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**Collaborative Work in Digital Democracy and Interactive Production of  
Personalized Information**

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper is grounded in the considerable body of scholarship examining the networks and interfaces of emergent media technologies, the ethics of appropriation of online content, and the importance of respect and ethics in collaboration. The theory that I shall seek to elaborate here puts considerable emphasis on cocreation in participatory cultures, competitive interaction between various media platforms in a converged news eco-system, the conditions of production of user-authored content, and gratifications of media participation. The results of the current paper converge with prior research on the experience of media consumption and production, the intersection of mass and interpersonal communication, and new modes of content production and information delivery.

## **Introduction**

Scholarship about the practices of gathering, producing, and publishing news, the implications of networked journalism, the success of online news ventures, and the integration of journalist- and user-generated content has increased and consolidated, especially in recent years. Yet, there have been few comprehensive assessments of what research has learned about the competitive dynamics of the online news environment, the evolving versionality of online news texts, the short-lived and changing character of online news, and the processual flow of online journalism. The main objective of this paper is to explore and describe the rise of the networked, computer-mediated communications environment changes in the experience and meaning of television, the new realities of web 2.0, and social networking applications. The purpose of this study is to examine journalistic values in news contexts, the rise of social media, the diversity of the global experience of new media, the relevance of the Internet and new media to everyday life, and the advent of the twenty-four-hour electronic news cycle.

## **The Integration of Journalist- and User-Generated Content**

As Beckett and Mansell put it, new forms of journalism encourage new forms of boundary crossing on a scale not possible until recently (new technologies offer the potential for new product development). Convergent media platforms create opportunities for new exchanges. The new forms of networked journalism rely on a growing array of new media platforms. The emerging forms of networked journalism are strongly

collaborative. Beckett and Mansell state that the traditional news media continue to be limited (there is relatively little incentive for openness and innovation). There is a need for new means of engagement with the consumer or citizen. Web forums or blogs offer platforms for consumers to critique and correct the media. Networked journalism can create opportunities for journalists to facilitate public debate.<sup>1</sup> Stanyer remarks that most of the major news sites have had well established interactive facilities. The geographical isolation, technological difference and national regulation are altering radically the nature of competition between news organizations. Newspapers and broadcasters compete to be the first destination for audiences seeking news. Technology has reduced the cost of publicizing and distributing information, while the numbers of news and information providers online has increased dramatically, and the majority of net users regularly consume news packaged by the traditional outlets directly or via news aggregators. Stanyer maintains that the most popular sites belong to the traditional news organizations and news aggregators (large media chains still exercise power in the online news environment). There are more opportunities for audiences to communicate their views and contribute to the news. The traditional news outlets encourage audience input as another way to gather information which they can then repackage, and there are now more news outlets available for citizens to choose from than ever before. Internet news sites provide more opportunities for citizens to exercise their voice and contribute to the news.<sup>2</sup> Allan posits that what counts as journalism is being reconfigured across an emergent communication field supported by digital platforms. Citizen reporting is not having a profound impact on the forms, practices and epistemologies of mainstream journalism. Allan says that the transfer of communicative power from news organization

to citizen is being consolidated. Online news engenders a heightened sense of locality that is relayed around the globe in a near-instant.<sup>3</sup> Hermida examines how the BBC has adopted the new media technology of blogging as a tool of accountability and transparency in its journalism, seeking to normalize blogs within existing journalistic frameworks (individuals played a key role in the promotion and dissemination of blogging at the BBC). Blogs challenge the historically static core set of news practices found in journalism. Hermida reasons that the BBC has yet to fully embrace blogs as a platform for a conversation with the audience. Established journalistic norms of impartiality and accuracy can be incorporated within blogs.<sup>4</sup>

In Brighton and Foy's reading, the danger in attempting to codify news values is that we can end up listing subject headings of stories. The majority of news items are essentially negative. Bad news sells newspapers and draws viewers and listeners to broadcast news programs. Brighton and Foy claim that only events which strike a specific chord with the viewer, reader or listener will be valid news (the unusual also is often of great interest). The higher the profile of the person, place or event, then the more likely it is to attract the interests of an audience. The timing and pacing of stories has always been a major factor. Brighton and Foy argue that news embargoes are a fascinating litmus test of news values in practice. Embargoes will only operate up to a certain level of newsworthiness, and are pointers to the balance of power between the makers and the reporters of news. Brighton and Foy state that the rise of the 24-hour news culture has changed the nature of what people seek from newspapers. Tabloid newspapers have renegotiated their relationship with electronic media in radical ways. Closer analysis of the news genres is of vital importance when it comes to understanding composition.

To the extent that it is convincing, the argument so far establishes that terrestrial television news has redefined its role in response to the internet and rolling 24-hour news. Increased awareness of terrestrial news as program has resulted in a widening of the stylistic divide between terrestrial and rolling news. Brighton and Foy say that citizen journalism is a trend which is in evidence on mainstream terrestrial news early in the cycle of major breaking stories. The news values and styles of delivery on display in routine rolling news are less different from those in terrestrial television news. Television news has been slower to adopt viewer feedback as an integral part of its output. The role of stylistic and aesthetic considerations is greater in television news than in radio. The role of the citizen is an adjunct to the existing news system. An important part of the professional news gathering process is to frame events within the value system. As Brighton and Foy put it, the citizen journalism model is more closely aligned to pull, rather than push, models of news delivery (the new order allows news receivers to draw in only those items which are of direct relevance to them). Any transfer of information from blogs to mainstream news outlets is mediated via traditional channels. The values applied by creators of news rely on factors including *truth*, *validity*, *topicality* and *expectation*. The public has an active role to play in the process of gathering news. Brighton and Foy reason that the majority of news is managed through a journalistic system which is essentially honest.<sup>5</sup>

### **New Modes of Content Production and Information Delivery**

Shirky explains that social tools provide a platform for communities of practice (communities of practice are inherently cooperative). Our social tools are a challenge to modern society (they are merely improvements on existing behaviors). The category of “consumer” is now a temporary behavior rather than a permanent identity. Recording, searching, and transmitting information is something our communications networks are good at. The problem of copying and distributing information is largely solved thanks to digital networks. Networked organizations are more resilient as a result of better communications tools. Shirky affirms that the most significant effect of our new tools lies in the increased leverage they give the most connected people. The open source movement is an ecosystem: open source relies on the “publish-then-filter” pattern. Open source communities have more discussions than in managed production (the communal can be at least as durable as the commercial). Our social tools have given groups the power to coalesce and act in political arenas.<sup>6</sup>

Paz Dennen asserts that blog identities are constructions that develop over time. Bloggers weave the narratives of their lives into posts. Reputation and appearance are important identity factors. Identity construction is an ongoing activity in which bloggers regularly engage. Sharing information about oneself in an online forum is a key way of attracting readers and participating in community (individual members have ownership over defined spaces and social networking sites). Blogs differ from Facebook in terms identity expectations. Paz Dennen posits that the blogosphere has not become a free-for-all of anonymous authors. Identity issues play a critical role in online networks. A blogging identity is another context-driven representation of a person. Pseudonymity is a key issue related to identity in the community.

What matters for the present discussion is that bloggers generally wish to maintain a distinction between their blogging selves and their everyday selves. Paz Dennen holds that pseudonyms allow bloggers to maintain a stable identity, while anonymity is the absence of an identity. Bloggers trust each other to represent themselves accurately. Many bloggers share their legal identities with each other off-blog. Individual blogging identities are a reflection of the norms and practices of the larger blogging community. There exists a tension between having privacy and having community. Blogging identities are constructed from a nexus of verbal, visual, and structural elements. According to Paz Dennen, bloggers must deal with the complexity of representing themselves accurately while protecting themselves from being readily identified outside the community, engaging in the act of juggling legal and blog identities. The use of pseudonyms impacts *trust, freedom of communication, and perceptions of privacy* within the community.<sup>7</sup>

Atton examines journalism that is produced by those outside mainstream media organizations, analyzing how alternative and mainstream cultures of news production may be understood in complementary ways. Amateur media practices are embedded in everyday life practices, and alternative journalistic practices present ways of re-imagining journalism. Participatory media production provides the constituents of an alternative public sphere. Alternative journalism challenges the rules and routines of normalized and professionalized practices.<sup>8</sup> Meinrath et al. contend that decentralized and participatory platforms have birthed a revived movement for democratized media production (social networking and media production have empowered users). Structural changes threaten to foreclose many of the Internet's democratic possibilities. Meinrath et al. posit that

network operators and protocol developers have the power to define the end-user experience. The convergence of networks and devices threaten user freedom. Open protocols and standards facilitate innovation and widespread adoption of new technologies.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Rise of User-Generated Content Distributed via Online Social Network Technologies**

De Zuniga et al. examine the role of journalistic activities in blogging, clarifying a psychological mechanism of bloggers who behave like journalists: bloggers are driven by their desire to communicate information and express themselves as a way to connect with others (information is a commodity that is accompanied by commentary designed to express personal opinion and influence others). de Zuniga et al. hold that having a better understanding of the perceptions, motivations and topical focus of bloggers clarify the blurring intersection online of blogging and journalism. Certain perceptions and motivations of bloggers lead to journalistic behaviors in their blogging practices. In de Zuniga et al.'s view, the classic model of *perception-motivation-behavior* can explain a psychological mechanism through which bloggers adhere to journalistic practices. Bloggers do not necessarily require journalistic motivations to engage in journalistic practices when blogging. A journalism blog functions as a space for strong opinions in ways that are consistent with the deontological norms of traditional journalism.<sup>10</sup>



Weldon says that citizen journalism and community-written websites *have forced newspapers to alter writing styles and source selection*. Traditional reporting methods have evolved to include consideration of many different factors from readers to culture to competition. Everyman news is a phenomenon likely to influence the content of new media forms not yet imagined. “The revolution in American newspapers had many causes: reader appetites, citizen journalism, blogging, a post-9/11 reverence for the individual story, the proliferation of narrative journalism, diversifying newsrooms, the field of narrative therapy and the concurrent explosion in marketing of the stories of ordinary people.”<sup>11</sup> Weldon insists that the increasing volume of featurized news stories running in American newspapers is a growing phenomenon. The writing styles in newspapers embrace *the softer, more humanistic approach to the reporting of daily events in print*. “What makes front-page news today are the stories of everyman, ordinary citizens whom journalists ideally are ordained to inform and represent. And those stories on the front page are not only about news events. The news on the front page not only validates the voices of everyman, it validates the trends, behaviors, and interests of everyman and declares them newsworthy” [43].

Based on the above reasoning, it is not difficult to show that *everyman news is the newspaper’s niche, while ignoring the dynamics of audience is suicide for newspapers*. Weldon points out that the newspaper’s brand of everyman news is what the reader is after. The growth of the Internet as a news source threatens the newspaper’s future. Blogs inspire journalists at daily newspapers to write in a mode that reflects the blogger’s language (*bloguage*). The function of newspapers has moved past the telling of news, *a regurgitation of events*. “While the move toward personal stories in newspapers

demonstrates a desire by journalists to tell stories of the individual, diversity in journalism is about more than just choosing someone off the street for an anecdotal lead. It is about highlighting and fully representing the voices of everyman in news” [131].

The basic idea here is that the genre of everyman news illuminates the personal stories of individuals, while readers of newspapers are drawn to stories of ordinary individuals and their reactions to events. Weldon maintains that everyman news wrapped around the core of individual personal story *may provide a benefit to the source, the journalist, and the reader*. The newspaper story told as everyman journalism serves as the organizational tool. A democratization of news culminates in the trend of everyman news *and the inclusion of more unofficial sources*. Balanced presentation of news demands journalists diversify sourcing. The proliferation of features in newspapers is a response to what readers want. “Everyman news has grown from a desire for newspapers to bring to the media buffet a different brand of story. It is a reaction to a cultural climate that sanctifies the story and reveres the viewpoints, input, and reactions to events cultivated from a broader range of sources. And it fills the demand for the democracy of voice” [163–164].

## **Conclusions**

The paper generates insights about the practices of online news production, the construction of information for individual use or public consumption, the importance of online news as a source of breaking news, the capacity of media self-regulation to promote responsible journalism, and the rise of user-generated content distributed via

online social network technologies. This paper seeks to fill a gap in the current literature by examining the dominance the leading media corporations exercise over the online news environment, the production and consumption of news media, the internet as a source of knowledge, digitization of production in media organizations, and the impact of new technologies on journalistic practices.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Stanyer, J., “Web 2.0 and the Transformation of News and Journalism: New Possibilities and Challenges in the Internet Age,” in A. Chadwick and P.N. Howard (eds.), *The Handbook of Internet Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 201–213.

<sup>3</sup> S. Allan, S., “Citizen Journalism and the Rise of ‘Mass Self-Communication’: Reporting the London Bombings,” *Global Media Journal* 1(1) (2007): online.

<sup>4</sup> A. Hermida, “The Blogging BBC: Journalism Blogs at ‘The World’s Most Trusted News Organisation,” *Journalism Practice* 3(3) (2009): 1–17.

<sup>5</sup> P. Brighton and D. Foy, *News Values* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> C. Shirky, C., *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 96–304.

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<sup>7</sup> V. Paz Dennen, “Constructing Academic Alter-egos: Identity Issues in a Blog-based Community,” *Identity in the Information Society* 2(1) (2009): 23–38.

<sup>8</sup> Chris Atton, Chris, “Alternative and Citizen Journalism,” in Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (eds.), *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 265–278.

<sup>9</sup> Sascha D. Meinrath, James W. Losey, and Victor W. Pickard, “Digital Feudalism: Enclosures and Erasures from Digital Rights Management to the Digital Divide,” *Commlaw Conspectus* 19 (2011): 423–479.

<sup>10</sup> Homero Gil de Zúñiga, Homero, Seth C. Lewis, Amber Willard Hinsley, Sebastian Valenzuela, Jae Kook Lee, and Brian Baresch, “Blogging as a Journalistic Practice: A Model Linking Perception, Motivation, and Behavior,” *Journalism* 12(5) (2011): 586–606.

<sup>11</sup> Michele Weldon, *Everyman News: The Changing American Front Page* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 24.