

# **Journalism, citizens and blogging**

## **Debra Adams**

PhD Candidate  
Creative Industries Faculty  
Queensland University of Technology  
[da.adams@qut.edu.au](mailto:da.adams@qut.edu.au)

## **Abstract**

Internet communication technologies (netCTs) have added a new dimension to the production and consumption of news journalism around the world. They have enabled the creation of new publishing spaces where diverse voices can engage in conversations about matters affecting daily lives. netCTs present citizens with many opportunities to produce as well as consume information.

This paper proposes research that will examine the ways in which the uses of netCTs in the production of news create new possibilities for citizens to engage with public life.

The research will compare traditional operational ideologies of journalism with those of participatory models of online news. It seeks to discover the extent to which participatory journalism has taken hold and the subsequent impact on the role of the journalist, traditional media models and the citizen. In particular, the research seeks to discover whether, and if so to what degree, the practice of news blogging enhances traditional media productions. The research will explore both supporting and opposing views of participatory media.

Case studies of commercial, public and alternative media models will assess the capacities of each to offer citizens a comprehensive and culturally flexible brand of citizen journalism.

## **Introduction**

There is concern within democratic societies that a growing number of individuals are disconnecting from their role as citizens (Merritt and McCombs 2004: 47, Turner, G., 2005: 135, Dyrenfurth, N., 2005). Much of the blame for this disengagement has fallen upon the gatekeeping practices of journalism (Schechter, D., 2005: 70). These practices are often held to be counterproductive to journalism's primary purpose, which is to create an inclusive and diverse space for conversation between members of society about issues affecting their lives. Gatekeeping practices have the capacity to create gaps and silences, giving voice only to those already holding power. Some contend that they give media corporations, politicians and large lobby groups the capacity to set the agenda on their terms and in their own best interests (Schechter, D., 2005: 70).

Ideally, democratic societies are underpinned by an inclusive media. This is reflected by equality of access, a diversity of viewpoints and multiple voices connected together in a public conversation. The growing concern in many democratic societies, including Australia, is that mainstream journalism has become depoliticised in favour of profit driven business policies (McChesney, 2000: 1). This concern has stimulated ideas about the possibilities for Internet communication technologies (netCTs) to create new ways to revive the public conversation, and thus citizenship.

The phenomenon of audiences dropping away from traditional news sites such as newspapers and current affairs programs (Turner, 2005: 135; Murdoch, 2005; Flew, 2006: 914-8) is largely understood by media managers as a sign of the public's disinterest in public affairs. Danny Schechter rejects this assumption and argues that it is the media itself that is driving the public away from public affairs (Schechter, 2005: 16). Like Robert McChesney, he argues that mainstream news media fails to provide the public with enough reliable information from a wide range of sources (McChesney, 2000: 1). Schechter says the public are concerned that they aren't getting the whole story from mainstream media (Schechter, D., 2005: 70).

John Hartley sees the changes in media use as a cultural phenomenon characterised by the evolving developments in communication technologies. He describes the “interactive phase of modernity” (Hartley, 2005: 10) where everyone has the opportunity to communicate with one or many (Hartley, 2005: 10) through what are described here as netCTs.

The modern mediasphere is now largely characterised by interactive technologies. Mainstream media are no longer the only source of news media available to citizens. The growing uptake of netCTs by ordinary people has enabled them to become both users and producers of information about public affairs and has clearly indicated that developments in technology, audience needs and media uses are intricately entwined.

In response to these evolving trends, mainstream media have developed online news sites where audiences are offered various levels of participatory access to the news process. While the most popular online news sites are the mainstream media sites (Papandrea, 2005: 4), netCTs have enabled the creation of alternative online media sites which have added a new dimension to the production and consumption of news journalism around the world. They enable ordinary individuals to become producers, editors and publishers of news content. Users now have the capacity to create multiple spaces for diverse and interconnected public conversations.

These conversations often occur in weblogs, or *blogs*. Blogging is a communicative practice that allows people to connect, converse and share information in a digitally networked environment. The global reach of digital networks such as blogs allows people to discuss with local and global participants the issues and events affecting their lives.

While there are many different kinds of blogs, those currently drawing the most scholarly interest are alternative news media blogs. Axel Bruns observes the importance of news blogs to news reporting in areas such as instant reporting from the scene of an event, filling gaps and silences in mainstream news media, commentary and opinion and investigative news reporting

(Bruns, A. and J. Jacobs, 2006: 3). The main difference between alternative news blogs and mainstream news is that alternative news is largely produced by non-journalists and not tied to corporate interests. This practice has raised questions about whether or not the information contained at these sites is actually journalism.

## **Proposed Research**

This research will investigate how and why corporate, public and alternative news media use blogs in their approach to citizen journalism. It will also examine and compare traditional and modern perspectives of journalism. The research will investigate a range of topics including citizen journalism, alternative media, participatory journalism, news blogs, citizenship, democracy, network theory, technology and the sociology of journalism and citizenship.

The topic of study was selected because literature shows there is much concern about the decline of active citizenship. Further there are unanswered questions about the way commercial, public and alternative media sites interact, influence and complement one another. Case studies of three different online media models will be undertaken to explain how and why each model uses news blogs in their approach to citizen journalism. The cases are:

1. News Limited: *NEWS.com.au*
2. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC): *BBC Blog Network*
3. *OhmyNews International*<sup>1</sup>

Further, a social network analysis will identify the original sources of information and map the extent to which the information infiltrates or is derived from each of the three media models. The research seeks to track and show how information is gathered, produced, shared and used. It seeks to identify producers and consumers. A social network analysis will be a

---

<sup>1</sup> *OhmyNews International* is a tentative case. The research will develop a clear definition of the term *alternative* and in doing so will take into account the *objectives* of the media model in addition to the news production practices.

significant element of the research because it will show the patterns of political, economic and social relationships created through news blogs.

## **Preliminary Literature Review**

This research is concerned with the way citizen journalism is supported by Internet communication technologies (netCTs). This review examines the literature of some of the key authors across a range of topics, with the foci of investigation including the relationship between citizenship and journalism, theories of democracy, media and journalism, network theory, representations, news blogging, Internet communication technologies, alternative media and the sociology of journalism and citizenship.

### *Previous work in the field*

There have been a number of previous studies regarding online media (see for example Atton, C., 2003, Bruns, A., 2005, Cordell, M. and S. De Silva, 2002, Curran, J. and N. Couldry, 2003a, Deuze, M., 2005, Downing, J. D. H., 2003, Flew, T. and G. Young, 2004, Meikle, G., 2002, Platon, S. and M. Deuze, 2003, Salter, L., 2006, Turner, G., 2005). Some of the alternative media sites that have been the subject of case studies over the past five years include: *MediaChannel, Plastic, Kuro5hin, IndyMedia, Active, The Paper, Open Democracy, Online Opinion, OhmyNews, Crikey* and *New Matilda*. While each of these studies will be used to benchmark the three media models, this study will differ from previous studies since it will combine and utilize a range of different theoretical perspectives including social, political, economic and technological, to examine how three different media models affect citizenship through the enabling of collaborative news journalism using news blogs.

### *Theories of Journalism*

There is a range of commonly held views about the role of journalism, such as: to offer a richly complex description of people, identity, lifestyles, characters, communities and histories (Mercer, C., 1992: 28); to keep citizens informed and engaged with society's institutions (Stockwell, S., 1999: 39, Carter, H., 2003: 8); to ensure the public conversation is significant,

interesting, inclusive and carries diverse viewpoints (Kovach, B. and T. Rosenstiel, 2001, Lichtenberg, J., 1990: 105, (McChesney, 2004: 1, Stockwell, S., 1999: 42); to provide comprehensive and proportional news coverage (Kovach, B. and T. Rosenstiel, 2001); to connect and collaborate with community (Flew, T., 2006, Pauly, J. J., 2003: 23); to serve the public and remain loyal to citizens (Bertrand, C. J., 2003: vii, Kovach, B. and T. Rosenstiel, 2001: 12); to facilitate debate (Kovach, B. and T. Rosenstiel, 2001: 12, Lichtenberg, J., 1990: 105, Stockwell, S., 1999: 41); to ensure that citizens are informed about all aspects and complexities of the democratic process (Adam, G. S., 2001: 316, Patmore, G. A. et al., 2004: 10, Stockwell, S., 1999:37); to form social consciousness (Adam, G. S., 2001: 316); to tell the truth (Kovach, B. and T. Rosenstiel, 2001: 12); to maintain independence and monitor power (Kovach, B. and T. Rosenstiel, 2001: 12, McChesney, 2004: 1); and to provide the public with a political education (McChesney, 2004: 1).

Mark Deuze says these characteristics of journalism carry across all “media types, genres and formats” and are common to all democratic societies (Deuze, M., 2005: 445). He categorises the “ideal-typical values” of journalism into five distinct areas: public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy and ethics, and describes them as journalism’s “occupational ideology” (Deuze, M., 2005: 442). Deuze argues that it’s not appropriate to consider journalism in traditional frameworks such as the aforementioned. He argues that the core values of journalism are not set in stone but instead are fluid. This means that it is possible for the operational and practical frameworks of journalism to move with the times. This idea is exemplified in the discussion of Margot Kingston’s *Webdiary* later in this paper.

Deuze is one of many authors who points out that there are problems associated with the idea of objectivity as a key element of modern journalism. Regardless of the known issues with the principle of objectivity, it is consistently used in traditional models of journalism to define and legitimise journalism’s professional status and the dominant position of mainstream media organisations (Deuze, M., 2005: 448, Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001,

Schudson, 2001, Zelizer B, 1992). The research will examine the presence and relevance of this principle to existing and emerging forms of online news production.

Barbie Zelizer argues that the profession of journalism uses ideas of objectivity and balance to conceal the constructed nature of their work (Zelizer, 1997: 403). She points out that the notion of “constructing reality” (Zelizer, 1997: 403) is rarely ever recognised as a defining principle of journalism. This assertion highlights the need for studies about journalism to include an understanding of why representations matter.

### *Representations*

Representations have a significant affect on the way people consider and understand issues in the media. Merritt and McCombs describe media coverage as creating pictures in people's minds. Journalists, they argue, have the capacity to tweak some things more than others to create the picture they want (Merritt and McCombs 2004: 45). However, entrenched public knowledge about issues doesn't occur on the basis of one single report; representations are understood through discursive formations. Merritt and McCombs argue that it is the pattern of the entire news coverage over time that tells the public what journalists think is important and this, they say, is "the epitomé of political power" (Merritt and McCombs 2004: 45). Similarly, Curran and Couldry contend that one of the main forces of power in society is the media's representational power (Curran, J. and N. Couldry, 2003b: 4). Of particular concern to this work is how the nature of news changes as elements of culture and technology evolve. The capacity of netCTs to enable instant reporting from anyone anywhere in the world poses a challenge to the traditional representations of people and events in mainstream media and therefore to the nature of news. Stereotypes, gender, political and racial representations can be contested in the new participatory mediasphere.

This research will consider the assertion that journalism constantly changes with emerging socio-cultural perspectives and changing media technologies

(Deuze, M., 2005: 442). Drawing upon theories of journalism, citizenship and democracy, the research will examine the operational ideologies of journalism in three news media models in terms of the fluidity of their operations and practices and their approaches to citizen journalism in relation to the developments in netCTs.

It also seeks to discover the extent to which representations are inclusive of all citizens. Flew argues “expressions of society’s morals and values should be recognisable sites of negotiation where all people are encouraged to take the opportunity to participate in their development” (Flew, T., 2006: 914-8). The research will assess the ways each media model approaches these ideas in terms of the levels of participation offered to their audiences and the degrees to which these offerings mobilise citizens’ engagement with political policies and processes.

### *Theories of Citizenship*

As noted earlier, there is concern within democratic societies that a growing number of individuals are disconnecting from their role as citizens (Dyrenfurth, N., 2005). This review will outline the key issues underlying this phenomenon. The defining principles of citizenship are numerous and diverse but ultimately they describe a relationship between individuals and the state. Given the interrelated connection between media, technology and citizenship, the research will examine how the practice of journalism shapes cultural citizenship.

Through the media, citizenship operates as a "device of inclusion and exclusion" (Dyrenfurth, N., 2005: 88). Access to media technologies, information, diverse viewpoints and representations affect the capacities of individuals’ to act out their rights and responsibilities as political, social and economic community members ( McChesney, 2000: 1, Murdock, G. and P. Golding, 1989).

Eide and Knight describe citizenship as being characterised by openness, participation, rights and duties and as "a system of practices that articulates civil and political society, a means for achieving democratic accountability and engagement" (Eide, M. and G. Knight, 1999: 536).

Herbert Gans describes citizenship in terms of its connection to democracy and the news media. He describes citizens' democracy as that which highlights the importance of citizens' participation in the political decision making process. He proposes that the news media should make a greater effort to mobilise citizens to take a more active role in the politics of their society. While stressing the importance of a large citizen membership (Gans, H. J., 2003: 117), Gans is uncomfortable with a number of issues which he sees as undermining active citizenship. He is concerned that the media doesn't provide enough consultation between elected representatives and citizens. He contends that the political decision making process should be an ongoing conversation instead of being limited to election campaigns. He also argues that in the interest of democracy the rights of citizens need to be protected from the dominance of large corporations (Gans, H. J., 2003: 124). And finally, he identifies an urgent need for new models of news production: "new institutions that are grounded in a greater degree of political equality" (Gans, H. J., 2003: 113).

This research will assess the degree to which the utilisation of netCTs by each of the three media model cases increases access and diversity of viewpoints, encourages active and ongoing participation in social and political conversations and the consequent democratic decision making process.

### *Theoretical Approaches to Media and Citizenship*

Terry Flew identifies three key approaches to media and citizenship: liberal media theory, critical media theory and "DIY citizenship"<sup>2</sup> (Flew, T., 2006: 914-8). Liberal media theory positions journalism as the fourth estate. Here, the media is seen as the guardian of citizens' rights and freedoms and where,

---

<sup>2</sup> Term first used by John Hartley in *Uses of Television* (chapters 10 & 11)

ideally, journalism is free of government control and corporate dominance (Flew, T., 2006: 914-8).

This theory breaks down in societies where there is a concentration of media ownership. Flew argues that the “concentration of ownership and control, class-based and other social inequalities, commodification and the intertwining of economic and political power” (Flew, T., 2006: 914-8) reduces access to the “communication market place” (Flew, T., 2006: 914-8). The problem is that the business interests of corporations often clash with the ideals of the fourth estate. Julianne Schulz contends that while commercial imperatives often take precedence over journalistic principles (Schultz, J., 1998: 233), journalists continue to embrace the ideal of the fourth Estate and remain optimistic in the face of such challenges (Schultz, J., 1998). Similarly, when Andrew Graham compares the capacity of the market to oblige the public’s democratic rights to that of the media, he concludes that the media does hold a sense of obligation and cares about people’s social experience whereas the market doesn’t (Graham, 2001: 1).

This research will use focussed in-depth interviews (Minichiello, V., 1990: 89) to gauge, through the reflections of the producers of news, the relationship between editors, journalists, media models and citizens. Informants will be asked open ended questions about the modern nature of their practices in terms of theories of the fourth estate.

Critical media theory is concerned with the role of the media in the public sphere and the degree to which media is bound up with political, economic and corporate institutions. Compared to the liberal media perspective, critical media theory takes a more positive approach to the relationship between citizens and the state by focussing on the public sphere as a site of public inclusion. Here, the state has the capacity to encourage public participation, diversity and pluralism through the funding of community based media and/or media regulation (Flew, T., 2006: 914-8).

Hartley proposes the idea that journalism “develops an understanding of modern forms of political citizenship” (Flew, T., 2006: 914-8). He contends that DIY media achieves “cross-demographic” communication which connects diverse and disparate populations and thus forms communities (Hartley, J., 1996: 57). Hartley observes a change in the way people use media to communicate; developments in communication technologies enable ordinary people to become both producers and consumers in multi-channel media environments. He contends “‘user-led innovation’ will reinvent journalism” (Hartley, 2005: 21) and will bring it closer to the “aspirational ideal of right for everyone” (Hartley, 2005: 21).

The case study of three different online media models will examine the trends in news production and how they affect the relationship between individuals and the state. It will review the inclusive and exclusionary practices of each of the three media models in terms of diversity in viewpoints, openness, capacities for individuals to participate in the news production process and in the public conversation, the mobilisation of citizens to take an active role in the organisation of the political sphere and how each model gives individuals the power to achieve democratic accountability. It will also seek to discover the extent to which the practice of journalism has evolved with technology and the democratic society.

### *Democracy and News Media*

Nick Couldry notes the long running crisis in political theory regarding democracy. He says preconditions for democratic life include the recognition by every person of everyone’s rights to speak and be heard (Couldry, N., 2002: 28). Like Flew, Couldry is concerned that not everyone has that opportunity. Questions about who controls whose voices in the media have prompted Couldry’s call for universal access to Internet communication technologies. Equality of access, he argues, would enhance and broaden “democratic public life” (Couldry, N., 2002: 29).

Jesper Strömbäck argues that the literature about media, journalism and democracy is largely unclear about the kind of democratic standard that should be applied to media critiques. He says the media are often accused of political cynicism without an explanation of how their practices are harmful to democracy (Strömbäck, J., 2005: 337). He argues that democracy is multidimensional and so it isn't valid to say that media and journalism either undermine or contribute to democracy without specifying the type of democracy in question. He says different models of democracy have different implications on journalism (Strömbäck, J., 2005: 337). Procedural democracy positions journalism as society's watchdog (Strömbäck, J., 2005: 341). Competitive democracy sees journalism focus on the political actors, their platforms and their political performance (Strömbäck, J., 2005: 341) while Participatory democracy sees journalism mobilising citizens to participate in public life and encouraging individuals to seek solutions to social issues through social interaction. (Strömbäck, J., 2005: 341). Deliberative democracy sees journalism foster "rationality, impartiality, intellectual honesty and equality" (Strömbäck, J., 2005: 341) through interactive networks.

This research will review theories of democracy and their implications on citizen journalism. It will review the extent to which Strömbäck's models, and others, are reflected in each of the three media models.

The *Media Consumption and the Future of Public Connection* research project confirmed that the democratic process is affected by media consumption (Couldry, N. et al., 2006: 34). The report shows that while there are multiple ways for media to engage citizens with politics (Couldry, N., S. Livingstone and T. Markham, 2006: 4), the news media registered significantly as a useful source of political explanations (Couldry, N., S. Livingstone and T. Markham, 2006: 4).

Earlier work by Curran and Couldry identified particular ways of thinking about media. The first, drawn from the work of Manuel Castells, is as a site where competing powers battle for media coverage (Curran, J. and N. Couldry, 2003b: 5). The second is that it is an illusion that the media only

mediate. These authors contend that mainstream media is one of the main forces in society that reinforce the ideologies of the powerful and is therefore one of the power forces that needs to be watched (Curran, J. and N. Couldry, 2003b: 4). With that in mind, Couldry's recent work points to "the continuing importance of traditional media in sustaining public connection" (Couldry, N., S. Livingstone and T. Markham, 2006: 34) and given their findings that "it is unclear whether the internet will generate habits of news consumption as stable as those associated with traditional media" (Couldry, N., S. Livingstone and T. Markham, 2006: 34), they recommend that "traditional media be given as much attention as new media in efforts to reverse political disengagement" (Couldry, N., S. Livingstone and T. Markham, 2006: 35). While uncertainty prevails over the future uptake of the Internet as a source of news, and given previous assertions by Curran and Couldry that significant challenges to media power have been mobilised by Internet communication technologies (Curran, J. and N. Couldry, 2003b: 5), their report emphasises the importance of the continued promotion of "news-oriented internet use" (Couldry, N., S. Livingstone and T. Markham, 2006: 36) in an effort to establish the Internet as a stable site for the consumption of public information (Couldry, N., S. Livingstone and T. Markham, 2006: 36).

The power of the Internet, according to Flew, is its ability to generate a wider range of "knowledge capacities" (Flew, T., 2005: 6) and alternative ways to access information. Cass Sunstein also emphasises the importance of the free flow of information to generate a wide range of knowledge. However, he does express some concern about the potential for group polarisation at sites such as the Internet. While he embraces ideas of diverse voices and vast sources of information afforded by the Internet, he warns that the capacity for this technology to allow people to personalise the information they receive could well be a danger to democracy (Sunstein, 2004: 58). He worries that people could choose to close themselves off from diverse or opposing viewpoints, only to consume like minded information which could potentially see the development of extreme viewpoints and a very unhealthy democracy (Sunstein, 2004: 59). In an environment such as this, he says, there is an absence of dissent. Without dissent there is less information being shared,

therefore it becomes much more difficult for group members to make decisions. In a situation such as this, the decisions are made by those with the most authority and influence and it becomes increasingly difficult for group members to publicly disagree. Therefore, for some (or many), conformity becomes “a sensible course of action” (Sunstein, 2003: 6). What these people know is never spoken about and the consequence is that the public conversation is deprived of useful information.

Sunstein’s theory will be applied to each of the three media models. The key applications of netCTs are "social software, open source software development, collaborative publishing and peer-to-peer networking" (Flew, T., 2005: 4). The use of these applications to create “blogs, wikis, open news sites, and community-based open source journalism” (Flew, T., 2005: 4) has the capacity to change the social behaviour of citizens in a way that impacts directly upon democracy. Of great interest is exactly how these applications affect social behaviours. This research seeks to find out.

The case studies of three media models, including both traditional and new media, will review the efforts by each to establish the Internet as a reliable and credible source of news. Working from the assumption that the reach of social networks enabled by netCTs has the capacity to influence public policy, this research seeks to show the extent to which this assumption is correct.

### *Alternative Media*

Lee Salter compares the ideological underpinnings of mainstream and alternative media sites. He says mainstream media sites are underpinned by “liberal-democratic understandings of politics” which position journalists as passive communicators of political information to publics. Thus mainstream is more representative of the state whereas alternative news sites are representative of ordinary people. Alternative news sites reject the hierarchical structure of mainstream media and endeavour to express the interests of marginalised groups. These sites do not have attachments to commercial interests and allow anyone to participate on any level. Mainstream media, on

the other hand, “serve to sustain the hegemonic position of a particular socio-political order” (Salter, L., 2006).

Salter contends that radical media and participatory journalism have evolved from a range of political and social movements and while there is much excitement about the possibilities for alternative media to revitalise citizens’ interest in the political sphere, Salter warns of the limitations attached to the Internet. The Internet is largely hailed as a site of freedom based upon assertions that it is “ungoverned, non-hierarchical, decentralised and anarchic” (Salter, L., 2006). Salter demonstrates how “US corporations dominate the technologies and the content around the world”, therefore proving that the assertions of unfettered freedom are “untrue” (Salter, L., 2006).

Curran and Couldry observe that there hasn't been a lot of research in the field of media studies on alternative sources of news. They contend studies have been more concerned with mass media power. The authors frame alternative media in terms of social responsibility and define it as "media production that challenges at least implicitly actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations" (Curran, J. and N. Couldry, 2003b: 7). Their scope of media production extends beyond traditional mediums such as print and broadcast to include mobile phones, digital radio and the Internet. They argue that these mediums are interconnected networks that contest power (Curran, J. and N. Couldry, 2003b: 8). Their interest in these mediums lies in the social, psychological, and political uses rather than the technical developments underpinning them (Curran, J. and N. Couldry, 2003b: 8). The scope of this research limits the sites of investigation to news journalism websites and news blogs.

#### *Agenda Setting, Gatekeeping and Gatewatching*

Of paramount concern to the preceding authors has been the agenda setting capacities of mainstream media. Couldry argues that existing media traditions limit the preconditions for public life (Couldry, N., 2002: 28).

Where gatekeeping practices are seen to limit and censor the voices and information that can be accessed in mainstream media, Axel Bruns' "gatewatching" (Bruns, A., 2005: 2) theory supports collaborative and open news production (Bruns, A., 2005: 311) enabling "producers"<sup>3</sup> to identify and highlight "important material as it becomes available" (Bruns, A., 2005: 17). Using Internet communication technologies, particularly applications such as blogging software, producers add analysis, commentary and opinion (Bruns, A., 2005: 198). This research will identify and analyse the gatekeeping and gatewatching practices in each of the prescribed media models.

### *Blogs*

The Internet, computers and computer software have added a new dimension to the production and consumption of news journalism around the world. Bruns describes news blogging as an inclusive, interactive and comprehensive media practice. News blogs are networked as a way of providing a more diverse, collaborative and comprehensive coverage of news (Bruns, A., and J. Jacobs, 2006). As a source of news, the news blog has gained momentum on the back of decreasing interest in mainstream news formats such as newspapers and current affairs programs (Turner, G., 2005: 140).

Following an Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) report that showed Australian audiences were turning away from hard news and current affairs, Graeme Turner, like Gans, has called for new news formats that better suit public needs (Turner, G., 2005: 135). Turner argues that mainstream media are "the most important influence on news and current affairs on the web" (Turner, G., 2005: 139). This research seeks to discover the extent to which mainstream news media utilises Internet communication technologies, such as blogging applications, in the production of news.

---

<sup>2</sup> Bruns defines *producers* as "users of news Websites who engage with such sites interchangeably in consumptive *and* productive modes (and often in both at virtually the same time)" (Bruns, A., 2005: 23).

### *Blogging as Journalism*

Bruns says there are many connections between journalism and blogging. While some producers of mainstream media argue that blogging can't be considered to be journalism because "there is no editor" (Bruns, A., 2005: 210), Bruns argues that bloggers contributing "informed and well-researched commentary on the news must be considered journalism" as much as the "op-ed contributions... in print and broadcast news" (Bruns, A., 2005: 212).

Rebecca Blood prefers to describe news blogging as "participatory media" rather than journalism (Blood, R., 2003: 62). She argues that a journalist's research extends beyond simply finding and providing a link to information and stresses the importance of the interview which, she observes, is non-existent in blogging (Blood, R., 2003: 62). Turner also stresses the importance of the interview to journalism but observes that even in traditional media sites the impact of the interview has been undermined by corporately controlled media practices. He argues that interviews are rarely conducted based on independent information and interviewees usually have prepared answers to scripted questions (Turner, G., 2005: 116).

Turner describes blogging as being "focussed on commentary...usually from the position of advocacy, rather than upon the attempt to generate new information or access to alternative news sources" (Turner, G., 2005: 137). He notes the Gulf War as an exceptional period where weblogs made a significant impact on the way people thought about the issues and events and, indeed, the mainstream media's coverage of the conflict. Bruns, too, connects the rise of blogs to political and other significant events (Bruns, A., 2005). This research will document and analyse significant events in terms of their coverage by mainstream and alternative news sites.

The research will consider differing approaches to audiences and will gauge the depth of information, the angles covered, the assumed reading level of the target audience, the interaction between audience members and between journalists and audience members, and peer-to-peer (p2p) collaboration. It will

also gauge the way publications position the audience and, importantly, the original sources of information.

A 2006 Pew Internet Project (PIP) blogger survey found an increased interest in the practice of blogging. The report estimated that around 12 million American adults kept blogs while 57 million read them. Not surprisingly, the survey found that most bloggers didn't think that their work was journalism particularly those who wrote about their life experiences. 34% of bloggers thought they were practicing journalism. Of those, 35 % said they verified facts often, while 28% said they never practiced verification; 15% said they directly quoted other people/media often, while 41 % said they never used direct quotes. Only 12% of bloggers who believed they practiced journalism abided by copyright restrictions while 50% never got copyright permission; 35% linked to original source material while 27% never used original sources; 11% posted corrections and 38% never posted corrections (Lenhart, A. and S. Fox., 2006: 19). It also brings into question how the traditional practices of journalism such as verification, original sourcing, direct attribution and legal and ethical guidelines, are addressed by bloggers.

Margot Kingston drafted her own code of ethics and conduct guidelines for her *Webdiary* news blog at the *Sydney Morning Herald*. These complemented the codes for traditional journalism. The *Webdiary* blog hosted public discussions about news issues and events. In an effort to create an open conversation, Kingston said she published all views, including those in opposition to her own, responded to all “non-frivolous” (Kingston, M., 2003: 171) queries, made corrections as they were brought to her attention by users of the site, published users material in “good faith, without bias” (Kingston, M., 2003: 171), and all the while remained conscious of her ethical obligation as a journalist (Kingston, M., 2005: 164). Kingston said it wasn't her intention that *Webdiary* would break news and she allowed contributors to write under a *nom de plume* (Kingston, M., 2003: 166). The operations and practices of *Webdiary* are an example of the way that traditional journalism practices can be modified and modernised.

This research will take into account the practices and operations of *Webdiary* as a benchmark for comparison when collecting and analysing the data from each case study.

J.D. Lasica sees the appearance of blogs on mainstream news sites as an indicator that corporate news organisations have recognised the vast opportunities presented by weblog technology. Mainstream media, he says, is increasingly drawing upon the blogosphere as a source of information and as a way to gauge how people feel about particular public issues and events. Lasica argues that since news stories have a longer life in the blogosphere people have more time to digest and consider important issues. People also have a greater opportunity than they did in the past to express their responses in a public forum. By offering audiences opportunities to circulate, test, dissect, analyse and revise their opinions from many different perspectives, news organisations are effectively engaging the public as partners and stakeholders in the news process. In this sense, they make themselves more accessible, open and transparent. This not only fosters a sense of community but enhances the credibility of the media organisation (Lasica, J., 2003).

Similarly, Bruns embraces news blogging as a way for ordinary people to become active participants in the news process which, he says, has the potential to “affect their overall place in the democratic process” (Bruns, A. and J. Jacobs, 2006: 20).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed a range of perspectives on journalism, citizenship and netCTs, particularly blogging. It has raised concerns about the disengagement of citizens from the public conversation about social and political matters. Journalism has, in part, been held responsible for this phenomenon. Therefore, an important element of the research to date has been to discover the diverse views about what journalism is, what it should be and how it should be done. This will remain an ongoing task throughout the

research process. This paper has proposed a course of research that seeks to indicate possibilities for Internet communication technologies to reshape journalism for citizens.

In particular, it suggests that developments in technology and media uses are intertwined, continually evolving and constantly reshaping the way audiences use media communication. The work has touched on some of the social, political and economic concerns associated with these developments. While there is much excitement about the possibilities of modern communication methods for openness and diversity, authors such as Salter and Sunstein have pointed out the need to be aware of the associated pitfalls.

Finally, the paper proposes a research plan to investigate three models of media: commercial, public and alternative. Using theories of journalism, citizenship, democracy, media, technology, sociology and network theory, the research will consider the effects of news blogs on journalism, journalists, citizenship and democracy. Moreover, it seeks to develop an understanding of the effects of participatory journalism on citizenship.

## References

- Adam, G. S. 2001. The Education of Journalists. *Journalism: Theory and Practice* 2 (3): 315-339.
- Atton, C. 2003. What is 'Alternative' Journalism? *Journalism*, 4: 267-272.
- Bertrand, C. J. 2003. *An arsenal for democracy : media accountability systems*. Creskill, N.J. : Hampton Press.
- Blood, R. 2003. Blogs and Journalism: Do They Connect?, *Nieman reports*, Fall 2003 61-63.
- Bruns, A. 2005. *Gatewatching : collaborative online news production*. New York : Peter. Lang Publishing.
- Bruns, A. and J. Jacobs eds. 2006. *Uses of Blogs*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Carter, H. 2003. Whose News Is It? In *Media, profit, and politics: competing priorities in an open society*, eds. Harper, J. and T. Yantek. xii, : Kent, Ohio : Kent State University Press.
- Cordell, M. and S. De Silva. 2002. New mediations. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, (103): 88-93.
- Couldry, N. 2002. Mediation and alternative media, or relocating the centre of media and communication studies. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*: 24-31.
- Couldry, N., S. Livingstone and T. Markham. 2006. *Media Consumption and the Future of Public Connection*. Research Report. London: London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Curran, J. and N. Couldry 2003a. *Contesting media power: alternative media in a networked world*. Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield.
- Curran, J. and N. Couldry 2003b. The Paradox of Media Power. In *Contesting media power : alternative media in a networked world*, eds. Curran, J. and N. Couldry. pp. 3-15. Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield.
- Deuze, M. 2005. What is journalism?: Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered. *Journalism*, 6: 442-464.
- Downing, J. D. H. 2003. Audiences and Readers of Alternative Media: The Absent Lure of the Virtually Unknown. *Media, Culture & Society*, 25: 625-645.

- Dyrenfurth, N. 2005. The language of Australian citizenship. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 40: 87-109.
- Eide, M. and G. Knight. 1999. Public/Private Service: Service Journalism and the Problems of Everyday Life. 14 (4): 525-548.
- Flew, T. 2005. *From e-Government to Online Deliberative Democracy*. Proceedings Oxford Internet Institute Summer Doctoral Program. Beijing. 11 July, 2005.
- Flew, T. 2006, 'Media and Citizenship: Historical and Contemporary Debates', in A.-V. Anttiroiko and M. Malika (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Digital Government*, Idea Publishing, Hershey, PA. 914-918
- Flew, T. and G. Young. 2004. 'If they come they will build it': Managing and Building e-democracy from the Ground Up. *Proceedings of the Australian Electronic Governance Conference*. Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne, Melbourne Victoria, 14-15 April 2004, pp. 1-22.
- Gans, H. J. 2003. *Democracy and the news*. New York ; Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Graham, A. 2001. *Quality not profit*.  
[http://www.opendemocracy.net/author/Andrew\\_Graham.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/author/Andrew_Graham.jsp) (accessed 20/09/06)
- Hartley, J. 1996. *Popular reality : journalism, modernity, popular culture*. London, England ; St. Martin's Press.
- Hartley, J. 2005. Journalism as a human right: a cultural approach to journalism. In *Journalism Research in an Era of Globalization*, eds. Löffelholz, M. and D. Weaver. London: Routledge.
- Kingston, M. 2003. Diary of a Webdiarist: Ethics Goes Online, in Lumby, C. and Probyn, E. *Remote Control: New Media, New Ethics*, Port Melbourne, Vic. : Cambridge University Press.
- Kingston, M. 2005. The Future of Fair Dinkum Journalism, in Mills, J., *Barons to bloggers: confronting media power* Carlton, Vic. : Miegunyah Press in conjunction with The Alfred Deakin Innovation Lectures.
- Kovach, B. and T. Rosenstiel 2001. *The elements of journalism: what newspeople should know and the public should expect*. 1st ed. New York : Crown Publishers.
- Lasica, J. 2003. *How blogging benefits media organizations*.  
<http://www.jdlasica.com/index.html> (accessed 03/06/2006)

- Lenhart, A. and S. Fox. 2006. Bloggers: A portrait of the internet's new storytellers. Research Project. US: Pew Internet & American Life Project,  
<http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP%20Bloggers%20Report%20July%2019%202006.pdf>, (accessed 21/07/2006).
- Lichtenberg, J. 1990. *Democracy and the mass media: a collection of essays*. Cambridge, New York : Cambridge University Press.
- McChesney, R. W. 2004. *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.  
[www.monthlyreview.org](http://www.monthlyreview.org)
- McChesney, R. W. 2000. Journalism, democracy,...and class struggle. *Monthly Review*, 52: 1.
- Meikle, G. 2002. *Future active: media activism and the internet*. Annandale, N.S.W. : Pluto Press; Routledge.
- Mercer, C. 1992. Regular imaginings: the newspaper and the nation. In *Celebrating the nation: a critical study of Australia's bicentenary*, ed. Bennett, T., pp. 26-46. St. Leonards. N.S.W. : Allen & Unwin.
- Merritt, D. and M. E. McCombs 2004. *The two W's of journalism: why and what of public affairs reporting*. Mahwah, NJ : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Minichiello, V. 1990. *In-depth interviewing: researching people*. South Melbourne : Longman Cheshire.
- Murdock, G. and P. Golding. 1989. Information Poverty and Political Inequality: Citizenship in the Age of Privatized Communications. *Journal of Communication*, 39: 180-195.
- Murdoch, R. 2005. Speech by Rupert Murdoch to the American Society of Newspaper Editors. *American Society of Newspaper Editors*,  
[http://www.newscorp.com/news/news\\_247.html](http://www.newscorp.com/news/news_247.html) (accessed 06/08/06)
- Papandrea, F. 2005. *Cross Media Reform: A Setback for Media Diversity*. Proceedings of the Communications Research and Strategy Forum. University NSW. November 2005.
- Patmore, G. A. and G. Jungwirth. 2004. *The vocal citizen*. Fitzroy, Vic. : Arena in association with Australian Fabian Society.
- Pauly, J. J. 2003. Recovering Journalism as a Democratic Art. In *Media, profit, and politics : competing priorities in an open society*, eds., J. Harper and T. Yantek. xii, Kent, Ohio : Kent State University Press.

- Platon, S. and M. Deuze. 2003. Indymedia Journalism: A Radical Way of Making, Selecting and Sharing News? *Journalism*, 4: 336-355.
- Salter, L. 2006. Democracy & Online News: Indymedia and the Limits of Participatory Media. *Scan Journal*, 3.
- Schechter, D. 2005. *The death of media and the fight to save democracy*. Hoboken, N.J. : Melville House.
- Schudson, M. 2001. The objectivity norm in American journalism. *Journalism Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 2: 149-170.
- Schultz, J. 1998. *Reviving the fourth estate: democracy, accountability and the media*. Cambridge ; Melbourne : Cambridge University Press.
- Stockwell, S. 1999. Beyond the fourth estate: democracy, deliberation and journalism theory. *Australian Journalism Review*, 21(1), 37-49
- Strömbäck, J. 2005. In Search of a Standard: four models of democracy and their normative implications for journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 6: 331-345.
- Sunstein, C. R. 2004. Democracy and Filtering. *Communications of the ACM*, 47 (12): 57-61.
- Sunstein, C. R. 2003. *Why societies need dissent*. Cambridge, Mass.; London : Harvard University Press.
- Turner, G. 2005. *Ending the affair: the decline of television current affairs in Australia*. Sydney, N.S.W. : UNSW Press.
- Zelizer, B. (1992). CNN, the Gulf War, and Journalistic Practice. *News: A Reader*. Tumber. New York, Oxford University Press: 340-349.
- Zelizer, B. (1997). Journalists as Interpretive Communities. *Social meanings of news: a text-reader*. D. A. Berkowitz. Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage Publications. 401-419.