

City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Thurman, N. (2008). Forums for citizen journalists? Adoption of user generated content initiatives by online news media. New Media & Society, 10(1), pp. 139-157. doi: 10.1177/1461444807085325

This is the unspecified version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/119/

Link to published version: https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to City Research Online policy.

City Research Online: http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/ publications@citystgeorges.ac.uk

Forums for citizen journalists? Adoption of user generated content initiatives by online news media

Neil Thurman, City University, London

The mainstream online news media face accusations of being slow to respond to so-called 'grassroots' or 'citizen' journalism, which uses the World Wide Web, and in particular blogs and wikis, to publish and promote independent news-related content. This article argues that the adaptation of established news websites to the increasing demand from readers for space to express their views is driven as much by local organisational and technical conditions as it is by any attachment to traditional editorial practices. The article uses qualitative research interviews with the editors and managing editors of nine major British news websites to reveal the debates journalists are having about their changing roles, the challenges of meeting commercial expectations and legal obligations and the innovations taking place in online newsrooms. It provides journalism and interactive media scholars with case studies on the changes taking place in journalism's relationship with its consumers.

Keywords: online journalism, citizen journalism, participatory journalism, grassroots journalism, blogs, user generated content, British news websites.

Introduction

The development of user-friendly, low-cost online content management tools like Movable Type, Blogger.com, and Manila have helped facilitate a rapid growth in the number and popularity of independently published websites that overlap the space traditionally occupied by the mainstream news media (see Thurman and Jones, 2005: 254). Matheson (2004: 449) has written of the 'many news-related weblogs maintained by people who are not journalists', estimating that perhaps half of all

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

weblogs deal frequently with public affairs. With nearly nine million weblogs—or blogs—indexed by the search engine *Technorati.com*,[1] there is no doubt that those who have traditionally consumed news are increasingly ready and willing to produce content. This so called 'citizen journalism' is not restricted to individual efforts: *Wikinews*,[2] a collaborative news publishing experiment, has sites in nineteen languages.

The professional news media are also providing opportunities for news consumers to participate: *OhmyNews.com*, a South Korean online newspaper, has more than 37,000 registered contributors, and is expanding into the English[3] and Japanese language markets; Britain's second most popular news website, *Guardian.co.uk*, hosts a 'News' message board to which readers contributed 647,798[4] messages or 'posts' between 1999–2005; and the ten most popular topical polls hosted by *ThisisLondon.co.uk*—the website of London's best-selling newspaper, *The Evening Standard*—averaged 48,000 votes apiece (Williams, 2004).

This study quantifies and analyses the distribution of user-generated content initiatives at ten mainstream UK news websites[5] through the use of a survey; and examines editors' attitudes to 'citizen journalism', exploring their publications' experiments with reader participation through qualitative research interviews.

Survey results

The survey—undertaken between 20–29 April 2005—revealed seven major formats for participation: 'Polls', 'Have your says', 'Chat rooms', 'Q&As', 'Blogs with comments enabled', 'Pre-moderated message boards', and 'Post-moderated message boards'[6] (see **table 1**). A number of additional formats were recorded and have been

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

grouped in a single column labelled 'other' (as they occurred once, cross-site comparison was impossible).

'Q&As'—interviews with journalists or invited guests, the questions for which are submitted by readers—were the most popular format (used by 70 per cent of publications), followed by 'Polls' (50 per cent), 'Have your says'—in which journalists post topical questions to which readers send written replies (40 per cent), 'Post-moderated message boards' (30 per cent), and 'Pre-moderated message boards' (20 per cent). 'Blogs with comments enabled', 'Chat rooms', and the nine 'other' formats were each used by a single publication.

What's striking about the distribution of formats is that, discounting the multiple choice and binary 'Polls', 80 per cent of the twenty-five textual formats for reader participation were edited or pre-moderated. No less significant was the wide difference in publications' deployment of these formats. When the survey was conducted only the *Guardian.co.uk* hosted blogs with comments enabled. Furthermore the range and depth of reader debate in message boards varied greatly: the *DailyMail.co.uk*'s message boards had over 123 times more posts than the *FT.com*'s equivalent—'Discussions'—and over 10,000 times more than the *Telegraph.co.uk*'s only message board.

Research context

Such variation is rarely considered by the literature where news organisations' adoption of interactive publishing technologies is often assumed to be uniformly shallow and slow: Katz (1997, quoted in Matheson, 2004: 444) criticised US newspapers for remaining 'insanely stagnant in an interactive age'; Matheson (2004: 446) believes the mainstream media have a 'rather static core set of news practices'

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

Table 1: User generated content initiatives at a selection of British news Web sites (April 2005)

Web site	Polls	Have your say	Chat room	Q&A	Blogs with comments enabled	Message boards: Moderated Pre	Message boards: Moderated Post	Message boards: Posts	Other
Guardian.co.uk				Yes	Yes [1]		Yes	1,221,054[2]	
DailyMail.co.uk	Yes[3]			Yes			Yes	1,165,000[4]	
ThisisLondon.co.uk	Yes[5]		Yes	Yes			Yes	389,000[6]	Yes[7]
FT.com	Yes			Yes		Yes		9,432[8]	Yes[9]
Telegraph.co.uk		Yes		Yes		Yes		116[10]	Yes[11]
Independent.co.uk									
TheSun.co.uk	Yes [12]	Yes[13]							Yes[14]
TimesOnline.co.uk		Yes		Yes					Yes[15]
Scotsman.com									Yes[16]
News.bbc.co.uk	Yes	Yes		Yes					Yes[17]

Definitions:
'Polls' are topical questions to which readers are asked to make a multiple choice or binary response.
'Have your say' refers to features where journalists post topical questions to which readers send written replies. A selection is made, edited and published.
'Q&A' refers to interviews with journalists and / or invited guests, the questions for which are submitted by readers. The interviews are Webcast in audio or video or the transcription published in textual form.
'Post-moderated message boards' publish users' comments without initial moderation. '**Pre-moderated message boards'** vet posts before publication.

Notes:
[1] Since September 2004, readers have been able to post comments to the *Guardian.co.uk*'s blogs 'live', without preliminary selection or editing. There are six blogs—'Electionblog', 'Gamesblog', 'Guideblog', 'Onlineblog', 'The Observer blog' and 'Newsblog'. Although the *Guardian.co.uk* published a 'Weblog' (http://www.guardian.co.uk/weblog/) from July 2001 until September 2004 it was a different interpretation of the form, focusing on providing 'the best links from around the web' rather than providing what Matheson (2004: 460) describes as a 'new personalized democratic space'.
[2] These figures were collected on 28 and 29 April 2005 and represent the total number of archived posts since the Talkboards were launched in 1999. The posts are spread over 10 'Talkboards', each divided into 10–30 'Topics'. Each 'Topic' has between 1–227 'Discussions'.
[3] The editorial director called polls a 'phenomenally popular' feature that 'can get 10,000 votes at a time' Williams (2004).
[4] Posts are spread across seventy-three boards grouped into twelve themes and date back to 2002. The boards predate the launch of the *DailyMail.co.uk* having previously appeared as part of its forerunner *femail.co.uk*.
[5] The ten most popular polls average 47,975 votes each.
[6] Posts date back to 2001 and are spread over 29 boards grouped into eleven themes.
[7] Additionally *ThisisLondon.co.uk* carry a small number (214) of 'reader reviews' spread across eight topics including books, computer games and restaurants.
[8] These posts are spread over 110 so-called 'Discussions'. These figures were collected on 20 April 2005 and represent the total number of posts archived since 2000.
[9] Readers can submit 'Letters to the editor' via the website and columnists' email addresses are printed alongside the articles to encourage reader feedback.
[10] This message board appears in the Travel 'channel' of *Telegraph.co.uk*. The posts date back to 2003.
[11] *Telegraph.co.uk*'s Wine 'channel' invites and publishes readers' recipes.
[12] Only run occasionally.
[13] Occasional comment pages are run when the editor 'has a spare reporter'. Popular topics will receive 'hundreds' of emails (Picton, 2004).
[14] *TheSun.co.uk* invite and publish letters and a selection of the 'top 20 viral emails'.
[15] *TimesOnline.co.uk* provides forms at the end of some articles which readers can use to submit comments. A selection are published.
[16] *Scotsman.com* run occasional features involving user participation: during the 2003 Scottish election they recruited a focus group who were sent a detailed survey (the results were published online), and they host an annual 'Photoblog' coinciding with the Edinburgh Festival.
[17] The *BBC News* website publish regular selections of readers' photographs—'Your Pictures'—as well as longer, single-authored photo essays, diaries and articles. They also carry special features to which readers contribute. The editor gave an example: 'we did a voters' panel for the US election where . . . we built up twelve people who we'd go back to on a monthly basis for their view of how the campaign was going and whether their view of who they were going to vote for changed' (Clifton, 2004).

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

and that they place 'other journalistic practices at its margins'; Gillmor (2004: 114) attributes the slow adoption of the blog by the mainstream media to their 'innate conservatism' and holds the view that 'when big media companies consider having a conversation with their audience, they tend not to push many boundaries' (op. cit.: 112).

The adoption of user generated content initiatives in mainstream news organisations raises a number of other questions about the processes of news production and the character of news sources. For instance, do reader contributions challenge the view, here expressed by Golding and Elliot, that 'even in highly equipped and financed news organisations there is an enormous reliance on the news gathering of agencies and on a few prominent institutional sources' (1999: 115), and the emphasis on news production as 'for the most part passive . . . selecting from already limited supplies of information' (1999: 118; see also Fishman, 1999: 108; and Sigal, 1999: 229)? Can we any longer assume only 'powerful or skilled sources know how to make contact with reporters' and that many if not most people do not 'know how to contact reporters', especially in the national media (Gans, 1999: 244)? Is it still the case that only the 'bureaucratic self-reporting apparatus' can generate the reliable quantities of information that reporters require or can readers rival the traditional 'stable sources' (Fishman, 1999: 108)? And what motivates readers to participate? Do they fit the traditional definition of sources as being politically or economically motivated, trying to gain 'favourable public access' for their 'political constituents, potential supporters, customers [or] investors' (McManus, 1999: 186–187)?

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

This paper will not attempt to provide definitive answers to such theoretical questions but poses them, in part, to set the context for what follows—an exploratory study that focuses on key points from qualitative interviews with editors; presenting voices that are still rarely found in the literature.

The following editors were interviewed in October, November and December 2004. Job titles are as they were at the time the interviews were conducted:

- Peter Bale, Editorial Director, Times Online
- Richard Burton, Editor, Telegraph.co.uk
- Pete Clifton, Editor, BBC News website
- Tracy Corrigan, Editor, FT.com
- Richard Deverell, Head, BBC News Interactive
- Martin King, Editor, Independent.co.uk
- Stewart Kirkpatrick, Editor, Scotsman.com
- Peter Picton, Editor, theSun.co.uk
- Mike Smartt, Founding Editor, BBC News website
- Avril Williams, Editorial Director, Associated New Media

Part (I) analyses the conflicts between editors' traditional roles and their awareness of and experiments with user generated content.

Part (II) examines the legal, commercial, human and technological factors that have shaped how news websites adopt user generated content initiatives.

(I) Lines of defense: professional standards under fire?

'This idea with blogs and particularly wikis that you can go in and edit stuff and all join the party. It is a load of fun but it just detracts from what a traditional idea of journalism is. I think we have to be quite careful' (Burton, 2004). In the light of the pornographic content the *LATimes.com* unwittingly published during their brief experiment allowing readers to co-write the site's editorials using a wiki (see Glaister, 2005), these comments made by the editor of *Telegraph.co.uk* six months before were prophetic. They exemplify the concerns that editors and managing editors interviewed for this study had about the ways that non-professionally produced content challenges journalism's professional norms. Particular concerns were expressed over: the news value of some user generated content; its standards of spelling, punctuation, accuracy and balance; and the influence of blogs on the mainstream news media.

News values and standards

A belief in the need to control, moderate or sub[7] users' submissions so that they met the standards of professionally produced output was strongly held. For example, editors at the *BBC News* website wanted to 'provide . . . users with a good edited read' (Smartt, 2004), by 'correct[ing] bad spelling and put[ting] capital letters in where there should be' (Clifton, 2004).

Some participants suggested that editorial intervention should extend beyond grammar to the selection of what was published in the first place. The editor of *theSun.co.uk* believed strongly that there was 'a premium to be paid for editing experience' and that readers wanted him 'to sift out content for them'. He suggested that the reason why people buy newspapers and magazines or view websites is to

'read a well-crafted news story or feature by someone who is trained and experienced in that field'. The founding editor of the *BBC News* website suggested that user contributions were often duplicative, providing a strong justification for editorial intervention. 'Most people are making the same point. You'll find that there will only be maybe ten points of view' (Smartt, 2004). Having worked in newspaper or broadcast environments where the amount of space or time available for content is limited, most online editors seek out content that has a broad appeal. The niche audiences reached by most bloggers are very different. This disparity helps explain why the managing editor of *TimesOnline.co.uk* believed that 'ninety-nine per cent' of blogs were 'extremely dull or . . . of very marginal interest' (Bale, 2004) and why the head of BBC News Interactive said, 'there are a lot of very mediocre blogs out there' (Deverell, 2004).

For some editors, in order to make the grade, user generated content needed not only to be of more than 'marginal interest' but also be balanced, something that the editors of *TimesOnline.co.uk*, *Independent.co.uk,* and *FT.com* were concerned was not always the case. Bale (2004) believed that forums could 'become just anchors for crackpots', a problem the editor of *Independent.co.uk* perceived with his, now defunct, message boards. He described the users as:

> . . . a bunch of bigots who were shouting from one side of the room to the other and back again without even bothering to listen to what the other side of the room were saying. If someone did try to put a reasonable, balanced view it was an exception (King, 2004).

King suggested that editors were 'abrogating some of [their] responsibilities if [they] allow articles to appear on [their] product that have not been at least checked for decency [and] taste'. The *FT.com* reported that 'racist comments' in their message

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

boards were a problem of sufficient import to prompt a move away from a 'straight-to-air', post-moderated model to a system of pre-moderation where journalists publish a selection of readers' contributions (Corrigan, 2004).

Blogs as a vehicle for reader contributions

Blogs represent the best-known form of invitation that writers use to initiate conversations with readers online. A common feature of blogs facilitates these conversations: the ability users have to send in 'comments', which are published alongside the blogger's original 'post'. As noted elsewhere (Thurman and Jones, 2005: 254), blogs in the mainstream news media, where they exist, often 'fail to conform to some of the social conventions of the blog', lacking 'the functionality [such as reader comments] that the blogging community has come to expect'. As shown in **table 1**, amongst the mainstream British online news media, only the *Guardian.co.uk* allowed comments to be posted to its blogs without pre-moderation.

The reasons for the scarcity and non-conformity of blogs in the mainstream, with the resultant lack of opportunity for user contributions, has been attributed (see Boyd, 2004) to a bias against the form fed by an alleged perception of the typical blogger as a 'naive and inexperienced' amateur. This paper argues that there are other reasons, specifically: journalists' reactions against the claims of novelty made on behalf of blogs; and the manner in which blogs emphasise the personality of the author.

In contrast to Boyd's claim that some in the journalism profession have been prejudiced against blogs as a form because they believe bloggers lack professional journalists' knowledge and experience,[8] this study shows that editors of mainstream news websites—at least in the British context—*do* recognise the merits of independently published blogs. The editor of *Telegraph.co.uk* commented that 'you

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

can get a very good blog' (Burton, 2004). The head of BBC News Interactive recognised that there are a 'number of very good ones' (Deverell, 2004) and the editorial director of *TimesOnline.co.uk* agreed that 'some of them are really superb' (Bale, 2004). Indeed Richard Deverell has been sufficiently impressed by some blogs to have looked at whether 'it is possible to provide links to relevant blogs from stories' in the same way that the *BBC News* website links to other news sites via their 'newstracker' software.[9]

Cult of personality

Rather than naivety, inexperience or their non-professional status, comments made by the editor of *Telegraph.co.uk*, Richard Burton, suggest that the emphasis blogs typically give to the personality of the writer—the messenger rather than the message—may have contributed to their slow adoption by mainstream news sites. Such an emphasis challenges a strongly established tradition in the journalism profession that most reporting is written anonymously. Burton (2004), also a visiting lecturer at the University of Westminster, recounted telling journalism students of his who were learning to write features that 'the message is the only thing that is important. No one knows you, no one cares about you. The reader wants information', and spoke to them of the 'traditional journalist who is a fly on the wall and will be delivering information'—very different in concept from the tone of most blogs, and a reason why he said, 'blogs worry me'.

The 'overselling' of blogs

Some journalists reacted against claims—such as those made by Kahn and Kellner (n.d.)—that blogs were revolutionary. Their reactions to the perceived 'overselling' of

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

blogs are shown below, and reveal a subtle distaste for the form which, it is argued, has contributed to the slow up take of blogs by mainstream online news sites.

The editor of the *Scotsman.com* questioned whether blogs were actually any different from previous forms of writing on the web:

> The whole blog craze has been a bit oversold and it is really just people with websites. It is very hard to tell the difference between someone who kept an online journal back in the mid 1990s and someone keeping a blog now (Kirkpatrick, 2004).

He added that 'we already have a mechanism for publishing the thoughts of the journalist, it is the website and the newspaper'. The editor of *theSun.co.uk* went further, questioning whether blogs were any different from existing forms of print journalism:

> What's the difference between a blog and a column . . . [or] a colour piece as we used to call it? We used to do '24 hours in the life of a nurse' and that's the same thing. I'm not against them I just don't understand why they are called anything different. . . . the columnists write one . . . every week and it goes in the paper (Picton, 2004).

Although blogs have been characterised by their emphasis on the provision of hyperlinks (see Blood, 2000), for the editor of *Telegraph.co.uk* the essential characteristic of blogging is the production of text—no different from the traditional role of the journalist. 'Blog is just a word. They are still writing copy. I am keen that we don't get lost in the language' (Burton, 2004).

Richard Burton's worry that blogs might detract from traditional journalistic standards was not made without qualification. Despite his reservations he acknowledged that blogs could 'look quite attractive' and were, he said, 'something that I want to examine'.[10]

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

(II) Commerce, courts, personnel and process: reader participation in the real world

Although the concerns editors expressed about the news value and quality of user generated content, and the subtle distaste some had for blogs may have contributed to the patchy adoption of reader forums in the mainstream media, these factors are not a full explanation nor do they adequately account for the significant variations in the deployment of such forums at the publications studied (see survey results). In this section it will be shown how local conditions play an important role in determining whether and how online news sites experiment with new forms of participatory journalism. Time and resource issues are discussed, along with other contingent factors, specifically:

1. The legal environment for hosting open forums for users.
2. The management and professional preparedness of journalists.
3. The information systems involved in processing and publishing user content.

Moderation and remuneration: counting the costs

The death of the popular British radio presenter John Peel in October 2004 was something of a turning point in the *BBC News* website's attitudes to user generated content:

> When John Peel died we had, in total, over 100,000 emails. On the first day we had 35,000. Because our approach is to read and sub everything that we put up, we just couldn't cope. We must have delighted about fifty people by publishing their comments but the other 34,500 must have thought, 'I've spent all this time crafting this beautiful poem and you've just ignored it' (Clifton, 2004).

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

Just a few years earlier, big stories at the *BBC News* website drew 'several hundred' emails at most, and 'one or two people, not even doing it full time' was all that was required to 'decide what to publish' (Smartt, 2004). By late 2004—even with an average year-on-year budget of £12.16 million (Graf, 2004: 35)—the speed and volume of correspondence from their rapidly-growing and increasingly vocal audience meant that the BBC found it impossible to read the '10,000 or more' (Clifton, 2005) emails they received on a weekly basis. The day John Peel died, perhaps one in thirty readers wrote in.[11]

The *BBC News* website's approach to moderation—reading and subbing everything they put up—was typical of the websites studied and explains why user generated content initiatives can be expensive to run. The *Scotsman.com* reported finding that 'the great problem with any kind of public involvement is that you have to moderate it and that is very, very resource-heavy' (Kirkpatrick, 2004). The *FT.com* 'cut down on the number' of user generated 'discussions' they published for the same reason (Corrigan, 2004).

Reader remuneration

User generated content initiatives, as currently managed by most of the mainstream British online news media, are resource intensive due to editorial intervention rather than any remuneration paid to contributors. They are motivated, the founding editor of the *BBC News* website suggested, 'because they just want to write their experiences . . . the question of getting paid isn't a major issue' (Smartt, 2004). However, as the BBC sought to expand the range and depth of user generated content, they were starting to pay for contributions. The editor of the *BBC News* website outlined a likely scenario. 'If we've got an aid worker stuck in the middle of nowhere who started writing a bespoke diary for us over a number of days then a discussion might come up

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

about payment' but, Clifton (2004) continued, 'it hasn't been an area where we have started to spend shed loads of extra cash'. For the most part user contributions at the *BBC News* website were treated in 'a traditional news gathering way. We interview them, thank them and that would be the end of that'.

Paying contributors no more than a nominal fee has not prevented South Korea's *OhmyNews.com* from becoming one of the most successful and influential examples of a publication written, largely, by its readers. According to *OhmyNews.com*'s[12] founder and chief executive Oh Yeon-Ho, 'when someone writes an article he gets paid only 1,000 Won (about 85 US cents), whether he writes ten pages or 100 pages'[13] (Yu, 2003). Despite the low remuneration, 37,000 people have registered as contributors of whom '15,000 have published stories under their bylines' (Gillmor, 2003).

Commercialising content, syndicating submissions: income and benefits

Ultimately, at commercial publications, the bottom line will determine the future place of user generated content. This article has described how current levels of moderation make such contributions expensive to integrate—not in itself a problem if sites can make money from the products that emerge. This study revealed that although publishers are exploiting this new source of content in various ways, commercialising user forums has been problematic. The editorial director of Associated New Media, publishers of the *Daily Mail* website and *ThisisLondon.co.uk*, believed that the areas of her sites featuring reader contributions attracted her 'most loyal audience'. 'People love it. They are very loyal to it'. That loyalty, Williams (2004) reported, has resulted in 'the number of pages per visit for those people [being] very, very high', with 'about 40–50 per cent of the *DailyMail.co.uk*'s traffic . . . made up of the [message boards]'.

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

So far so good; but can readers be too loyal? The editor of the *Independent.co.uk* believed so. When he analysed the number of regular users of their Middle East message board he found that there were no more than 'about 220' (King, 2004). Readers like this, viewing over 100 pages per week, are unlikely to have the time or inclination to participate in any commercial opportunities provided, making them a drain on resources rather than revenue-generators.

The *DailyMail.co.uk* have tried a number of strategies to earn money from their message boards including advertising overlays and sponsorship. They have also used 'intelligent hyperlinks within postings. So if someone writes Weller then that Weller would become a link to the Weller website'. It was, according to their editorial director, the price users had 'to pay for their message boards' (Williams, 2004). Although 'a couple of years' ago there were some complaints about this type of commercial intrusion she thought that there was now an acceptance because 'you are providing them with a service with the associated server costs, design costs, and staffing costs'.

Internal syndication

Although publishers have not been entirely successful in generating revenues from user generated content initiatives, for online news websites with a print or broadcast parent, users have provided a useful new source of exclusive content. The *Daily Mail* and the *Mail on Sunday* 'quite often run a page of readers' comments taken from the website' (Williams, 2004). The *FT.com* have done similar things:

> Last year . . . we asked 'who is the most influential European of the last 25 years' . . . It was all done on the web and the results were published . . . in a special edition of the Saturday magazine (Corrigan, 2004).

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

The Sun's online editor reported that some news desks were 'pulling in five or six or seven stories a day' from the website and loved 'the direct communication' with readers. Picton (2004) reported that the newspaper was 'getting more stories from our readers via the website . . . than they are on phone-ins'. 'On a daily basis' journalists at the *BBC News* website were feeding back quotes, photographs and contact details from 'people who are at stories that other parts of the BBC are chasing' (Clifton, 2004). User comments were making the news too. According to the editor of the *BBC News* website, journalists from the BBC's 24-hour rolling news operation, *News 24,* had visited his newsroom to watch users' comments arrive and feature them in their own coverage. 'When John Peel died they were up here regularly that day to just read out loads of gushy comments, which is fairly low grade, but sometimes it's a useful way for them to reflect general opinion' (Clifton, 2004). Clifton believed that news gathering at the BBC was 'just waking up to that fact that [the website] isn't a bad way of getting additional information on a story' saying that he would 'like to invest a bit more effort into that in the coming year. I think that's an interesting area for us'.

Legal liabilities

The fear of action resulting from libelous comments posted to unmoderated user forums was an important contingent factor explaining the sometimes-wary attitude to user generated content initiatives at some of the sites studied. The case of LORD ROBERTSON v THE SUNDAY HERALD played on the mind of the *Scotsman.com*'s editor Stewart Kirkpatrick. In March 2003 *The Scotsman* reported that Lord Robertson (the then Secretary General of NATO) would be suing the *Sunday Herald*, alleging that a post to a message board hosted by the newspaper was defamatory (Denholm, 2003). Although the *Sunday Herald* claimed that a maximum

of thirty-seven people could have seen the comment, and that they were unaware of its presence—a defense of 'innocent dissemination'—they decided to settle out of court for £25,000. The case has not helped to resolve in editors' minds what it means in law to publish a libellous comment. Questioned about allowing users to add comments to blogs, Kirkpatrick said that the libel laws are 'holding publishers back and certainly give me cause for concern'. If the person submitting a message to a bulletin board rather than the publisher carried legal liability, the *Scotsman.com*'s editor would, he said, be 'a lot more relaxed' about unmoderated user forums.

The *Sunday Herald* case brought home the 'legalities' and consequent 'responsibilities' of hosting forums to the editor of *Independent.co.uk* who, even before the Robertson case, thought that legally they 'were on dodgy ground' with the message board they hosted. Although legal issues were not the primary reason for dropping the forum, looking back King (2004) felt 'quite happy' to have abandoned the forum 'for a while'. He didn't want the 'distraction from your credibility and your time' that legal actions could cause. It was, in part, the heavy legal responsibility that came with hosting bulletin boards that caused the editorial director of Associated New Media to 'question', 'a lot of times', the communities that the *DailyMail.co.uk* hosts. Williams (2004) reported being 'constantly anxious about our community' and said she would 'be lying if I said it didn't make me think'.

Time and temperament: how human factors influence reader participation

As was suggested earlier, the blog represents the best-known form of invitation writers use to initiate conversations with readers online. Although Donald Matheson (2004: 444) suggests that 'many journalists working online are enthusiastic about the potential to rearticulate practice in the new forms that are available online', this study

revealed that some of their editors had concerns about the time commitment required as well as their journalists' preparedness. The editor of *FT.com* said:

> Maybe we would do more blogs if we had lots of people who had time to write but I think it is difficult to get journalists to commit to doing very long-term blogs when they are doing full-time jobs as well. . . . you might have time to do a daily blog [on magazines], but . . . not . . . here (Corrigan, 2004).

The editor of *Telegraph.co.uk* worried that the blog may not suit his journalists professionally:

> You can end up . . . forcing somebody into something by saying 'when you are out on this story we want you do a blog'. Reporters are trained in certain ways . . . they work to certain deadlines. They work to a brief. Giving somebody an open-ended 'have a bit of a rant' brief doesn't necessarily suit them professionally (Burton, 2004).

These reservations reveal two further contingent factors explaining the variable degree of adoption of forums for user contributions at British news websites. The final factor concerned the information systems involved in processing and publishing user contributions.

Systems: from cut and paste to filter and rate

At many British news sites journalists cut readers' comments from email and paste them into publications' content management systems, usually making a selection and subbing on the run. There are exceptions: the *Guardian.co.uk*'s blogs and Talkboards, which allow readers to post 'straight-to-air'; Associated New Media's bulletin board management system; and the *BBC News* website's 'Have Your Say beta'. The relatively laborious manner in which many British news websites deal with user content is not, in all cases, due to a lack of resource. It is often the result of a desire to

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

retain, and in some cases reclaim, control over the editorial content of the publications in question. Dan Gillmor (2004: 114) recognises this tendency in his analysis of why 'true' blogs—those to which readers are able to freely post comments—have been slow to take off in the mainstream. He believes there is a:

> . . . mistrust among traditional editors of a genre that threatens to undermine what they consider core values—namely editorial control and ensuring that readers trust, or at least do not assume there is an absence of, the journalists' objectivity and fairness.

He suggests that 'this hasn't been an entirely wrong headed worry although it is overblown'. As discussed previously, the experience of *FT.com* and *Independent.co.uk* confirms publications have some cause to worry about the 'objectivity and fairness' of users who submit content. The *Independent.co.uk*'s solution—dropping all user generated content initiatives—could be described as 'overblown', leaving it without a forum for conversations with its readers. On the other hand, with a staff of just eleven to manage the entire site, their options were limited. *FT.com* took a slightly less radical approach to worries about the quality of users' contributions, moving from a post-moderated bulletin board to publishing a lightly edited selection of readers' comments. This approach is mirrored at *TimesOnline.co.uk, theSun.co.uk, Scotsman.com*, and *Telegraph.co.uk* for the same reason—to ensure quality and consistency in the editorial product.

The practice of manually reviewing and editing users' comments does not, in all cases, indicate that more open, technologically sophisticated systems have not been considered. The editor of *Telegraph.co.uk* considered an external 'bulletin board structure' but in the end Burton (2004) decided against it. 'The monitoring worried me. The people weren't trained to any discernable standard to watch for problems', he said.

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

Systems evolution at the BBC News website

Until October 2005, staff at the *BBC News* website also read and subbed everything they put up. The corporation's decision to allow unmoderated comments to appear in their 'Have Your Say beta' debates was a recognition that the manual approach would become 'more and more unmanageable over time' (Clifton, 2004). The new software driven solution was a significant change to the systems they used to deal with user feedback:

> readers [can] rate each comment . . . on how interesting or useful they found it. The best ones . . . rise to the top so you [can] look at all the comments with the most highly rated ones at the top of the list or . . . look at all of them either by the name of the person who posted them or the time they were posted (Deverell, 2004).

Clifton (2004) admitted it was 'a big step to take', and meant that they have had to become

> more relaxed about the fact that there will be several hundred comments coming in. We're not going to undertake to clamber in 24 hours a day to moderate. We are going to have to be more relaxed about people raising the alarm and be able to withdraw comments as soon as that alarm is raised.

Publishing users' comments in the quantities the *BBC News* website received at the time of the death of John Peel—35,000 in the first day, 100,000 in the week that followed—would, Clifton (2004) recognised, present some usability problems. '[On] a day like that when we were getting tens of thousands [of emails] we may have to have some other way of limiting the sheer volume'. Although not every reader should expect to see their comment published, the system does allow a greater percentage of user contributions to appear. 'A tiny percentage of the ones we [got were] actually making it to the site which [was not] right', said Clifton.

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

Amongst the BBC's rivals opinion on this approach was split. The editor of the *Scotsman.com* thought that getting 'users to moderate it is fantastic. Certainly to my mind the best model for that kind of moderation is something like *Slashdot.org* where you get 'karma points' for a post and that reflects how prominent your comments are' (Kirkpatrick, 2004). In contrast the editor of the *Independent.co.uk*, still smarting from his bad experience with message boards, was skeptical that the number of 'dodgy' comments would remain small once the system went live. 'As soon as the 14 year olds in their bedrooms discover there is a part of the BBC that they can submit a dodgy email to, and it will appear on the site, then what are they going to do?', said King (2004). Even the proposed registration system, he maintained, was unlikely to be a deterrent. 'I just see that sort of thing open to abuse, malicious users could login five times under five different names.'

The head of BBC News Interactive intended that the *BBC News* website would minimise the risk of 'dodgy' comments by restricting the type of debates their new platform would host. 'We wouldn't do it on very controversial Talking Points—debates on the Middle-East or Northern Ireland. . . . Secondly we would still have a process where we dipped into comments frequently, every hour or two hours (Deverell, 2004). To what extent the *BBC News* website will be able to rely on users to alert their paid journalists to potentially libellous or indecent comments remains to be seen. The experience of the *DailyMail.co.uk* and *ThisisLondon.co.uk* offered some pointers.

Associated New Media's bulletin board system

A combination of professional moderators (three in total), 35–40 unpaid 'hosts' and software tools were used to monitor the message boards hosted by the *DailyMail.co.uk* and *ThisisLondon.co.uk*. When the boards were first launched the

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

editorial director thought that she would be able to depend on the unpaid hosts 'much more' than she has been able to. 'However well you legally train them, you are not paying them and they are not as effective at policing as we hoped that they would be' (Williams, 2004). One of the problems was that the hosts were themselves part of the community and found it difficult to police their peers—according to Williams there had been 'an awful lot of cyber-bullying'. A specialised software moderation tool, which alerted them to posts containing key words that were legally sensitive, assisted the human moderators. In addition they had the option to turn off boards that were being 'inundated' with messages, and for topics that were 'particularly legally worrying' they used a 'trusted system': users could only post live if they had previously posted a certain number of acceptable messages. Out of hours, when no moderators were working, messages were placed in a queue to be moderated and published at a later date. In spite of these 'seven or eight really good tools' Associated New Media used to protect themselves, Williams admitted that 'it's tough, it's not easy. It's been quite a challenge for us, particularly on the *Daily Mail*, to manage that load and to moderate it effectively'.

Conclusions

Online, self published current affairs journalism and news publications built on a preponderance of reader contributions are starting to offer alternatives to established news providers. At the same time mainstream sites have begun to host spaces for user generated content, although not as a direct or linear response to these so-called 'grassroots' or 'citizen journalism' activities—witness the withdrawal of message boards at the *Independent.co.uk* and *FT.com*. In their provision of formats for reader contributions, the news organisations studied showed wide differences in practice,

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

with local conditions having a considerable influence on the range and character of the initiatives adopted. These differences are consistent with Boczowski's (2004: 4) view that innovations in newsrooms unfold in a 'gradual and ongoing fashion' and are 'shaped by combinations of initial conditions and local contingencies'.

Cost was an important contingent factor. Reader participation was found to be expensive, mainly because of moderation—eighty per cent of the user generated content initiatives launched by the publications surveyed for this study were edited or pre-moderated. These costs have not yet been fully off-set by the revenues generated. Although contributors were found to be avid consumers of their own material, some publications were struggling to commercialise reader contributions due to low participation rates (at the *Independent.co.uk*) and insularity (at the *DailyMail.co.uk*). Questions remain about the extent to which users are interested both in participating themselves, and viewing other readers' contributions. The fact that a 'popular' debate on the *BBC News* website's post-moderated comments system—'Have Your Say beta'—attracts contributions from just 0.05 per cent of the site's daily unique audience, and one fifth the page views of a 'popular' news story[14] (Herrmann, 2006) calls for further work on the utilisation of these initiatives and the composition and motivations of contributors.

Increasing circulation is, of course, not the only reason for eliciting reader contributions. Editors understood that secondary benefits existed as user generated content initiatives could provide a source of stories and content for stories. Although events such as the Buncefield oil depot explosion[15] show that for 'out of the ordinary' events (Hall et al, 1999: 249) readers are providing information in quantities that reporters have only previously been able to expect from 'stable sources' (Fishman, 1999: 108), it is not clear that other categories of 'news'—for example concerning

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

elite persons or nations—can be adequately be reported by sources not close to the top of the hierarchy of those persons or nations.

Journalists and editors had some concerns about user contributions. They felt that there was a need to edit material to: avoid duplication, keep the standards of spelling and grammar high, select material that was newsworthy with broad appeal, and ensure balance and decency. There was also some questioning of the claimed novelty of blogs—a popular mechanism for eliciting reader contributions—and a resistance to their personal tone. Nevertheless there was no fundamental prejudice against the form and several publications intended to expand their provision in this area as time and ability allowed.[16] This rapid pace of change means that further work is needed to quantify the number and character of user generated content initiatives and it is hoped that this study can act as a starting point, at least in the British context.

Legal liabilities worried some editors, which helped to explain the slow uptake of user generated content initiatives and why some sites had dropped them altogether. IT systems also played a part. Most publications relied on journalists to manually select and edit material before it was published, although there were exceptions. Such an approach allowed editorial control to be maintained—a legitimate requirement for some publications whose forums had unwittingly published inappropriate material. However, to accommodate increasing reader contributions changes were taking place. At the *BBC News* website, once a bastion of editorial control, users were being allowed to post comments without pre-moderation. Some of the editors interviewed believed this system could be open to abuse, and Associated New Media's bulletin board management system highlighted some of the issues involved in managing unmoderated user content.

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

Acknowlegements

I would like to thank: Professors Ray Larson and the late Peter Lyman; my colleagues in the Departments of Journalism and Information Science at City University; the two anonymous referees and my father, Dr John Thurman, who provided useful comments on earlier drafts of this article; and all the participants without whom this work could not have taken place. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 1st International Reporters' Forum in Seoul, South Korea, 26 June 2005; and the 7th International Symposium on Online Journalism in Austin, Texas, 8 April 2006.

Notes

[1] Figures collected, 18 April 2005.
[2] http://en.wikinews.org
[3] http://english.ohmynews.com
[4] Figures collected 28–29 April 2005.
[5] The sites surveyed were regional (*Scotsman.com* and *ThisisLondon.co.uk*) and national (the others); publicly funded (*BBC News* website) and commercial (the others); with broadcast (*BBC News* website) and print (the others) parentage; and serving different readerships (in print terms *theSun.co.uk* is tabloid, *DailyMail.co.uk* and *ThisisLondon.co.uk* are middle-market while the *Independent.co.uk*, *TimesOnline.co.uk*, *Telegraph.co.uk* and *FT.com* represent the broadsheet sector).
[6] Where possible the term most commonly used to refer to the format described has been used. Variations in nomenclature are given in the notes that accompany **table 1**.
[7] Newsroom jargon for 'sub-edit'—the correction and rewriting of text by specialised journalists know as 'subeditors' or 'subs'.
[8] *Technorati.com*'s list of the 'top100' most 'authoritative' blogs—those with the highest number of links to them—includes many written by individuals, such as Glenn Reynolds and Lawrence Lessig, who, primarily, do not make their living through the practice of journalism.
[9] See: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/help/3676692.stm
[10] In February 2006, fourteen months after this interview, Burton launched his own technology blog as part of the *Telegraph.co.uk*'s adoption of the genre. As of 30 August 2006 the site was publishing thirty two blogs organised into the following categories: UK Correspondents, Foreign Correspondents, Technology, Fashion, Politics, Arts, Sport, and Society, see: http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/
[11] This calculation is based on the fact that the *BBC News* website had an audience of some 22 million unique users per month (Nixon, 2005).
[12] South Korea's *OhmyNews.com* launched in February 2000. Its readers write eighty-five per cent of the online edition. It has a staff of forty-eight reporters who review the 50–200 articles submitted daily, about seventy per cent of which are published. An average of about one million visitors per day visit the site, although peak traffic can be between two and three times greater.

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

[13] Although for most contributions this is the norm, *OhmyNews.com* pay more—about $20—for a front-page story and readers can 'tip' contributors. The maximum tip any reader can give is about $10. The record tip received was over $30,000 in two days for a story about the proposed relocation of South Korea's capital city.
[14] Steve Herrmann (2006) revealed that a 'popular' 'Have Your Say beta' will attract up to 100,000 page views and 2,000 contributors, this from a daily unique audience of 3.5–4 million. In comparison 'popular' news stories can attract '500,000 page views'.
[15] On the day of a major oil depot explosion in Buncefield, England, the *BBC News* website received about 6,000 emails containing 3–4,000 video clips, stills and eye witness accounts (Clifton, 2006).
[16] After the main data collection for this study took place, six of the publications surveyed launched 'blogs' as part of their online coverage of the 2005 UK general election although only one—the *Guardian.co.uk*'s 'Election blog'—allowed readers to add comments 'live'. The others were: the *DailyMail.co.uk*'s 'Inside Whitehall: Benedict Brogan's election blog', the *BBC News* website's 'The Election Monitor our campaign weblog', the *FT.com*'s 'reporters blog', the *Telegraph.co.uk*'s 'Westminster weblog' and 'Candidate's weblog', and the *TimesOnline.co.uk*'s 'Election log'.

References

Bale, P. (2004) [Telephone call with Neil Thurman, 14 December 2004].

Blood, R. (2000) 'Weblogs: a History and Perspective', 7 September, URL (consulted April 2005): http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html

Boczowski, P. (2004) *Digitizing the news: Innovation in online newspapers*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Boyd, D. (2004) 'Demeaning Bloggers: The NYTimes is Running Scared', *Many 2 Many: a Group Weblog on Social Software*, 26 July, URL (consulted April 2005): http://www.corante.com/many/archives/2004/07/26/demeaning_bloggers_the_nytimes_is_running_scared.php

Burton, R. (2004) [Telephone call with Neil Thurman, 7 December 2004].

Clifton, P. (2004) [Telephone call with Neil Thurman, 8 November 2004].

Clifton, P. (2005) 'From the Editor's Desktop', *BBC News*, 19 April, URL (consulted May 2005): http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4497239.stm

Clifton, P. (2006) [Personal conversation with Neil Thurman, 31 January 2006].

Corrigan, T. (2004) [Telephone call with Neil Thurman, 13 December 2004].

Denholm, A. (2003) 'Robertson Considers Action Over Web Allegation', *The Scotsman*, 10 March, URL (consulted July 2005): http://news.scotsman.com/index.cfm?id=290762003

Deverell, R. (2004) [Telephone call with Neil Thurman, 3 December 2004].

Fishman, M. (1999) 'Manufacturing the News', in H.Tumber (ed.) *News A Reader*, pp. 102-111. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gans, H. (1999) 'Deciding What's News', in H.Tumber (ed.) *News a Reader*, pp. 235-248. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gillmor, D. (2003) 'A New Brand of Journalism is Taking Root in South Korea', *San Jose Mercury News*, 18 May, URL (consulted April 2005): http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/business/columnists/5889390.htm

Gillmor, D. (2004) *We the Media*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media.

Glaister, D. (2005) 'LA Times 'Wikitorial' Gives Editors Red Faces', *The Guardian*, 22 June, URL (consulted July 2005): http://www.guardian.co.uk/online/news/0,12597,1511810,00.html

Golding, P. and Elliott, P. (1999) 'Making the News (Excerpt)', in H.Tumber (ed.) *News A Reader*, pp. 112-120. New York: Oxford University Press.

Graf, P. (2004) *Independent Review of BBC Online*. London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Hall, S et al (1999) 'Policing the Crisis (Excerpt)', in H.Tumber (ed.) *News a Reader*, pp. 249–256. New York: Oxford University Press.

Herrmann, S. (2006) [Personal conversation with Neil Thurman, 31 January 2006].

Kahn, R. and Kellner, D. (n.d.) 'Internet Subcultures and Political Activism', URL (consulted April 2005): http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/oppositionalinternet.htm

Katz, J. (1997) 'Clueless in the Newsroom', *Hotwired*, 23 October, URL (consulted April 2005): http://hotwired.lycos.com/synapse/katz/97/42/katz3a_text.html

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

King, M. (2004) [Telephone call with Neil Thurman, 16 December 2004].

Kirkpatrick, S. (2004) [Telephone call with Neil Thurman, 20 December 2004].

Nixon, R. (2005) [Email from Rachel Nixon, 18 May 2005].

Matheson, D. (2004) 'Weblogs and the Epistemology of the News: Some Trends in Online Journalism', *New Media & Society* 6(4): 443–468.

McManus, J. (1999) 'Market Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware (Excerpt)', in H.Tumber (ed.) *News a Reader*, pp. 180-190. New York: Oxford University Press.

Picton, P. (2004) [Telephone call with Neil Thurman, 10 December 2004].

Sigal, L. (1999) 'Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking (Excerpt)', in H.Tumber (ed.) News A Reader, pp. 224-234. New York: Oxford University Press.

Smartt, M. (2004) [Telephone call with Neil Thurman, 25 October 2004].

Thurman, N. and Jones, S. (2005) 'From Nexus to Newslog: Online Journalism from the Grassroots', in R. Keeble (ed.) *Print Journalism: a Critical Introduction*, pp. 252–263. London: Taylor and Francis.

Williams, A. (2004) [Telephone call with Neil Thurman, 22 December 2004].

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325

Yu, Yeon-Jung. (2003) 'OhmyNews Makes Every Citizen a Reporter', *Japan Media Review*, 17 September, URL (consulted April 2005): http://www.japanmediareview.com/japan/internet/1063672919_3.php

NEIL THURMAN is a senior lecturer in the Journalism Department at City University, London. He held creative and executive roles at Interactive Learning Productions, The Thomson Corporation, and Granada Learning, publishing a number of award-winning interactive videos and multimedia CD-ROMs. His other work on online journalism appears in: Richard Keeble's *Print Journalism: A Critical Introduction* and in the journals *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* and *Journalism Practice.*

Address: Department of Journalism, City University, Northampton Square, London, EC1V 0HB, UK. [email: neilt@soi.city.ac.uk]

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in New Media & Society 10(1), February 2008 by Sage Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008. It is available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325