms are no longer fortresses for the Fourth Estate, they are hubs at the centre of endless networks. News is no longer a product that flops onto your doormat or springs into life at the flick of a remote control. It is now a non-linear process, a multi-directional interaction. And journalism is no longer a self-contained manufacturing industry. It is now a service industry that creates and connects flows of information, analysis and commentary.

Networked journalism is a valuable enterprise. In a world of complex economic crisis, climate change, migration and conflict we desperately need better journalism. In an age of increasing education and individualism there is a growing demand for more open, accessible and informative news media. People like journalism so much they are prepared to help create it themselves – for free. This report is an attempt to highlight how we can deliver that through a journalism that values the public as well as the public value of what we do.

## CHAPTER I

### Live blogging: The networked front page

Live blogging represents many of the characteristics that we will look at in more detail throughout this report. The way it changes reporting is typical of networked journalism. It is a concentrated dose of participatory, interactive and connected news media, facilitated by a professional, mainstream media journalist or team. It could become the new online 'front page'.

Live blogging has always been a staple of citizen online reporting. People go to conferences or meetings and tap away on lap tops and more recently, on phones. Sometimes they live-stream video via sites such as Qik.com and post photos on platforms like Yfrog.com. Media analysts like Paul Bradshaw have shown how this offers more varied and direct ways of reporting<sup>6</sup>. The journalist moves from a linear, one-off story to a stream of instant witnessing, often combined with background context and analysis as well as public interactivity through comments or email.

This has now gone mainstream especially around major events such as the Icelandic volcanic eruption and the UK election. No-one is suggesting that a live-blogging stream will replace all other coverage. Rather it feeds off and into other reportage. As we shall see with the other sections of this report, the same techniques and principles involved in live-blogging can enhance other forms of journalism.

Live-blogging is a form of mass media but no-one expects a big audience to access a live blog on a continuous basis. The readership figures for BBC's As It Happens live-blogging of Haiti were not astronomical at around 100,000 views per day, but they were significant for what was a difficult story<sup>7</sup>. More importantly, they showed that there was an appetite for a more complex form of coverage. The Haiti live-blog combined simple text updates with video and still photographs. It used material from other platforms such as websites, email and Twitter:

<sup>6</sup> <http://onlinejournalismblog.com/2007/09/17/a-model-for-the-21st-century-newsroom-pt1-the-news-diamond/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8456322.stm>

'The journalist moves from a linear, one-off story to a stream of instant witnessing'

'It is different editorially and in style – there is more freedom to report instant analysis and reaction so it's less editorially restricted'

**1204 Frederic Dupoux tweets:**  
'Everybody is camping in the streets of Port-au-Prince, sleeping under the stars to wake up from an awful nightmare.'

This crowd-sourced material was mixed with quotes from BBC Correspondents, news agencies, governments and NGOs. There were hyper-links to the sources as well as to all the other background information and analysis provided by the BBC itself. This opens up their reporting, according to BBC Online's Russell Smith:

It is different editorially and in style – there is more freedom to report instant analysis and reaction so it's less editorially restricted. It gives people a flavour of what is being fed at the time through the newsroom... and treats the reader as more grown up and more complicit and more sophisticated.<sup>8</sup>

So the reader/viewer had a stream of live narrative combined with access to non-linear data and commentary. Only online live-blogging can provide that diversity of experience. BBC Online's Russell Smith says that they have plans to make this even more rich:

We are planning a more sophisticated version that will include live streaming of pictures or audio and a more multi-layered, direct access for the reader to material. The new version will also allow the reader to interrogate aspects and customise the flow of information to suit them.<sup>9</sup>

*The Guardian* was one of many newspapers to experiment with this format. Andrew Sparrow's live blogging of the election and its aftermath was one of the most successful.<sup>10</sup> Sparrow was able to bring a much more personal perspective combined with his professional experience as a political journalism wonk. When he first started live blogging he attempted to keep it in the third person but soon realised that the format had to be more true to its 'new media' context. So while Sparrow is in effect a conduit for others, he does so in this own voice and with himself (or a colleague) as the blogger persona. The BBC can adopt this more informal posture for live blogging of subjects like football but it attempts to maintain a more depersonalised stance for hard news.

On the *Guardian* live-blog most of the crowd-sourcing from the public is done by using material from social media such as Twitter as well as emails and posted comments from readers. Much of the main news narrative content brings together the *Guardian's* own correspondents and columnists. However, it does much more than aggregate content. It is a platform for journalists to add material that otherwise would never be published. It captures the excitement of covering an event as a journalist and conveys the atmosphere as well:

**11.07am:** My colleague Polly Curtis is in Portcullis House, the main office block for MPs. She's sent me this. There were a load of senior Tories hanging out – Liam Fox, Alan Duncan, Jeremy Hunt- but they've all just scarpered. Apparently, the talks are about to finish. There's a fantastic atmosphere in PCH: lots of speculating MPs having coffee. Keith Simpson has just pointed out that it's 70 years to the day that Churchill formed his WW2 coalition... Labour MPs are more cheerful than you might expect. One tells me best case scenario is a Tory/Lib Dem coalition for a couple of years, taking Britain through the worst of cuts, followed by a reinvigorated Labour government, reclaiming lefties who went Liberal with a new leader. David Cameron has just walked past too. Apparently, he's meeting his MPs in groups of 15 to get them onside for whatever the deal is, even before there is a deal.

This satisfies the public's demand for immediacy while building in reflection, context and a diversity of perspectives. Unlike a TV news channel it allows the reader to control their consumption of the flow of news in a much more proactive way. It also encourages greater transparency. It shares sources and allows the reader to compare and select what they consume. The live-blogger becomes a facilitator rather than a simple gate-keeper to the news. Simultaneously the comments allow a direct feedback loop from the reader to the issues and to the coverage itself. Not all of the latter is entirely complimentary:

Would that be this article? The one with no sources? Is the *Guardian* really quoting its own sourceless article as a source in this piece? I think it is... Make news anyone?

Of course, live blogging is best suited to breaking stories and events. Everything from earthquakes to football matches. However, the principles of live blogging apply to all kinds of networked journalism and the format itself is increasingly becoming the pivotal platform for newsrooms – the new front page. This is partly because it is a great way to drive traffic,

<sup>8</sup> Interview with author, May 2010

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/may/10/general-election-2010-live-blog>

<sup>11</sup> L Chouliaraki (2010) Ordinary witnessing in post-television news: Towards a new moral imagination in L' Chouliaraki (ed) *Self-mediation: Citizenship and New Media*, special issue *Critical Discourse Studies* Vol.7 Nr3

but it is also acting as the signature offering that helps define the editorial brand.

It may also be changing the nature of news itself. LSE Professor Lillie Chouliaraki has suggested that live-blogging, along with other participatory new media formats, are taking us into a world of witnessing that goes beyond mass media print or broadcast news, a kind of post-television age. New formats such as live-blogging create 'structural changes [which] result in replacing the logic of news as story-telling with a logic of news as techno-textual interactivity.'<sup>11</sup> That's networked journalism.

## CHAPTER 2

### The value of connectivity for the networked journalist: Ruth Gledhill

At one level connectivity is the simple fact that the Internet and the hyper-textuality of Web 2.0 allows any journalism to be linked to a network of further information. This provides opportunities to do things that journalism always struggled to do in the past:

- It affords the potential for much greater context.
- It allows for non-linear narratives that can circumvent the limitations of deadlines and editorial space
- It allows interactivity before, during and after production with the audience
- It allows the journalist to work within a complex network of multi-directional flows.

The public and other journalists can originate or add to any story. The journalist can crowd-source gaining information from the public, or they can publish primary texts giving information to the public. It deepens and widens the journalism. But at the centre of this hyper-textuality can be an individual reporter, correspondent or journalist.

One example would be that of a specialist correspondent who also blogs. The post of Religion Correspondent for the London Times' used to be one of the most Establishment fixtures of British journalism. Yet the current incumbent Ruth Gledhill has transformed her impact through networked journalism. It helps her to reflect both the increasing complexity of journalism, but also of her subject.

In addition to her newspaper and online articles she uses the micro-blogging site Twitter. She can promote her work and herself through Twitter but it is clear that it serves as more than just a marketing tool. Gledhill uses Twitter as another portal for her to pick up information, commentary and reaction from the public and experts to stories as they break and develop. She also links through Twitter to the work of a variety of other journalists. At the time

'Web 2.0 allows any journalism to be linked to a network of further information'

## 'All journalists, not just specialist correspondents, need to start thinking of themselves in this way'

'It's now easier to go out of the office and stay in touch. You can have a conversation with someone in America while in tiny little parish in Limerick. This makes for better journalism because you never lose the broader picture.'<sup>13</sup>

of writing she follows and is followed by 3,500 people respectively on Twitter. Her Twitter account is therefore the hub of a rich and varied specialist news network.

In addition she uses her blog to link to primary information that provides vital background material for the often-complex issues she handles. It uses video particularly well to give the reader access to international broadcast news, original interviews and religious groups' own output. Gledhill is aware that this is changing her relationship to her readers in a profound way:

'Breaking the boundary between audiences and journalists helps to increase understanding, and lets audiences go beyond "my interpretation" of a story.'<sup>12</sup>

The interactivity that allows her readers to comment and contribute is not without problems. Initially there was more heat than light in reader comments. Perhaps this is not surprising as religion is notoriously a subject that provokes passionate and often conflicting responses. While the reader contributions have retained their commitment they are becoming more civil. Gledhill says that is because a less one-dimensional approach is what gets attention online: 'Rants don't engage people – passion does.' Gledhill has a particularly informed and concerned audience and the quality of the responses reflects that, assisted by some careful moderation. There is some of the usual vitriol and silliness of anonymous public comments but generally the discourse is relatively intelligent and enlightening.

Another consequence of this connectivity for the individual journalist is that their stories go beyond national boundaries instantly and then stay online 'permanently'. The story that Archbishop Sean Brady was a notary at an event at which two children sworn to secrecy about sexual abuse allegations was reported by the *Sunday Mirror* 10 years ago, but now that it's being brought up again it can have a bigger, broader online life. Rowan Williams' comments on the Irish Catholic Church went around the world immediately after being reported in the UK. But the Internet allows the individual journalist to stay connected says Gledhill:

Gledhill retains a strong sense of her more traditional role as a newspaper journalist. She says that meeting people is still the best way to get new stories. She also insists that she retains overall editorial control and that ultimately the agenda is set by the newspaper not the readers. She also welcomes *The Times'* pay-wall plans as a way of setting some kind of boundary to her work. As she points out, all this extra connectivity takes time and although the Internet increases efficiency and capacity, there are still only 24 hours in a day and she is still just one person.

Gledhill is by no means the only correspondent doing this kind of work. But she uses the institutional capital and the legacy audience of *The Times* combined with her personal and professional presence to create a network that collectively produces more 'quality' journalism than would have been possible working in traditional ways. Perhaps all journalists, not just specialist correspondents, need to start thinking of themselves in this way. It enhances the process and enriches the work.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with POLIS researchers, April 2010

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> Interview with POLIS researchers, April 2010

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

## CHAPTER 3

# The value of an engaged community for news production: Telegraph Online

In May 2007, *The Daily Telegraph* became the first among the mainstream UK broadsheets to allow readers to create their own blogs within their online property. It was the beginning of 'My Telegraph', a community that has now over 60,000 registered users, with something between 10,000 and 15,000 currently actively blogging. 'That was quite innovative then and really has remained so, as no one else has done it', said Kate Day, Communities Editor for Telegraph.co.uk.<sup>14</sup>

'My Telegraph' is one of the key efforts by the Telegraph.co.uk to allow audience participation, alongside comments in selected areas of the website – all the articles in the Comment section and blog posts, and some news features. Marcus Warren, editor of Telegraph.co.uk says it is breaking down barriers:

A blog on MyTelegraph has the same status as anything else we publish, it's just on a different platform. We don't have signposted on the site something that says, 'This was written by someone who is a professionally trained journalist.' The distinction between people who are professionally employed by the company as a full-time writer and others who aren't are beginning to dilute and crack. The whole beauty is that the potential is one of creative flux and out of that something interesting emerges.<sup>15</sup>

Content produced within My Telegraph has been incorporated into the news on special occasions, 'if a reader happens to be at the centre of a news story and also happens to have a My Telegraph blog', says Kate Day. 'There's one guy [Ralph Johnson, also known as "Wise Ralph" on My Telegraph] who was living very close to the Sichuan earthquake, in China, and sent regular updates from the ground and it ended up being picked up by Sky News and BBC. It was quite a remote area and there weren't many reporters there'.

Although there are other examples like that, Day admits that there isn't a standard procedure to feed reader's contributions into the news:

'It's quite a manual process at the moment, so it tends to be a case by case thing. Usually someone who is

deep into the community spots something that might be valuable, newsworthy, and sends them across. They may link to it either as related content in their article or the news front page, or the editor's choice widget. It gets manually added somewhere, wherever is relevant".<sup>16</sup>

Day says the challenge now is to bring journalists and readers closer:

'The difficulty with My Telegraph is that it is a bit of a stand-alone site, it is quite separated from the rest of our journalism. So we are trying to pin that together and then encourage journalists across the organisation to take more of an interest in commenting and using the community in a more engaged way'

The rise in the use of social media by Telegraph journalists is helping to change that relationship. First it was the public relations people using networks such as Twitter to interact with the journalists but it can go further says Day:

'Some of those journalists are now quite used to the idea of talking to the readers. If I can give them better tools to bring that conversation right onto their article pages or get them into My Telegraph, well, the more we can do about that, the better'<sup>17</sup>

Reader engagement works best as an editorial tool in specific cases though, she argues, with specialist correspondents in niche subjects where readers can share technical knowledge or particular personal experience. She has a personal success case: a strong community engaged around photography that follows her personal blog at the Telegraph.co.uk.<sup>18</sup>

In order to enhance reader participation, she is planning to introduce new functionalities to My Telegraph, such as the ability to create groups. The goal is to create an environment where content can be found more easily, not only by users, but also by editors. Building the tools that really make it useful is quite hard. Getting the hard-pressed news staff to cooperate can also sometimes be an issue.

<sup>17</sup> ibid

<sup>18</sup> <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/culture/author/kateday/>

'A blog on MyTelegraph has the same status as anything else we publish, it's just on a different platform'

## 'Content that is closed and doesn't allow participation is moribund'

Moreover, journalists that do experiment with reader interaction do not always have good results at first. "Sometimes they don't get many comments or just a few that are not very useful. It's quite easy to be put off at that point", says Day. She points out that the quality of the engagement tends to improve over time, so it's important to develop a long term relationship with the community. It is crucial to think of crowd-sourcing in a way that is acceptable to the crowd:

'It's really about understanding your audience and what the project looks like from their point of view. It takes a long time to build an engaged and valuable community. For me, what improves my work most is following really interesting people and it just takes time to find them'. It's important for journalists to recognize that there is always someone closer to the story than they are – either an expert or an eyewitness, someone that happened to be there or is directly affected by the story".<sup>19</sup>

That reader perspective adds a whole new dimension to story-telling by adding the public impact of a policy. It has got to the point where Marcus Warren sees public engagement as essential, not an extra:

'Content without participation lacks something. It's not 100 per cent content if other people can't participate in it. Content that is closed and doesn't allow participation is moribund.'

Of course, not all readers become part of a community because they want to enhance the *Telegraph's* journalism. Most spend all their time talking to other readers and simply enjoy the sense of community rather than the value it brings to editorial. Day and her team tried to create mechanisms to reward users that were more active in the community, but it was very tricky:

'We used to have a concept of featured blogger that didn't work so well. However transparent we were about the selection process – and at one stage it was a purely automatic system – they still didn't believe it. They were convinced we were trying to showcase

particular people. There was a huge conspiracy theory around that'<sup>20</sup>

For the time being, they will focus on implementing new features that will allow more participation in the website, such as replying directly to people in the comments section and ranking comments based on peer recommendation. With the introduction of the group functionality in My Telegraph, journalists should also be able to invite some users to have a more active role in the community.

The point about any online community is that it is ultimately self-governing. You can't force people into a community and you can't simply exploit it as a resource. Networked Journalism and communities is about a relationship not property. My Telegraph has created a service not a product. However, with careful long-term nurturing and investment by journalists, it is a service that could bring value to the journalists as well as the users themselves.

<sup>19</sup> ibid

<sup>20</sup> ibid

## CHAPTER 4

### The value of networks to breaking news: Sky News

Sky News was a single platform when it was set up 21 years ago enabling the newsroom to devote all its energy and focus to the 24/7 rolling TV news channel. It was a relatively traditional service in its core values which included breaking news as fast as possible. Its editorial ethics and style were those of mainstream public service mass media but with a relentless drive towards immediacy and exclusivity. Sky won awards because it was regularly first to a story in the sense of both breaking it and literally being there. Now it uses the Internet and social media to enhance that mission in the face of strong competition domestically from the much bigger BBC and internationally from a whole host of emerging news channels.

Online Editor Julian March is clear about the value of networked journalism to Sky News' core strategy:

'Of course some journalists are wary because using social media for news gathering requires skills they may not have yet. But they soon become aware that anyone interested in getting the best material and getting it immediately has to know how to use social media.'<sup>21</sup>

Sky News was teased by some rivals when it first introduced a Twitter Correspondent Ruth Barnett in March 2009. However, Sky was clear why they had done it:

'The Twitter phenomenon continues to explode. A photo with an eyewitness in Lahore yesterday came to us through Twitter. Last night's breaking story on the death of a Briton in the Alps came to us from Twitter. The first phone on the Buffalo plane crash came from Twitter. The first photo of the Hudson River rescue came from Twitter. Convinced?... The Online team is using Ruth Barnett as a 'Twitter correspondent' – scouring Twitter for stories and feeding back, giving Sky News a presence in the Twittersphere. If you don't understand Twitter and would like a demonstration of its power as a newsgathering tool...'<sup>22</sup>

At the time the *Guardian's* media reporter Jemima Kiss pointed out that using social media should not be a responsibility for a single specialist journalist. Everybody in the newsroom needs to use it for it to be efficient and effective. Kiss described how Twitter works best when it is used

regularly so you build up networks of other users and a better understanding of how it can link into social media more widely:

'...you really don't need a Twitter correspondent. You need a pack of responsive, quick-to-learn journalists who use these tools instinctively.'<sup>23</sup>

That is precisely what has happened now at Sky where Ruth Barnett's role has been dissolved into a universal acceptance that all Sky journalists should count tools like Twitter as part of their news-gathering practice. So when the Moscow underground was bombed in March 2010 it was via Twitter initially that Sky found sources for unpublished CCTV pictures of the scene.

Twitter is just one part of the social networking/micro blogging that Sky taps into. However, it is well suited as an entry point into online social networks for a TV News channel because of its immediacy. It has both benefits and risks. During the Iran protests in 2009 it was both a stream of reportage and a politically-motivated communications tool. So Julian March said that Sky was constantly monitoring and even referring to Twitter, but with caution:

'You do have to be a very careful – but basic rules of journalism apply. The ubiquity of social media drives a proportion of doubtful material. So you have to follow the digital paper trail. You have to go back to the first tweet and then cross-check with other sources or platforms. During the Iran protests we got in Farsi speakers to check the tweets, to see if names of streets made sense. This helped us confirm the contemporaneity of material.'<sup>24</sup>

March accepts that instant messaging and social media like Twitter does strain the ability of news organisations to maintain the levels of verification that traditional 'official' sources might allow. It means that the presenters have to be more transparent. They have to give the viewers details of social media sources and adjust their language to reflect their status. 'This purports to show...' is a common phrase.

It is now very much a two-way process with viewers using social media to send in tips or material. During the recent heavy snow-falls in the UK Sky was

<sup>21</sup> Interview with author, April 2010

<sup>22</sup> <http://eu.techcrunch.com/2009/03/05/sky-news-realises-news-breaks-first-on-twitter-not-tv-creates-a-twitter-correspondent/> Accessed 2.4.2010

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/pda/2009/mar/05/twitter-socialnetworking1>

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

'Anyone interested in getting the best material and getting it immediately has to know how to use social media'

## 'Local and regional media have struggled to take advantage of the Internet'

getting a constant stream of accident information from its audience. It also got leads to specific news stories, such as car clampers locking stranded vehicles.

Interacting with social media is now generating scale. The Sky website is a serious part of the overall operation, especially during big set-piece events. On Budget Day 2010 the TV channel peaked at 1.5 million while the website clocked up 500,000 individual users. The two are now very complimentary according to March:

'We can narrowcast while TV does broadcast. So during the election campaign we could go down to an individual constituency, link to national social media and filter, aggregating the social media flows through interactive applications. TV can't do all that.'

Sky still does have separate teams for broadcast and online but they are now integrated through common sources and shared skills. There is no longer a hard divide between the hacks and the geeks, they are all now networked journalists linking their work on different platforms to each other and to the audience. Of course, Sky is by no means alone in what it is doing in broadcasting, let alone journalism. But it is a good example of a commercial news outfit with a very high-profile single platform undergoing radical change in production. It will be interesting to how this greater interactivity develops if the channel itself shifts towards a more 'views' orientated approach akin to, say, Fox News in America.

## CHAPTER 5 Grass-roots networked journalism

Conventional wisdom has always been that communities form most naturally locally, so surely a kind of journalism based on linking people together at that level should succeed? In fact, local and regional media have struggled to take advantage of the Internet. They have not built online audiences in the same way that national media has been able to, let alone take advantage of pools of previously unconnected international readers. Indeed, commercial local media appeared so under-confident of its ability to attract an online audience that it has fought a defensive battle to stop the BBC expanding into the space. It has asked for subsidies in a way that would not occur to its national equivalents.

Some reports have suggested taxing Google or forcing local authorities to put recruitment advertising back to newspapers and away from funding their own glossy propaganda publications.<sup>25</sup> Whatever the merits of those ideas, they don't feel politically or practically plausible. Nor do they address the question of whether local media companies deserve that support and what they would do in the future in return. Some people would go at least some of the way with George Monbiot in questioning the claims by local newspaper journalists to be some kind of bastion for democracy:

'For many years the local press has been one of Britain's most potent threats to democracy, championing the overdog, misrepresenting democratic choices, defending business, the police and local elites from those who seek to challenge them. Media commentators lament the death of what might have been. It bears no relationship to what is.'<sup>26</sup>

This paper is not the place to address the wider regulatory or subsidy issues, but we would suggest that networked journalism at a local level offers a way forward so that both the journalism and the business can be offered some hope of reclaiming the purpose of non-national news media. At the local level above all it seems logical for professional media organisations to work with the citizen. This was also the conclusion of the House of Commons Media Select Committee report in April 2010:

Local newspapers can learn from many of these innovative [independent hyperlocal]

<sup>25</sup> [http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/civil\\_society/publications/making\\_good\\_society](http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/civil_society/publications/making_good_society)  
<sup>26</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/nov/09/local-newspapers-democracy>  
<sup>27</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcomeds/43/42i.pdf>

websites, and in some cases there is an argument that local newspapers should be working alongside them... it is local journalism, rather than local newspapers, that needs saving.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time as mainstream local media has been struggling to adjust to the recent challenge of the Internet and its longer-term problems, there has been a blossoming of hyper-local online ventures. These non-commercial community or neighbourhood activist websites serve particular audiences in a distinct manner. Voluntary or citizen local media operating on a small and unstable scale may not make money, or employ professionals, and it may not provide comprehensive coverage. But like all genuine community organisations it has a fragile but valuable function. It may simply be that hyper-local – as opposed to more regional or city-wide online media – is not scalable or profitable by its very nature. It is, however, a good and growing example of citizen journalism with wider social utility. It could also be part of broader mainstream local networked journalism.

Independent hyper-local journalism is not simply a hobby or a pleasant localist addition. It is a potential amelioration of the drastic problem of declining professional regional and local news media. The Guardian's local web project is one example of how a professional media organisation is seeking to connect itself to those grass-roots networks and in return, provide a wider connectivity for their work.

For decades local paper groups have disinvested in staffing. Consolidation has diluted their local character. At the same time commercial local radio has failed to invest in significant journalistic assets leaving the field to BBC local radio. Of course, local BBC is also dependent for much of their news on the declining capacity of local papers. Now ITV regional news is under threat, while previous Government plans to create local news consortia have been effectively abandoned. Could networked hyper-local be part of a renewal process?

One leader of this kind of activist hyper-local journalism is Will Perrin who has created a model in London and is seeking to spread the example nationally. His approach is very much from the starting point of the community rather than media:

'There's a basic communication black hole in the middle of all of this... hyperlocals could cover gaps that inevitably arise in newspapers.'

Today Perrin's *KingsCrossEnvironment* enjoys a readership of just over three hundred daily hits. It has four main contributors:

'We have over eight hundred articles on the neighbourhood and we use the site to find campaigns and create what psychologists call, 'bridging social capital'...30 active people contribute things and four or five people have authoring rights – so each of one of us has a network of people who do tell us things... then about another three hundred people 'spectate' and occasionally get involved if we make things easy for them.'<sup>29</sup>

Why bother? For Perrin it is about local politics and connecting people, not profit:

'We use the web to drive people into local democratic avenues to get things to change... [The websites are] there to augment real human engagement in the political process. You need representatives to make decisions... but the web can help them understand better what those issues should be... we help augment traditional community action.'

This is a much more directly 'political' motive than the general claim made by traditional journalism that it sustains democracy by reporting upon public administration and holding power to account. It also deals with issues that would otherwise be ignored, Perrin claims, such as pockets of the neighbourhood that became no-go areas for police. Despite the way it taps into local issues and stories, *KingsCrossEnvironment* is not particularly connected into other mainstream local media:

'Every now and then, maybe once every six to eight weeks, journalists ring me up and say, "we saw that interesting feature on your website. Can we turn it into a quote and then into a story?"' Thus far, 'there's been only one example of collaboration [with local newspapers]. I found statistics on ambulance callouts in response to assault incidents. They were rising massively but violent crime was only rising a small amount... The newspaper picked up on my research, ran some more maths on the numbers, and ran a story.'

Perrin is puzzled that local papers don't connect more to community websites in general:

'We use the web to drive people into local democratic avenues to get things to change...'

<sup>28</sup>

<sup>29</sup> All quotes in this report with William Perrin are from an interview with POLIS researcher Jaime Herve-Azevedo, March 2010

## 'An interactive, connected, targetable online reader is worth far more to an advertiser'

'Hyperlocal websites always have challenges working with their local newspaper and traditional media. They never find that easy. Local newspaper editors, which is understandable given the history of the trade, are very sharp-elbowed people... What we don't see, and this is always a puzzle to me, is why local newspapers don't just reach out and embrace with a warm big hug the people who are creating content on the ground.'

Perrin believes that despite their bureaucracy, local authorities might make better partners for hyper-locals than other media:

Councils are quite risk averse and slow to change..[but]... there are bigger opportunities for websites to work with councils than there are working with newspapers because the council people and the websites have very similar goals.

Now Perrin's work beyond *KingsCross Environment* involves training people who create hyperlocal sites across the country. These tend to be community activists rather than mainstream media people. There are some technical problems for these sites when they stray into 'news' reporting as traditionally understood. One is libel law and the cost of insurance. Another is marketing as hyperlocal sites quickly reach plateaus and can find it hard to connect to the next group of people or a higher level of activity. It seems logical for local papers to help bridge that gap to each other's mutual benefit, but Perrin believes that old-fashioned attitudes hamper co-operation:

'I think a lot of the papers are coming from an old-fashioned mindset which is that if I link out, I will lose that pair of eyes rather than thinking that I want that pair of eyeballs to keep coming back to me every week because I've got interesting things to link to.'

Perhaps both could benefit by being more networked to each other. No-one is suggesting that hyper-local sites can somehow replace a Golden Age of local and regional media coverage. But Perrin has a gut feeling that the community media brands now being created from the grass-roots may have longevity. Not at

the expense of professional local media, but as a more relevant and personal alternative to a declining sector:

'As long as reliable free web platforms are available then some of the brands that have been available within the last two years could still be around in 150 years.'

That is now accepted by a major commercial group like Trinity Mirror. Their regional digital director Richard Ayers says the market and his group's attitudes and the way it behaves is changing rapidly this year:

'We welcome proper linking to other websites such as independent hyper locals because we now see ourselves as part of the eco system. We are pushing partnership and participation hard'<sup>30</sup>

The motive for Trinity Mirror is money but Ayers claims it has acquired a new sense of the online media environment after a false start by much of the commercial regional press:

'Local newspaper websites were seen as "companion" websites that reflected the newspaper's brand rather than having an independent existence editorially. One of the problems was that material was simply put online after it was in the newspaper. There was little effort invested in creating a good online product. To make something work online... you need to plan and develop the design for weeks in advance and that was not done in the past - partly because the online teams were too small and too separate. Now ALL journalists are called multi-media journalists but that doesn't make them multi-media overnight. You need to strategise and make time for online.'

One example of a failed effort was *Teeside Online*, now *Gazette Communities* as part of Trinity's Middlesbrough-based *Gazettelive.co.uk*. It started well but public participation was stymied by technical problems. Now it's re-launched and interactivity is soaring says Ayers. The journalists are also being more pro-active with pages on Flickr, and other forms of crowd-sourcing. He insists that networked Journalism is more than just a way of generating content, it is a battle for 'the audience's hearts and minds' which Trinity then wants to sell to advertisers.

One problem is measurability. *The Liverpool Echo* has something like 75 per cent market penetration for newspaper reading in the city but online it is, in effect, competing with the whole global

<sup>30</sup> All quotes Ayers from interview with the author, April 2010

Internet. So advertisers see the smaller percentages and either don't spend or retreat to off-line platforms. Ayers says that he needs new kinds of metrics:

'to capture every touchpoint with a reader in an area so that we can sell that relationship. An interactive, connected, targetable online reader is worth far more to an advertiser than someone glancing through a newspaper'

For Trinity the Internet does not replace newspapers. It can help revive them, even when they are cut back. So although their *Birmingham Post* is no longer a daily it can still break news 24/7 online and the weekly paper version itself has grown, recently hitting 212 pages. So locally publication is now a two-stage publication process with two outlets in a networked market where linking to other information or news sources is a virtue not a threat.

If you talk to local journalists in the major newspaper groups or broadcast organisations, many will talk of over-work, poor pay and low standards. Lack of resources makes the networked journalism ambitions of someone like Richard Ayers look ambitious. So it is not surprising that many of the better independent hyperlocal sites are created by experienced local journalists going their own way. They too, however, are limited by their access to traditional resources to create conventional local media platforms. In the end both groups have one thing in common. They both need the power of a networked audience and the advantages of connectivity with each other.

## CHAPTER 6

### The value of independent networked journalism: *Mumsnet*

The point about the parenting website *Mumsnet* is not that it was supposed to have been critical in deciding the election. Despite some of the hype, it was always the TV debates rather than online fora that would be the big media factor in Election 2010. The real importance of *Mumsnet* in this report is that it is a rare example of an independent networked journalism enterprise achieving scale and significance. It represents a series of communities that journalism did not seem to tap into before. That is why politicians like to pay it a visit.

*Mumsnet* 'qualifies' as networked journalism in a variety of ways. Launched by professional journalists it has a core paid staff but depends overwhelmingly on input from its members. It is also very connected to other mainstream and online media. It uses a variety of platforms such as books, TV and magazines pooling resources from the core website.

*Mumsnet* founder Justine Roberts sees this as a way of making a living but it does so with guiding values based on the importance of public participation:

'This idea that the only experts out there are expert journalists feeding you is nonsense. In this crowd of lots of smart women there are experts that know the little intrigues of everything. And the wisdom of crowds is quite awesome to behold, it educates people.'<sup>31</sup>

*Mumsnet* claims not to edit posts and does not allow members to edit their own posts. The rule is to stand by what you have said. Although profanity or personal attacks are removed and their posters banned from the site. *Mumsnet* however does control the traffic on its site and will highlight threads that are in the news or hot topics of the day.

*Mumsnet* sees this as part of a facilitating or curating rather than controlling process. Indeed, Justine Roberts claims *Mumsnet* users feel they have ownership of the site and if they disagreed with an editorial decision they would challenge the administrators. Or in her words 'if they

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Justine Roberts of *Mumsnet* by POLIS researcher Bjørk Kjærnestad, March 2010

'This idea that the only experts out there are expert journalists feeding you is nonsense'

'It seems to be accepted now that becoming more networked is essential for journalism in an era of social media'

were cross with us they would let us know. We would have a discussion about it'. So the site runs its 'professional content' covering everything from child-care to holidays on the accumulated advice from its readers. The sites commentary is even more driven by the members. The online forums are initiated or approved by users. The approval/suggestion process taking place in a special online forum. The site not only allows its members ownership in the content creation but also in its direction and policies. They even get a say in what advertisers are allowed on the site. Banned companies include Nestle, McDonalds and various other products that are seen not to be in line with the community's philosophy. Justine Roberts says they have to consult 'because if we didn't we would just get shouted at! I mean, they could all leave couldn't they?'

This participatory principle even extends to another growing profit-making part of the site, the product testing and focus groups. These are advertised on the site but users can decide on their participation.

Ms Roberts believes in the wisdom of crowds and the democratic potential of the internet. 'There is a kind of a general feeling that the internet is dangerous because it is full of people who are not professionals and don't offer professional scrutiny. Our experience contradicts this'

Ms Roberts cites then Labour Minister Ed Milliband's web chat on the site. Mr Milliband performed very well and communicated clearly but got tripped up citing a 2005 report about re-usable nappies vs. disposable nappies. This was the moment where wisdom of the crowds took over. Within five minutes several 'Mumsnetters' had cited the more up to date report of 2006 that proved that the 2005 report had used a questionable sample:

'They cited all the evidence to him in a way that I would suggest that a Paxman or Humphreys would not know. That is what I mean, we have experts in all fields. Collectively that wisdom is as good, if not better, than any professional interviewer.'

The style of journalism on *Mumsnet* is very much about politicians learning to have a conversation online rather than using it as another one-way platform. Justine Roberts cites the infamous 'biscuit' question for then Prime Minister Gordon Brown when he took part in a *Mumsnet* live webchat.

Ms Roberts claims the question was actually all about Mumsnetters feeling frustrated at the way that the PM was not interacting properly and only 'cutting out bits of policy and pasting it'. Therefore, the seemingly relentless questioning about Mr Brown's favorite biscuit showed the community's frustration with the approach rather than the content of his performance. Mr Roberts believes the mainstream media missed the subtlety of the biscuit question and reported it as 'silly women interested in biscuits' when in fact it was all about the Mumsnetters realising that 'here was a politician that wasn't really engaging'.

*Mumsnet* has managed to retain the openness and interactivity that supposedly characterises online discourse on a large scale without succumbing to the ugliness and fragmentation of much Internet discussion. Justine Roberts puts this down to the dominance of female users, but it may also be to do with the combination of commentary with prosaic practical material.

What about the drift to extremism that appears to characterise many newspaper online forums? Are the views expressed representative of the wider *Mumsnet* community? Currently the site has about 20 lurkers to every poster but Ms Roberts believes that the relative docility of so many of the site's users is not a problem since their views and opinions are covered by somebody. She and her staff do not post at all.

Like all commercial online enterprises *Mumsnet* has to balance privacy with profit. It warns members not to give out personal information but it is increasingly pushing to monetise the community by selling access to the community. Roberts predicts that in the future *Mumsnet* will have even more social networking functions because people are becoming less concerned about privacy and will want to interact as their real self.

So it appears to offer a sustainable business model based on the principles of networked journalism: creating content in a collaborative way with participation throughout the process. It has accessed a community that obviously felt under-served by mainstream media and has opened up a source of information and insight to the rest of society as well as providing entertainment and support for a highly-pressurised group. That might not appear particularly radical. However, at a time when mainstream media is often failing to do the same – either online or offline – it is important to learn how *Mumsnet* has created value as a business and for its participants.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/nickdavies>

<sup>33</sup> Coleman, S. Et al Public Trust In The News (2009) Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

<sup>34</sup> Quality in an age of networked journalism: Mediaestudier, Sweden 2010

## CHAPTER 7

### What is the value of networked journalism?

Is the journalism that emerges from this networked process more valuable? If the organisations and arrangements that used to produce journalism are being destroyed or re-ordered then we must be sure that their replacements provide something at least as good. This report has shown how networked journalism can transform and enhance the quality of news media production by making journalism deeper, more connected, diverse and engaged with the public. Through greater public participation and interactivity it can become more reflective and representative while allowing for greater creativity and critical thought. It can be sharper, quicker and cheaper, too. It seems to be accepted now that becoming more networked is essential for journalism in an era of social media.

This is not to ignore the obstacles to improving value. There are still the threats to valuable journalism from crass commercialism, underinvestment, political interference, and professional complacency. Nick Davies<sup>32</sup> has described in his book *Flat Earth News* an increase in some newsrooms of unthinking and unoriginal 'churnalism' as companies drive down costs by getting fewer journalists to do more work, leading to a fall in quality. Politicians and bureaucrats in turn are happy to see journalistic oversight reduced.

The same new technologies that offer increased efficiencies and communicative powers bring with them potential negative as well as positive impacts. As journalism becomes more networked there are still choices that we must make as journalists, citizens or politicians to decide what kind of media we want. There is nothing innately virtuous, democratic or valuable about the Internet. It has taken revenue away from many traditional providers of quality journalism. It can also exacerbate problems such as the trend towards recycling rather than originating news information. It affords greater opportunities to falsify imagery and to spread unsubstantiated information without accountability.

The answer lies in the function of the networked professional journalist to act as a filter and facilitator and the potential power of the citizen to hold them to account. For example, it is one thing to allow people to post or comment on a website, but there is no reason why there can't still be a moderation policy. The participatory audience can

also act as a check and balance. In the end trust is secured by connectivity. Interactivity leads to accountability through a new conceptualisation of trust based on the networked journalist as a reliable hub of connectivity:

The mission to connect for contemporary journalists involves four principal linkages: between contextual back stories and current events; between citizen and institutional process of policy-making; between citizens and the confusing mass of online as well as offline information sources; and between communities and communities.<sup>33</sup>

The influx of more disparate material raises serious issues that networked journalism brings about traditional editorial values such as objectivity and authority. If the public is participating then how do you prevent bias, subjectivity or unrepresentative content? I deal with some of these issues in a separate paper on the nature of quality in networked journalism<sup>34</sup> but put briefly, I would argue that the benefits of improved diversity far outweigh the risks. Traditional journalism with its more narrow production base was also given to a particular view of the world. The difference with the kind of connectivity that networked journalism can provide is that the audience now has a greater range of biases from which to choose.

Networked journalism builds on many of the traditional functions of the news media: to report, analyse and comment on our world. It returns to old (and often neglected) editorial virtues: independence, oversight, and human interest. It can enhance existing genres such as political reporting and specialist practices such as investigation. It draws upon well-established formulations of news production such as Community media and Public or Civic journalism.

However, it is difficult to see how news media culture can remain the same if the journalism alters. This is not about private versus public, or even professional versus amateur. We have seen throughout this report that career journalists and commercial companies as well as public service broadcasters and local activists can all participate in networked journalism. But how they do it has changed. The newsroom is not the same. The BBC's

'Collectively that wisdom is as good, if not better, than any professional interviewer'

## 'Journalism is at its best when it is at its most reflexive and responsive'

wider society to invest in and influence this process. Journalism is too important to be left to journalists and too valuable to be left to chance or crude market forces. Networking journalism is not just an option, it is an imperative and a necessity.

Peter Horrocks has already signalled the end of Fortress journalism:

Most journalists have grown up with a fortress mindset. They have lived and worked in proud institutions with thick walls. Their daily knightly task has been simple: to battle journalists from other fortresses. But the fortresses are crumbling and courtly jousts with fellow journalists are no longer impressing the crowds. The end of fortress journalism is deeply unsettling for us and requires a profound change in the mindset and culture of journalism.<sup>35</sup>

We have seen in this report how that vision – which can be brutal and demanding when you are in the middle of it – is being enacted. The struggle in a period of limited resources is how to add the value of networking without losing the journalism. There may be something even more profound going on here. It may be that the news itself is not the same. LSE Professor Terhi Rantanen<sup>36</sup> has pointed out that historically news has often shifted in its production processes and even in its meaning. You can go back to 17th century pamphleteers or 19th century news agencies – or more recently to the advent of radio and television to see how social and technological changes have produced quite different ideas of what news is.

We have moved on from an era of relatively scarce news information subject to limits of time and distance in its gathering and dissemination. Now we have an abundance of instantly accessible data and commentary that can be connected onwards almost infinitely. Much of it is produced by the public, often through social networks. The first challenge of journalism will still be to tell us what is new – what has just happened. In the past it might have been enough for journalists to repeat that 'news' and duplicate it across a series of discrete platforms. The Internet and convergence has broken that monopoly and forced the news media to seek value in networking.

The idea and the practice of networked journalism raise as many questions and possibilities as it provides answers. This is good. Journalism is at its best when it is at its most reflexive and responsive. We should be impressed by the effort of both citizens and professionals to reinvigorate our news media. But we also look to

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2009/07/the\\_end\\_of\\_fortress\\_journalism.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2009/07/the_end_of_fortress_journalism.html)

<sup>36</sup> Rantanen, T, *When News Was New* (Wiley Blackwell 2009)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Networked journalism is now an integral part of British mainstream journalism.
2. It allows for public participation in all parts of the news production process.
3. It is based on interactivity and connectivity
4. It changes the way that the individual journalist as well as news media organisations work
5. It connects the mainstream media organisations into a much wider network of independent, individual and social media communications
6. It offers the potential for a transformation of the public value that journalism can offer in a networked society

Networked Journalism adds editorial value for the consumer in (at least) three ways:

i. Editorial diversity:

It creates more substantial and varied news so that the consumer is more easily able to find content that suits their interests and needs. Instead of the public going to a limited range of news, an almost infinite network of news is created around the individual.

ii. Connectivity and Interactivity:

Networked journalism distributes news in different ways that engage the attention of the public by offering them involvement at every stage. The promise of interaction can be enough in itself to create community. In practice, collectively the public appears to have an almost limitless appetite for involvement.

iii. Relevance:

Networked journalism relates to audiences and subjects in ways that create new ethical and editorial relationships to news. It creates a more transparent production process that helps to build trust. It seeks to be where public discourse happens rather than creating a discrete space called news. It means turning news into social media.

Networked journalism also offers an enhanced business model in (at least) three ways:

i. 'Free' Content:

Public participation through networked journalism adds economic value directly to the news media in the sense that the contribution of the public literally creates

content – usually for free – from the citizen. Journalism must be one of the few industries where the consumer volunteers material and services to the producer.

ii. The Curation Premium

Counter-intuitively, the abundance of disintermediated information may also give quality networked journalism a market advantage. The plethora of data sources and competing platforms and outlets means there will be a premium (or 'freemium') for authoritative and trustworthy curating and filtering of news. This function may happen within 'pay-wall' or subscription systems as well as through other more open channels. The demand for transparent and relevant mediation will increase. Networked Journalism as a kind of intelligent and pro-active search engine will create quality by adding value to search.

iii. Journalism as a public service

Networked journalism is a valuable way to create stakeholder-funded journalism. Educators, foundations, NGOs and community groups are among the civil society organisations that can use networked journalism to create media that furthers their aims, ideally in a transparent, interactive and accountable way. The BBC is just one example of a publicly-funded media organisation that has retained its independence. Other organisations such as local councils, universities and NGOs like Oxfam produce so much media that they are themselves becoming part of networked news provision. We argue that is just as important to debate and scrutinise how well they do that as it is to demand value of professional news media groups.

**This report was researched and written by Charlie Beckett with Polis interns Jaime Herve-Azevedo, Kyle Moughan, David McDougall, Daniela Moreira, Bjork Kjaernested and Sachi Doctor**

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