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Blogosphere of influence:
Are weblogs enriching journalism
in the new media environment?

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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of

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is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfilment for that stated above.

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Author's note

In the interests of consistency, any instances of American English spellings, especially of words contained within direct quotes (with the exception of titles and proper nouns) have been modified to the British English equivalents.

In addition to this, the capitalised spellings of 'internet' and 'world wide web' have also been changed to reflect current standards.

Abstract

This dissertation is an attempt to discuss and hopefully answer the question: ‘are weblogs enriching journalism in the new media environment?’

Chapter 1 gives a background to the weblog phenomenon, outlines my motivation for researching this thesis, and details the research methodology, literature, and research limits on the project.

Chapter 2 deals with the attack on New York on September 11, 2001, and the repercussions this event had for the media sphere in the succeeding weeks and months; how it proved pivotal for showing the potential for ordinary citizens to take the media into their own hands and contribute directly to the news process, and what implications arose as a result.

In Chapter 3 I explore the apparent redefinition of the media environment in the wake of 9/11 and its long-term effects; describing the new terms by which an increasingly connected society deals with the established mainstream media and relates to its journalism, and whether this new relationship is enriching the journalism produced by the mainstream in any way.

Placing weblogs within the broader trend of ‘citizen journalism’, Chapter 4 looks at the media response to both the London bombings on July 7, 2005 and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in late summer of 2005, in comparison with the events of 9/11 and subsequent event-driven media phenomena.

Evaluating what actual effects the shifting media paradigm is having on contemporary journalism and journalists is the basis of Chapter 5, where I analyse and discuss the conclusions of the Harvard conference on blogging and journalism, as well as feedback from journalists, bloggers and journalists who blog, whom were interviewed for this dissertation, to uncover the realities of the blogosphere’s relationship with the traditional media.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 What is a weblog?

According to Wikipedia (2005), a weblog, or blog, is best defined as “a web-based publication consisting primarily of periodic articles (normally in reverse chronological order)”. They are frequently updated, dynamic websites, usually authored and maintained by an individual or group of individuals (called bloggers) whose identity or identities the weblog usually represents.

Rebecca Blood (2000) gives some more background to the development of weblogs:

In 1998 there were just a handful of sites of the type that are now identified as weblogs ... Jesse James Garrett, editor of Infosift¹, began compiling a list of “other sites like his” as he found them in his travels around the web. In November of that year, he sent that list to Cameron Barrett. Cameron published the list on Camworld², and others maintaining similar sites began sending their URLs to him for inclusion on the list. Jesse’s ‘page of only weblogs’ [listed] the 23 known to be in existence at the beginning of 1999.

A defining factor of weblogs is their copious usage of hyperlinks. “The original weblogs,” Blood (2000) writes, “were link-driven sites ... Many current weblogs follow this original style. Their editors present links both to little-known corners of the web and to current news articles they feel are worthy of note.” This is a trend that is still prevalent today.

The most influential bloggers are those who help [people] make sense of the jumble of information out there on the web. To do this, they are expert in “the art of linking”: pointing people to other sources of information on the web by hyperlinking chunks of text on their own blogs to the ... web addresses of other pages and blog posts.

(MacKinnon, 2005: 12)

It should be noted also that the copious usage of hyperlinks helps to distinguish weblogs from online diary or journal sites, which are similar in appearance but

¹ This site is no longer active, but its archives remain at <http://www.jjg.net/retired/infosift/>; Garrett currently maintains a weblog at <http://blog.jjg.net/>

² <http://www.camworld.com/>

different in content and concept.

Another feature that distinguishes weblogs is the archive. Since “incoming links to specific entries are important to many weblogs, most have a way of archiving older entries” (Wikipedia, 2005). In general, each entry posted to a given weblog will have its own static link or ‘permalink’, either to a standalone webpage, or compiled sequentially with other entries written in the same week or month, or on the same topic. Archives bring a permanency and a sense of context to the web that did not exist in the days of static homepages.

1.2 What is the blogosphere?

In short, the blogosphere refers to the sum total of weblogs and weblog-related websites, in all their variations of theme, style and content, published on the world wide web. The blogosphere could also be interpreted as a set of concentric spheres, with the most popular bloggers (the so-called ‘A-List’ bloggers) at the centre with the rest radiating outwards, depending on popularity and influence, towards the periphery.

Even within this, of course, there is a multitude of self-contained spheres, specific to genre; many niche genre weblogs might not have wide popularity or influence but that in no way indicates a lack of quality or expertise in their particular areas.

1.3 Motivations for research

My motivation for investigating this topic stems from my experience of maintaining a weblog over the last four years.

I first became aware of the blogging phenomenon in late 2000 via (as ironic as it sounds) a newspaper article, in *The Guardian*, which prompted me to begin reading weblogs and to explore the blogosphere. This swiftly developed into a regular habit, and I started to get a feel for what blogging was all about.

The blogs I read at this time were mostly general-interest, maintained by web designers and other technical professionals linking to their friends' sites and other places of interest on the web; often with a quirky slant, but always with strong, punchy writing – and sometimes punctuated by more serious, essay-type pieces commenting on culture, politics and society.

It was a year later, in November 2001, when I started a weblog of my own, writing about academic life and my interests, along with links to other weblogs and websites. It eventually became for me what blogger Cory Doctorow refers to as an 'outboard brain'³, an online notebook of sorts; a place to record my thoughts and store discontinuous nuggets of information that I happen upon as I trawl across the web.

As I maintained my weblog, and read into the history of blogging and the position of the blogosphere in a cultural perspective, my interest in how bloggers related to journalism grew. But like many within the blogosphere, not to mention the media, I was frustrated by repeated attempts to define the arguments on this subject in simple binary oppositions. I felt that the issues involved deserved more careful definition, interpretation and examination.

1.4 Details of research

1.4.1 Research methodology The research project for this thesis was primarily library-based, consisting of reviews of relevant journal articles and similar academic publications; news articles in print and online; and articles, commentary and reportage published on weblogs; along with anecdotal evidence derived from these sources (see 1.4.2).

Additional primary research was conducted by way of a series of interviews with working journalists, long-time webloggers, and journalists who also maintain weblogs (sometimes referred to as 'j-bloggers'). Due to various constraints such as location, time and availability, these interviews were conducted by three methods: one-to-one interviews; e-mail interviews; and one-to-one interviews by instant messaging (see

³ <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/javascript/2002/01/01/cory.html>

Chapter 5.3).

1.4.2 Literature review Due to the developing nature of this particular field of study there is a clear lack of precedent in terms of literature previously published, especially where it comes to literature dealing specifically with this thesis. While there is a growing number of published material and academic journal articles dealing with themes on or around the general field of online journalism and the significance of the internet in terms of news provision, none of this work is definitive in its scope, and very little of it tackles the question of whether blogging is enriching contemporary journalism directly.

At the same time, there is an even faster growing pool of new research and ideas being published, produced, or linked to within the blogosphere itself. Because of the sheer volume of this web-based literature, even of that which is relevant to this thesis specifically, it would not be possible to critically evaluate all of the material in a thesis of this scope, and given the time available.

Therefore, this dissertation will not include a formal literature review section, but will refer to and summarise relevant books and articles to illustrate, reinforce or contradict the hypotheses, arguments and conclusions herein. Context for these sources will be given in the form of footnotes wherever necessary.

1.4.3 Limits of research There are a number of limits to my research on this topic which need to be addressed before proceeding.

For starters, I will be examining the blogosphere and the weblogs within it only in so far as they have content or quality that could potentially be described as journalistic; personal diary-style, literary or fictional weblogs -- despite their proliferation -- will therefore be excluded from this project. Any hypotheses, arguments and/or conclusions will only apply to those genres of weblogs which will be dealt with herein; an examination of the significance of the excluded would be a worthwhile field of study for further theses or dissertations.

Another limit, and a significant one, is that the bulk of that research already conducted in this field concentrates on the American experience, and as such reflects the web-usage patterns (of web users as readers and content creators alike) of Americans only. Though figures reflecting the US would likely be mirrored in other industrialised, English-speaking countries with statistically similar rates of internet provision and access – such as the United Kingdom, for an obvious example – it is important to note that there are certain factors which could skew the data for crucially different results.

For one, Britain and the US have different rules regarding communications control legislation and media ownership, which has resulted in stark contrasts in the public media environments experienced by British and American society respectively. Also, it is generally regarded that Britons are better served by their media outlets – public service television and radio; healthy competition in the newspaper market; etc. – than their American counterparts, which might leave them less inclined to take the media into their own hands, and therefore less inclined to partake in what is often described by US pundits as the ‘democratisation of the media’.

In light of this, the results of research conducted in the US context will be accepted in an ostensibly universal manner to reinforce or contradict the hypotheses, arguments or conclusions herein, but it is necessary to state here that this research may not be wholly representative for situations out of its respective context.

Needless to say, this particular thesis is restricted to the English-speaking world by virtue of the lack of relevant literature available in other languages, the lack of research conducted on or within the non-anglophone blogosphere, the cultural experience of the author, et al. This dissertation should by no means speak either for or against the non-English-speaking media spheres; indeed, further study on the significance of the web’s contribution to journalism in France, Germany, or anywhere else in the world for that matter, would be welcome.

Chapter 2

9/11 and its repercussions for the media

2.1 New York, September 11, 2001

At 8:46am on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, the first of two hijacked passenger planes crashed into the ‘twin towers’ of the World Trade Center in Manhattan, New York. It was only the beginning of a day that deeply affected not only Americans, but millions around the world.

Within an hour of the second aircraft smashing into the south tower, reports were coming in of a third attack at the Pentagon, near Washington DC, and a fourth plane which had crashed on farmland in rural Pennsylvania. So much was happening at once; it was a time of mounting tension and confusion.

Just a few hours later, both towers of the World Trade Center collapsed, taking with them over two and a half thousand lives. It was witnessed by millions worldwide on live television — but also written about, commented and reported on by a minority of internet users who represented, whether knowingly or not, the vanguard of what some would hail as a new media revolution.

2.2 Coverage of the event

2.2.1 The potential of news online The news coverage of September 11 is best seen in light of a major news phenomenon of six years previously, the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995 — an event often regarded as the first major news story of the Internet Age.

In the immediate aftermath of the explosion at the Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City (which until 9/11 had been the largest terrorist attack on American soil) rumour and speculation were rampant regarding the specific details of the tragedy, the identities of those responsible, and so on. As “claim and counter-claim clashed,” according to Stuart Allan (2005: 71), “people were turning to the internet for breaking developments in numbers never seen before”.

Not surprisingly, rumour and speculation were even more rampant and unchecked online, and conspiracy theories were the order of the day. But even in this chaos of misinformation — or disinformation — news was being broken, facts were being compiled, information was contextualised, and this was all happening in real time. This process may have been nothing new to mainstream news organisations internally, but for the first time the public had access to the iterative development of a story as it happens.

Allan (ibid.) quotes from Scott Rosenberg in the *San Francisco Examiner*, who saw that “post-Oklahoma traffic between the online world and the news media [represented] a coming of age for relations between the two realms.” In Rosenberg’s argument, cyberspace was becoming a “real place ... a transitional meeting ground where people talk, rumours spread and news happens.” For him, the story of the Oklahoma City bombing created a “feedback loop” between the established media and the burgeoning online community, which in Allan’s view “possessed the potential to be either informative or treacherous.” (This is a debate which remains ongoing today, and will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.)

In the months and years following the Oklahoma City bombing, the internet began to solidify its place in the public consciousness: the browser developer Netscape’s floating on the stock market in late 1995 marked the birth of the graphical web, and with it came an overnight onslaught of easily-accessible content. And at every step along the path of the world wide web’s weaving around the globe, there was usually some defining news phenomenon to signal the occasion. According to Alex Halavais (2002: 29):

The night of the 1996 election, the broadcast of the Mars Pathfinder mission, the breaking of the Lewinsky scandal and subsequent release of the voluminous Starr report — these and other events have each been singled out as the moment at which the Web came into its own.

It was an exciting time; one in which, as Jay Rosen sees it, the ‘terms of authority’ were changing (2003: 35). But there was also a climate of growing uncertainty. In the information deluge that came with the rapid expansion of the internet, hand-in-hand

with the proliferation of computers in the average home, the public's relationship with its news providers was being renegotiated – and the high-profile failures of the mainstream, in terms of both lagging behind the new online scoop-merchants and in the shortcomings of their web-based infrastructure, hardly instilled their audience with confidence.

However despite these setbacks, Michael B. Salwen (2005: 68) believes “[t]he September 11 attacks showed that there was an audience for online national breaking news stories” in the United States at least, which signalled positively for a new media trend that was about to have its time to shine.

2.2.2 The news in action The news coverage of the September 11 attacks was undoubtedly driven by imagery, and powerful imagery at that – and it was television news that dominated in this respect. It was virtually impossible in the days following the tragedy to avoid seeing footage of the second aircraft flying into the World Trade Center; or of huge, ominous dust clouds sweeping through the streets of Manhattan⁴.

There was blanket coverage on television news broadcasts in the United States and in Western Europe. Rolling news channels dedicated their programming to playing footage of the aircraft flying into the towers, and of the thousands of people running through the streets to safety. For days afterwards, virtually every broadcast and every newspaper the world over featured the iconic image of the towers engulfed in flames, while some even took the gamble to publish photos of bodies falling from the towers to the streets below⁵.

However, while this imagery was indeed powerful, there was initially only so much of it to go round. For much of the day itself, when immediacy of information was most vital, the broadcast news media found themselves compromised, and they struggled to provide fresh insight or context to their reports, many repeating the same footage over and over again⁶.

⁴ <http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/shattered/>

⁵ http://www.usatoday.com/news/sept11/2002-09-02-jumper_x.htm

⁶ This is an issue for rolling news channels at the best of times; by their very nature they repeat their news bulletins every hour on the hour with few significant changes or developments.

It is therefore not so surprising that many people turned away from the broadcast news in favour of the world wide web, in search of the most up-to-date information. However, this was with varying degrees of success.

Hu and Sandoval (2001) reported that many news websites operated by mainstream media outlets “were swamped by an overflow of traffic,” their servers heaving under the strain of so many simultaneous requests from internet users desperate for information. In some cases news sites were almost completely inaccessible, a significant problem for (the then-majority of) users on slower dial-up connections. While the webmasters at sites such as CNN.com and Yahoo.com attempted to ease the load on their servers and on the connection bandwidth for web users by stripping down their homepages (removing extraneous graphics and other superfluous page elements) many found themselves blocked from these sites as millions of users worldwide competed for whatever bandwidth was available – and that’s if they could connect to the internet at all, on a day when web traffic to news sites spiked to extraordinarily high levels.

“On what should have been the internet media’s biggest day ever,” wrote Steve Outing (2001), “the infrastructure failed and the online audience was forced to return to traditional media – mostly television news.” It lead Detroit Free Press technology columnist Mike Wendland to comment: “At a time when information starved Americans needed it as never before, the internet failed miserably in the hours immediately following [the] attacks” (quoted in Allan, 2002; 120).

When one looks at the figures after the fact, it is easy to see why there were so many problems on 9/11. “Where some 14 million page views would be ordinarily made over the course of an entire day [at CNN.com],” according to Outing (2001), “about 162 million views were made on that day.” At over ten times the normal web traffic, it is little wonder why most major news websites like CNN.com had not anticipated the demand on their services, and why those same services failed so spectacularly.

But those who could access the internet with fewer problems were to find that the failures of the mainstream news media’s online operations proved less of a hindrance

than expected to the communication of news and information about the day's tragic events.

2.3 The public becomes the media

Something that is particularly notable in outlining the above news coverage is the secondary position that newspapers were forced into, due to the lack of immediacy inherent in the medium. The attacks of September 11 happened at such a time that it was almost 24 hours before the major daily newspapers in the United States could provide any coverage in their printed editions.

However, these same newspapers had been investing in new media and online technologies since the time of the Oklahoma City bombing, and were discovering the importance of having a distribution channel that was not dependent on deadlines or physical products.

For Steve Outing (2001), the website operations of major newspapers "became primarily the immediate printing presses required for [these newspapers] to reach the public with breaking news at the same time as television news". Even so, Outing is critical of their content provision:

What I didn't see a lot of was coverage that was unique to the online medium. There were bulletins and longer text articles; there were photo galleries and video clips; there were infographics (some using animation which helped convey the information more concisely). That's all well and good, and it should be part of any news site's coverage... Where I think online media has fallen short in the week since the attacks is in creating content and services that take advantage of what the Internet can do and other media cannot.

(ibid.)

Outing describes this as "the 'shovelware' approach to the story": the text of articles being 'shovelled' onto the website with a bare minimum of formatting, and notably lacking in hyperlinks and other multimedia elements that could make such stories

nodes of a larger network, and in turn give much greater context to the information within them.

In the great media relay race that ensued after 9/11, it appears that the baton was dropped by the broadcast media online, and refused by the press. But, as we shall see, it was gladly accepted by an increasingly engaged public.

2.3.1 Filling the information gap While the broadcast news media recycled their footage, adding slowly to the story, as the press failed to capitalise on the potential of their online distribution channels, and as the online infrastructure of a number of mainstream news outlets collapsed under the weight of demand, a new form of media began to fly its flag in the hours following the 9/11 attacks. Into the breach that was left by the established media stepped the blogosphere.

The weaknesses of the mainstream were an invitation to the burgeoning blogosphere – the communities of technology professionals; writers, artists and designers; academics; armchair pundits; and ordinary 9-to-5 civilians – an “invitation to ‘be the media’, and thus to challenge traditional definitions of what counted as ‘news’ as well as who qualified as a ‘journalist’, [which] was very much consistent with the animating ethos of the Internet” (Allan, 2002: 127).

For those involved, the transition was likely a natural one; many of these sites existed as extensions of the authors’ hobbies, interests or whimsy, and commenting on events happening around them, from the sublime to the mundane, was par for the course. But undoubtedly the 9/11 attacks were no ordinary event, and regardless of intention the actions of these bloggers and online content producers constituted what some might regard as a minor media revolution. As Stuart Allan explains:

Hundreds of refashioned websites began to appear over the course of September 11, making publicly available eyewitness accounts, personal photographs, and in some cases video footage of the unfolding disasters. Taken together, these websites resembled something of a first-person news network, a collective form of collaborative newsgathering. Ordinary people were transforming into ‘amateur

newsies', to use a term frequently heard, or instant reporters, photojournalists, and opinion columnists.

(ibid.)

Suddenly empowered by a fortuitous confluence of elements — access to consumer-grade technology of a professional standard; access to a freely distributable publication medium; and simply being in the right place at the right time — these 'amateur newsies' were making an invaluable contribution to the body of news coverage. Said David Vogler, a graphic designer who captured the scene with his digital camcorder:

Anyone who had access to a digital camera and a website suddenly was a guerrilla journalist posting these things ... When you're viewing an experience through a viewfinder, you become bolder.

(quoted in Hu, 2001)

2.3.2 Do-it-yourself journalism These non-professional journalists, these ordinary people doing their own reporting and newsgathering were not only bolder, but their actions were growing confidence in the public's direct participation in the news process. As Alex Halavais outlines in his contribution to the Pew Internet and American Life Project's report on September 11 and the internet, the concept of 'do-it-yourself' journalism "[had] been a staple of Internet activity for years" (2002: 26).

Of course this had always been on a small scale: though from its early days the world wide web gave the public access to the raw material of news stories and, potentially, enabled them to examine and pick apart the facts as presented to them by the mainstream media, such a task required the kind of dedication that sets professional journalists and newshounds apart from the average user or news consumer. There is also the small fact that the most famous 'do-it-yourself' journalist that the internet had spawned up to this point was Matt Drudge, of the infamous Drudge Report⁷ — hardly the greatest advertisement for the movement.

But the web was older in 2001, and more mature. The events of September 11 happened at a time when internet access rates in the United States were significantly

⁷ <http://www.drudgereport.com/>

higher than they had been just six years previously, and the medium was starting to blossom and appeal beyond its characterisation as the domain of the nerds or the sinful and a ghetto of misinformation, to something that was actually coming close to being as ubiquitous and as necessary as the telephone, the radio, or the television.

Aside from those few amateurs with the technology and the wherewithal to gather their own newsworthy material, be it photos or video footage or whatever, by 2001 it was no longer so difficult for anyone to use the internet to look behind the stories in the news, critically evaluate the information at hand and, in effect, synthesise news of one's own.

Certainly, this was still a niche activity for the most part. However, as Halavais notes, the attacks on 9/11 “gave new prominence to the phenomenon”:

In the days after the attacks, the Web provided a broad catalogue of facts and fancy related to 9/11, ranging from eyewitness accounts from New York, Washington, and across the nation, to government reports, to analysis from experts and amateurs. With the eyes of the world focused on a small number of related events, many stepped into the role of amateur journalist, seeking out sources and sometimes assembling these ideas for others. Most striking, perhaps, were the wide number of accounts from those who had seen the World Trade Center collapse, or had in some way gained first-hand knowledge of surrounding events. Beyond that, many people posted their reactions to 9/11.

(ibid.)

“The urgency of the news,” says Halavais (2002: 27), “transformed many sites into news suppliers.” Websites that were usually non-news weblogs or general discussion forums suddenly shifted gear and metamorphosed almost seamlessly into effective newsgathering nodes, compiling and combining whatever news was coming from a variety of mainstream media outlets with real-time eyewitness accounts from the ground and constant analysis of events from their contributors.

Community weblogs such as the popular MetaFilter⁸ excelled at this kind of news supply, creating information portals that provided a novel blend of three distinct elements: access to news from professional journalists and news organisations; access to individual bloggers posting commentary and aggregating links on their own sites; and messages from contributors who bore witness to the events as they happened — the word from the man on the street, more or less. For Halavais, sites like MetaFilter and Fark⁹ were “interesting examples of the way non-news sites were reoriented by ‘do it yourself’ journalists during the crisis” (ibid.).

All of this was, too, approaching the phenomenon that the technology journalist (and blogger) Dan Gillmor, in his book *We the Media*¹⁰, calls ‘citizen journalism’; it was bloggers and other web users harnessing the new technologies of the ‘read-write web’ (2004: 23-43) – weblogs, digital cameras, even video and audio – to perform acts of “civic engagement” (2004: 139). (See Chapter 4 for more on this.)

2.4 Questions of accuracy

One of the main criticisms levelled at this kind of ‘do-it-yourself’ or ‘personal’ journalism is that of the accuracy or objectivity of its product. Whereas the news from established media outlets carries weight by virtue of the masthead, and the trust that audiences hold in its implied ideals, and their respective news-providing institutions, the slew of ‘citizen-produced coverage’ (Allan, 2002: 127) that appeared in the wake of 9/11 had to be taken at face value. As the late Peter Jennings of ABC News said in February 2005: “I love the bloggers if you have time to read them all day but I’m not quite sure who it is out there.”¹¹

“The contributions to so-called ‘personal journalism’,” Allan (ibid.) elaborates, “appeared from diverse locations, so diverse as to make judgements about their accuracy difficult if not impossible.” For critics of the internet, the lack of verification

⁸ <http://www.metafilter.com/>

⁹ <http://www.fark.com/>

¹⁰ This is an important textbook laying out the basics for the evolving media environment for the American media experience, though its scope is too broad to cover in much detail for the thesis at hand. See Appendix B for further details.

¹¹ From an interview with Jon Stewart on CNN International’s *The Daily Show: Global Edition*, broadcast February 26, 2005.

is significant; if one cannot judge the accuracy of a given piece of information, then it constitutes mere noise. “There’s this vast, sort of torrent of information coming from these sources all the time, unchecked and uncheckable,” says *Irish Times* columnist John Waters, “and the result is that public consciousness is actually becoming more paranoid, and more conspiratorial [about a variety of issues]” (interview with John Waters, August 25 2005). Rebecca MacKinnon warns, too, that the conversational nature of perspectives in the blogosphere has “implications for the journalist’s ideal of objectivity” (2005: 29).

Yet criticism such as this mostly misses the point. ‘Do-it-yourself journalism’, or at least that which appeared after 9/11, isn’t as much about accuracy for its own sake, or even objectivity, as it is about shedding new light on the news, looking at stories from different angles, putting information into greater context. Rather than feeding the public’s appetite with something sinister or insidious, “these forms of reporting may have provided some members of the online community with a greater sense of connection to the crisis than that afforded by ‘official’ news reports” (Allan, 2002: 128).

While it is impossible to argue that the web was not “an incubator of rumour”, it was also an inoculator, “knocking down rumours and other fanciful tales” (Halavais, 2002: 21) and infamous memes that spread like wildfire throughout the web and through viral e-mails (the false Nostradamus predictions, for just one example¹²).

In a way, 9/11 gave the blogosphere a strong notion of responsibility, a responsibility felt by many bloggers to their fellow web users. “It makes me feel like I’m doing something useful for those who can’t do anything,” said popular blogger Jason Kottke¹³ with respect to his posts on 9/11 (Kahney, 2001a). But this was at the same time a process of catharsis; Vogler again (quoted in Hu 2001):

I found that for me, posting videos and sharing these experiences was the best therapy. It’s a modern way of a survivor of a disaster declaring, ‘I’m still alive; look at this website. I got out.’

¹² <http://fury.com/article/925.php>

¹³ <http://kottke.org/>

2.5 Weblogs: a source of news, or a source of perspective?

“Of particular importance here,” Allan (2002: 128) observes, “was the crucial role played by weblogs in making these [new] forms of journalism possible ... [m]anagers of these weblogs spent the day rapidly linking together any available amateur accounts and photographs onto their respective sites.” Indeed, “[m]ost of the amateur content,” explains Leander Kahney (2001b), “would be inaccessible, or at least hard to find, if not for ... weblogs, which function as ‘portals’ to personal content,” as well as independent, distributed portals to news and information across a spectrum of sources, which was especially important on a day full of confusion.

All of this is not to say, however, that the blogosphere served as a replacement for the mainstream news media. By and large, people turned first to television for their news (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2002: 2), and still went to professional news sites online for information. But in the succeeding days, weeks, and months, personal perspectives like those provided by weblogs brought a more direct, more human dimension to a news event of a massive and, in effect, dehumanising scale. Stuart Allan observes:

In stretching the boundaries of what counted as journalism, ‘amateur newsies’ and their webloggers together threw into sharp relief the reportorial conventions of mainstream journalism. The webloggers ... illustrated how news sources are not restricted to what we think of as the traditional news media.

(Allan, 2002: 128)

The blogosphere resounded with striking accounts “from those who had seen the World Trade Center collapse, or had in some way gained first-hand knowledge of the surrounding events” (Halavais, 2002: 29). These eyewitness narratives

ran fairly long, while others consisted of little more than a single informational posting. Eyewitness accounts most frequently appeared on personal blogs ... On group blogs, first-person information was usually volunteered in very abbreviated form. For example, in the early discussion on Fark, someone identifying himself as an employee of Worldcom indicated that the World Trade Center housed one of

the major switches for their telephone networks, and another noted that his friend, a volunteer firefighter in Pittsburgh, had been put on alert and advised that there was a hijacking before the plane crashed outside of Shanksville, Pennsylvania¹⁴.

(ibid.)

Halavais explains that these witness accounts were not meant to be ‘news’ in the professional sense of the fact-checked, subedited, impartial news product: “They are necessarily more socially constructed, and read more like rumours, with particular aspects of the story being embellished while others are left aside” (Halavais, 2002: 29-30). They might not have been up to the strict standards of journalism but they were, as Dan Gillmor (2005) states, “extraordinary contributors of knowledge”.

While most of the news provided by sites like Fark, Plastic and Slashdot and the many weblogs that aggregated information could be readily had elsewhere through mainstream news channels, it was the juxtapositions of perspectives; the contrasts of rumour and fact; and the collaboration, conversation, and argumentation between users that set such sites apart. In this case ‘news’, as a product of traditional media institutions, became merely one element, one cog in a much greater knowledge-producing machine

And in this respect the blogosphere, whether by design or by accident, had stepped into the breach left by the shortcomings of the traditional media infrastructure, and helped to fill the gaps in the public’s information.

2.6 After 9/11

September 11 was the day that saw blogging begin to cross over, however slowly, into the mainstream public consciousness. And over time it was, it should be emphasised, the traditional media that played a big hand in this. Glowing articles appeared even in that most august of publications, *The New York Times*, which pointed out the benefits of the web and the blogosphere in providing a personal

¹⁴ See <http://forums.fark.com/cgi/fark/comments.pl?IDLink=45123>

perspective on the stories they covered day in and day out, and hailed the potential of the web for people to share their own stories as the nation grieved.

It was also long-established purveyors of news and quality journalism such as the *Times* (and *The Guardian* in the UK) who, in publicising the likes of Blogger.com and the culture of the blogosphere in general in news stories and features, pointed their readers towards the tools to empower themselves in this emerging new media commons.

One study cited by Pamela LiCalzi O'Connell (2001) found "that while American adults turned first to television as their primary source of information after the attacks, 47 percent discussed the events online and 23 percent said that using the Internet helped them deal with the tragedy" in one way or another. Before long, the blogosphere was home to an ever-growing oral history of the 9/11 attacks, a body of knowledge far deeper and going far beyond the stories published by newspapers and broadcast on television – "social history in its rawest, tear-stained form" (ibid.).

"One legacy of 9/11 for online news," states Halavais (2002: 32), "is that growing numbers of Americans seem to want to supplement the material they get from traditional media via traditional mechanisms such as television, newspapers, and magazines." At the same time, "[s]ome Internet users become journalists themselves, with no other outlet than the sites to which they post their material." As internet maven Rogers Cadenhead commented on the day:

Amateur news reporters on weblogs are functioning as their own decentralised media today, and it's one of the only heartening things about this stomach-churning day.

(Cadenhead, quoted in Allan, 2002: 119)

Whatever their influence on the public during the day itself, September 11 can be regarded without doubt as a milestone in the transformation of the media sphere. The significance of weblogs in the aftermath of 9/11 was not lost on the mainstream media, and the blogosphere would soon prove to be a place for journalists of all kinds to ignore at their peril.

Chapter 3

**Redefining
the media environment post-9/11**

3.1 Cultural chaos

As the blogosphere gained momentum in the months following 9/11, the reactions of journalists and the mainstream media were noticeably mixed. So, too, were the attitudes of the public, most of whom had no idea what a ‘blog’ was – and if they did, they were only aware through the skewed perception of second-hand knowledge. For each of those who had discovered the benefits of the blogosphere during this time and found a purpose in blogging themselves, there were many more who were intimidated or bemused by the concept, or confused by the terminology.

And even for those who more readily dip their toes into the waters of new media, it can be a daunting experience. There is just so much information out there – the quantity is so unfathomable; the choices are so virtually limitless that the effect is almost paralysing. And the new ways of navigating this expanding ocean of information, though not especially difficult, take time to master. Even those of us well-versed in these matters find ourselves floating adrift from time to time, unsure of where to start, or where to go, or how to get there.

This new environment that we find ourselves in is one of what Brian McNair (2005: 151) describes as “cultural chaos”:

We inhabitants of the twenty-first century live in an environment of communicative turbulence – a ‘cultural chaos’ brought into being by the proliferation of media channels and the volume of information of all kinds, which flows up, down and through them.

It is in the newly broadening media sphere that ‘cultural chaos’ is clearly evident, but it’s not necessarily as chaotic or as debased as the notion implies. Rather, we are moving in this new environment from a state of ‘relative autonomy’ (one comprised of monopolistic news organisations, who filter what news is ‘in the public’s interest’ to us from the top down) to one of ‘relative control’, where the top-down approach is being usurped by a more distributed, multilateral, more socially-inclusive media landscape; one where the voice of the press and of media institutions finds itself sharing space with the voice of the people (McNair, 2005: 151). McNair observes

here that global news culture is becoming decentralised – a trend of which weblogs are indicative.

McNair himself writes of an emerging “culture of access, brought about by the growth of democracy, the advancement of capitalist societies, and the development of technology to facilitate communication” (2005: 157). The blogosphere, and the web in total, could be regarded as an important factor of this ‘culture of access’.

Certainly, the traditional media institutions maintain the resources and, in general, the trust of their readers, that contribute to their authority. However their fallibility is today much more apparent:

In an earlier era, when there were many fewer media outlets, much less global in their reach, imposing elite control on coverage of ... events was easier (if never without the risk of failure). But in a global media market of many news providers, competitive realities determine that bad news will out.

(McNair, 2005: 158)

But it could also be argued that it is not just competitive realities in the commercial media marketplace which determine that the bad will out – the blogosphere plays a role in this, too.

3.1.1 The ‘Long Tail’ Young people today are growing up in a society in which a key asset (or burden, depending on your perspective) is the plurality of information. It is a “world of abundance”, where the provision of online distribution channels – which is what weblogs are, in effect – can compensate for the “world of scarcity” (Anderson, 2004), the traditional media realm where there is, in the words of Chris Anderson:

not enough space for all the CDs, DVDs and games produced, not enough screens to show all the available movies, not enough channels to broadcast all the TV programmes, not enough radio waves to play

all the music created, and not enough time in the day to squeeze everything out through either of those sets of slots.

(ibid.)

Not forgetting, not enough newspapers or mainstream news outlets to report all of the news that happens in a given day.

Everyday news journalism presents that news which is deemed to have the utmost relevance to the greatest share of the audience, which in most instances goes hand-in-hand with the determination to provide the public with the news they deserve, the information that is in the “public interest”. But circumstances dictate that only a fraction of everything that can be defined as news in any given day actually makes it onto the pages of a newspaper or the broadcasts of a rolling news channel. “Caught up in the web of events, tight deadlines and the inherent disposability of their daily output,” explains Prasun Solwalkar (2005: 262), “journalists are rarely able to realise that they routinely ignore large parts of human existence or that willy nilly their exertions end up catering to the elite sections of society.”

But weblogs can exploit this deficiency by publishing or highlighting that news or information which would otherwise be discarded for various reasons (niche appeal, lack of space, and so on). To take the term coined by Anderson¹⁵, in this way the blogosphere could be acting as the ‘Long Tail’ of the media sphere. “[O]ur culture and economy,” he argues, “is increasingly shifting away from a focus on a relatively small number of ‘hits’ (mainstream products and markets) at the head of the demand curve and toward a huge number of niches in the tail.” This is subverting the old supply-and-demand model, which operates on the principle of pleasing only some of the people all of the time, by feeding the rising demand across the breadth of society for more obscure, more detailed, or more local information. These are the types of niches that the blogosphere can fill.

¹⁵ The ‘Long Tail’ phenomenon (in terms of news provision) is important enough to note here, but deserves much greater exploration than there is space or scope to cover in this dissertation, and could be a valuable thesis for further study. For more on the concepts behind the ‘Long Tail’, see Chris Anderson’s article on the subject in Wired magazine at <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html>, his weblog coverage for his forthcoming book on the subject at <http://longtail.typepad.com/>, and a concise explanation of the concept at http://longtail.typepad.com/the_long_tail/2005/09/long_tail_101.html

So what benefits is this environment of ‘cultural chaos’ bestowing on our modern, media-savvy society? It would seem that the blogosphere may hold the answers.

3.2 The birth of the blogworld

In the eyes of Matt Welch (2003: 22), the established media today looks like a castle under siege:

Blogging technology, has, for the first time in history, given the Average Jane the ability to write, edit, design, and publish her own editorial product – to be read and responded to by millions of people, potentially ... It has begun to deliver on some of the wild promises about the Internet that were heard in the 1990s. Never before have so many passionate outsiders – hundreds of thousands at minimum – stormed the ramparts of professional journalism.

It’s only natural for Welch to proselytise for the potential of the medium; he is a blogger himself, and a successful one – but he is also a journalist, and seems genuinely excited about the future of journalism as it incorporates the new media forms emerging from the ‘cultural chaos’.

He sees bloggers as “reminiscent of old-style metro columnists or the liveliest of the New Journalists”. For him, bloggers are “staking the narrowest of editorial claims as their own ... and covering them like no one else”. They are “fact-checking the daylights out of truth-fudging ideologues”, “sifting through the biases” of the mainstream media, “pumping up stories that should be getting more attention”, and all the while “cheerfully acknowledging and/or demonstrating their own lopsided political sympathies”. But most importantly for Welch, bloggers are “committing impressive, spontaneous acts of decentralised journalism” (ibid.)

He posits four qualities that the blogosphere has already contributed to journalism: “personality”, “eyewitness testimony”, “editorial filtering”, and “uncounted gigabytes of new knowledge” (Welch, 2003: 24). We’ve already seen in the previous chapter how these elements contributed to enriching the journalism produced in the

aftermath of 9/11– but for Welch, this is a constant, ongoing process that is slowly building momentum by the day.

“Why are weblogs so popular?” asks the former journalist and current blogger and media commentator Jeff Jarvis.¹⁶ “I think it’s because they have something to say. In a media world that’s otherwise leached of opinions and life, there’s so much in them” (quoted in *ibid.*).

Though they may not be quite as popular as Jarvis believes, they have certainly been noticed: none more so than the ‘warblogs’ and the political weblogs that emerged from the blogosphere, spouting their rigidly-held opinions, during the turbulent climate of the war in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq.

3.3 The rise of the warblogs

While the earliest weblogs (many of which are still going strong and are incredibly popular today) were and are unashamedly geek-centric, with an almost autistic obsession with the minutiae of technology culture, the ones that finally broke through the invisible barrier to the mainstream were of a distinctly different breed. They were the ones that capitalised on the increasing politicisation of American society at the turn of the century.

These blogs, too, were similarly obsessive, with a laser-like focus on the politico-militaristic machinations of the Bush administration, for better or for worse. Bloggers like Glenn Reynolds¹⁷, Andrew Sullivan¹⁸, Markos Moulitsas Zúniga¹⁹ and the aforementioned Matt Welch²⁰ found that they had a passion to write about political issues with immediacy, like a running commentary on the political world, and found also a growing audience who shared this passion – often rabidly so.

¹⁶ <http://www.buzzmachine.com/>

¹⁷ The conservative law professor Reynolds blogs at Instapundit: <http://www.instapundit.com/>

¹⁸ The journalist and conservative political commentator Sullivan’s weblog, The Daily Dish, is at <http://www.andrewsullivan.com/>

¹⁹ The liberal Zúniga blogs at Daily Kos: <http://www.dailykos.com/>

²⁰ Matt Welch’s seminal warblog can be found at <http://www.mattwelch.com/warblog.html>

The trend for this can be traced back well before 9/11, to the US presidential campaign of 2000 and the anger and frustration that mounted in the face of George W. Bush's allegedly tainted victory. Even though voter apathy was at a consistent all-time high²¹, the election of 2000 still highlighted significantly deep divisions in American society, polarising people as liberal or conservative, as Democrat or Republican, as 'blue' or 'red'. This was a division that the blogosphere did little to bridge, but much to widen. In the politicised blogosphere, the battle lines were being drawn between left and right²².

Though the trend preceded it, it was the political events which succeeded 9/11 that gave rise in the public eye to this platform for a new breed of political commentator. The invasion of Afghanistan and the search for al-Qaeda evoked what could be described as a sense of duty among the largely patriotic, conservative political bloggers; a duty to make sense of the issues beyond the media spin, as they saw it. This explains why many conservative bloggers viewed themselves as diametrically opposed to what was and is perceived as a liberally-biased mainstream media (or MSM, as the bloggers refer to them pejoratively).

This, in turn, defines the position of the liberal bloggers, who perceived a danger in the overt conservative bias of mainstream news outlets like Fox News, and were angered by what they felt was the wilful misrepresentation of information in, and the intellectual dishonesty of, the conservative blogosphere – with respect to anything from politics and economics to society and religion. Of course, like their conservative opponents, what they call 'bias' is only ever in favour of the other side, and they would be hard-pressed to highlight a bias towards their own.

3.4 Watchdogs – or wolves at the door?

Yet these biases, argued back and forth from side to side, made for a refreshing change from the norm in the American media (where political affiliation is much less

²¹ Judging by the disappointingly low 51.3 per cent turnout rate (<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0781453.html>).

²² Though a few centrists and moderates would find their place, among them Oliver Willis (<http://www.oliverwillis.com>).

outspoken than in, say, the British media). The bloggers, unlike journalists within the traditional media for the most part, were not afraid to wear their political affiliations on their sleeves, and had little fear about taking the media to task when they were seen, in the eyes of the blogging community, to be failing in their journalistic obligations. “More than just A.J. Liebling-style press criticism,” says Matt Welch (2003: 26), “journalists finally have something approaching real peer review, in all its brutality.”

Thus, in their own way, the controversies stirred by the blogosphere that I will examine in this section – the Dan Rather ‘memogate’ scandal and the Eason Jordan debacle – could be viewed as influencing, and maybe enriching the journalism produced by the established media, even if in as little a way as keeping them on their toes.

3.4.1 Memogate The ‘memogate’ scandal is so far the biggest success story for the conservative bloggers in what they regard as a war against the ‘liberal’ mainstream media. It concerned a set of seemingly official memoranda which criticised George W. Bush’s service record with the Texas Air National Guard during the Vietnam War in the early 1970s. The documents reopened a controversy regarding Bush’s service during that war – that he had joined the National Guard to escape fighting in Vietnam – when they were brought to the public’s attention by the renowned CBS News presenter Dan Rather²³ on an edition of the current affairs strand *60 Minutes*²⁴.

The story circulated around the blogosphere: both with the liberal bloggers, who hailed the reporting as a major salvo in the battle against the right; and with the conservatives who immediately questioned the authenticity of the documents, picking apart small details, such as the typography. Soon enough, as the authenticity of the documents began to fade under scrutiny, this turned into a full-scale attack on the journalistic integrity of CBS News and the reputation of Rather.

²³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Rather

²⁴ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/60_Minutes for a detailed history of this long-running current affairs series.

Within a matter of weeks, CBS admitted that they had been misled by their source for the story; the producer of the segment was fired; a number of CBS News executives were forced to resign; and Dan Rather himself announced his retirement under a cloud a few months later²⁵ .

It seemed like a coup for the right, and for the blogosphere. The conservative bloggers saw themselves as a decentralised pressure group that finally had genuine influence on the mainstream media as CBS News capitulated under the weight of their criticism. But as Corey Pein observes, the bloggers were “guilty of many of the same sins” that they had accused CBS of committing:

First, much of the bloggers’ vaunted fact-checking was seriously warped. Their driving assumptions were often drawn from flawed information or based on faulty logic. Personal attacks passed for analysis. Second, and worse, the reviled MSM often followed the bloggers’ lead. As mainstream media critics of CBS piled on, rumours shaped the news and conventions of sourcing and scepticism fell by the wayside.

(Pein, 2005: 31)

The ‘memogate’ affair turned all eyes on the mainstream news media, but also turned journalists’ eyes on themselves and their profession. It couldn’t have happened at a worse time, linked in a chain of events, which included the Jayson Blair scandal²⁶. The climate today is one where mistakes are much less forgivable than before, and journalists are under enormous pressure to defend themselves, lest they face the wrath of the blogosphere, and lose the trust of their audience.

The results have been largely negative for all sides concerned. But if the fallout of ‘memogate’ can encourage more rigorous journalistic standards, and convince more journalists to watch the blogosphere more closely, then at least some good may come of it.

²⁵ Although his reputation was damaged for many in the public, within the sphere of his profession this was just a blip – ‘one mistake does not the man make,’ so to speak – and not reflective of his distinguished career.

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jayson_Blair

3.4.2 Eason Jordan In January 2005, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, CNN executive editor Eason Jordan delivered a speech in which he was alleged to have accused the US military of deliberately targeting journalists reporting from the war in Iraq to prevent evidence of atrocities from becoming public knowledge.

Unfortunately for Jordan, some of the conference participants were bloggers, and they took exception to his statements. Within moments, his words had been posted to the world wide web for anyone to read, and were quickly publicised and kept in circulation by the conservative side of the blogosphere, who clamoured for his immediate dismissal. Though Jordan had backtracked from his statements after challenges from the audience, the damage had been done, and the controversy was enough to force his resignation from CNN some weeks later.

The nub of the argument from the conservative bloggers' side here was that the mainstream news media, as they saw it, were sitting on the story, and if not for their efforts to publicise Jordan's words it would never have been the story that it was. As far as the conservative bloggers were concerned, once again they had done the work that the 'supposed' professional journalists should have done.

Of course the reality of the situation is not as clear-cut as that, and this particular scandal leaves us in a virtual minefield of questions. One important one concerns qualified privilege. Statements like those made by Jordan are commonplace at such gatherings of professionals which are normally held 'off-the-record' unless stated otherwise, and as such cannot be held against them.

It could be argued that Jordan was communicating a privately-held opinion, and therefore not need to provide evidence for his statement – but when his words were leaked into the blogosphere, they were conflated with his position of authority in a major news organisation, and he was treated as if he had falsified a story. Never mind that the only recorded evidence that this ever took place was withheld by the conference organisers – the witness testimony of the bloggers in attendance was enough verification for the conservative blogosphere. The mainstream media is beholden to much stricter legal standards than that, but individual bloggers are not. In

this respect, one might even say that ‘bloggers go where journalists fear to tread’. But legal regulations on what the established media can and cannot say exist for very practical reasons.

It’s clear that by bypassing mainstream media channels and publishing their own criticism, weblogs can reach the public with their message almost instantly – but as these two scandals show, this message might ultimately be more damaging than beneficial, or “more treacherous than informative” (Chapter 2.2.1). For every reason this situation throws up why we should not trust the mainstream media, there is a complementary reason for why we should be suspicious of the motives of the blogosphere as well.

3.5 The new correspondents

There is, however, another side to the coin. While many bloggers were content to review, criticise and pick apart the mainstream media, influencing the process of journalism from the outside, a few individuals were using the new personal publishing tools at their disposal to produce what can only be described as original journalism, but outside of the confines of the traditional media structure.

The invasion of Iraq highlighted a growing number of these ‘blogs-as-reportage’, written by a new breed of foreign correspondent – whether independently-minded journalists using weblogs to circumvent the editorial controls of the mainstream channels, or ordinary individuals caught up in the chaos of war, and commenting on life as it continued around them.

3.5.1 Chris Allbritton A former Associated Press reporter, Chris Allbritton had a bright idea for the spring of 2003: to report on the invasion of Iraq from the heart of the country itself, and from an independent perspective beyond the confines of the mainstream media and editorial controls.

To this end, he took advantage of the technology available to him, and used his profile within the blogosphere to raise the necessary funds to become the “first fully

reader-funded journalist-blogger.”²⁷ Jay Rosen recounts his story:

Allbritton raised \$14,500 from 342 donors on a simple promise: that he would send back from the war original and honest reporting, free of commercial pressures, pack thinking, and patriotic hype. He needed a plane ticket to Turkey (where he snuck over the border and found the war), a laptop, a Global Positioning Satellite unit, a rented satellite phone, a digital camera, and enough cash to move around, keep fed, and buy his way out of trouble. While some reporters were embedded with the American military, Allbritton sent himself on assignment, never even asking permission to be in the country.

(Rosen, 2003: 35-6)

“The Internet,” says Rosen, “did the rest.” Within days of arriving in Iraq and posting reports and images to his weblog²⁸, his site had attracted over 20,000 readers, eager for reports and news direct from the ground and not filtered through military or editorial channels. It proved for Rosen “not that anyone in the public can perhaps be a journalist, but that anyone who is a journalist can have a mini-public on the net” (Rosen, 2003: 36).

Allbritton’s project was certainly successful, and a fitting example of just what can be done, but it was a model that could not prove sustainable in the long term, at least for him: the following year he rejoined the mainstream media, becoming *Time* magazine’s Baghdad correspondent.

3.5.2 Kevin Sites At this time, another name often uttered in the same breath was that of Kevin Sites, then a war correspondent for CNN covering the US military’s exploits in Iraq.

Sites had already garnered a strong reputation in his field as a ‘sojo’ – “a broadcast journalist who works alone with portable equipment to shoot and transmit stories from the field” (Mernit, 2003) – when he was encouraged by technology journalist and blogger Xeni Jardin²⁹ to start a weblog where he could publish notes and anecdotes to supplement his news reports.

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Allbritton

²⁸ <http://www.back-to-iraq.com/>

²⁹ <http://www.xeni.net/>

Jardin's connections within the blogosphere saw that word of Sites's site spread quickly; in less than two weeks, his site was listed as one of the top 100 most linked-to blogs, and his story had already attracted interest from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

The massive buzz surrounding Site's blog, however, made CNN executives uncomfortable; they felt that he was compromising his professional obligations to them by distributing journalism for free via his weblog, and forced him to stop. Barely a fortnight after he began, Sites abruptly suspended his blogging.

But the story, of course, did not go away – it only grew bigger. A major debate arose in the blogosphere about whether CNN had the right to impose restrictions on Sites' reporting on his weblog, and many saw it as a sheer lack of understanding of the benefits of the new medium on the part of the broadcaster. Others brought up the question of whether Sites' actions were in violation of his contract: did the broadcaster own the copyright in all of the journalism he produced in Iraq, even that which was not intended for broadcast?

Sites parted ways with CNN shortly after, and returned to freelancing in the field on assignment for MSNBC and NBC News, who allowed him to continue blogging provided they had the right of first refusal on his material. It was hailed as a victory for blogging over the established media dinosaurs, although it was a somewhat pyrrhic one.

It was an assignment for NBC News in November 2004 that saw Sites back in the spotlight, having witnessed and filmed the shooting of a wounded and apparently unarmed Iraqi prisoner by US marines on patrol at a mosque in Fallujah (Sites, Miklaszweski and Johnson, 2004). It was a controversial episode: in spite of his journalistic responsibility not to interfere, he was widely criticised for either failing to prevent what many characterised as either a war crime, or just the opposite: committing an act of treason by portraying the US military as criminals. In response, Sites used his weblog to speak directly to the audience. In his own words:

The blog gave me a voice to directly clarify what I had seen and videotaped; my account didn't have to be filtered through someone else's writing or perspective. I was able to take responsibility for my actions while providing background that helped people achieve a fuller understanding.

(Sites, quoted in Wired, 2005)

3.5.3 The Baghdad Blogger *Where is Raed?*³⁰, the weblog of Baghdad resident Salam Pax, began inauspiciously; it was just an easy method for him to communicate with his friend Raed, a graduate student in Jordan. But it was a unique combination of circumstances that set this blog apart from the countless others set up every day – in it, Pax wrote openly about his homosexuality, his feelings on Saddam Hussein's regime, his opinions on the war, and his experiences of the fighting right on his doorstep.

The enigmatic Pax's site was just what the blogosphere needed: an eloquent, gripping account of life during wartime. Links to the blog spread like wildfire throughout the blogosphere. The media buzz surrounding the blog was immense for a website that never purported to be an act of journalism, and the name Salam Pax was soon the talk of the virtual town. The phenomenon of the 'Baghdad Blogger' was born.

Questions regarding the blog's authenticity soon arose, however. Pax's Western inflections, coupled with the fact that he wrote under a pseudonym ('Salam' and 'Pax' are the Arabic and Latin for 'peace') aroused suspicion; he could have been anyone: a propagandist, a spy or government agent, or a journalist posing as an Iraqi.

The questions provoked *The Guardian* to track him down – which they eventually did, in May 2003. They discovered he was in his late 20s, an architect by profession, and had spent some time living in Vienna, which explained the Western references that peppered his writing.

Soon after the relationship between Salam Pax and *The Guardian* turned professional; the paper published extracts from his blog in their feature pages, and eventually hired him as a columnist. He also filmed a series of reports from Baghdad for *The*

³⁰ http://dear_raed.blogspot.com/; Pax currently has a weblog at <http://justzipit.blogspot.com/>

Guardian's film unit, which were broadcast on the BBC's *Newsnight* programme in 2004.

His perspective on the conflict in the Middle East was truly enlightening; Pax told it like it was, from the perspective of a native. Few would argue that his blogging and subsequent writing did not enrich the journalism produced on the war in Iraq.

But not only did Salam Pax's weblog signal the potential for the blogosphere to produce quality writing, insight and reportage amid the noise of the internet, it also showed that the blogosphere was broadening – it was no longer solely the domain of white American males. Bloggers like Pax, and later Hoder³¹, paved the way for a vibrant blogging community in the Middle East that not only established a valuable connection between people in the region, but also a vital link with emigrants as far away as Britain and the United States³².

3.6 Moving forward

As these three previous examples show, there are certain caveats when it comes to weblogs and journalism, the most notable being the question of independence. The model as implemented by Allbritton cannot be sustained for the long term without the backing of the mainstream. Kevin Sites may not have started blogging at all without being a part of the established media infrastructure. And even Salam Pax was eventually assimilated into the mainstream.

But even so, the weblog form proved here to be a powerful tool for professional journalists to enrich their own reporting, while also (in the Baghdad Blogger's case) being a fertile source of new talent and engrossing reportage.

As we have seen in this chapter, the media environment has evolved significantly since the pivotal events of 9/11, and the relationship between the media and its

³¹ <http://hoder.com/weblog/>

³² The blogosphere was encompassing what Volkmer calls "spaces of microspheres" (2005: 364).

audience is being constantly renegotiated. The blogosphere has played no small part in this; as the audience has begun to learn more about blogs and blogging, so too have working journalists both within and without the traditional media infrastructure.

As web users divine greater and broader knowledge about current events, journalists have begun to use the tools of the blogosphere to supplement their own work. And media organisations, too, have started to recognise the talent that the blogosphere can foster.

In the next chapter, we will look at the current state of the redefined media environment, and what role the blogosphere is playing in the ‘citizen journalism’, with relation to the Asian tsunami disaster, the London bombings of July 7, and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in August/September 2005.

Chapter 4

The tsunami, 7/7 and beyond: new questions for journalism?

4.1 The Asian tsunami

The tsunami that struck South-East Asia on December 26, 2005, was a truly international tragedy, its devastating waves affecting several countries on the rim of the Indian Ocean, even as far off as South Africa, killing upwards of 200,000 people and displacing many thousands more. It was also the first large-scale news event to take over the internet and the blogosphere since 9/11 three years before. As such, the web's response, and in particular the response of weblogs to this tragedy is especially useful in comparison to the events of September 11, to see how far the blogosphere had come.

4.1.1 Coverage of the event The fact that the worst hit areas were also popular holiday destinations for Westerners brought the tragedy closer to home than it might otherwise have been, in this respect similar to the effect of 9/11. Because of this, the global reach of the internet proved invaluable for the communication of information on rescue efforts, and for connecting families with their loved ones stranded amid the chaos.

The information chain was much stronger and more connected than it had ever been; the web had grown in capacity since 9/11, many mistakes had been learned from, and the network was far more robust. The mainstream also showed that they had adapted much better to the evolving media environment, and sites like BBC News³³ and Guardian Unlimited³⁴ utilised the web efficiently and effectively in collecting available news and communicating reports as quickly as possible (see Fig 4.1).

The bloggers did their part, too, by aggregating links to such news reports; to personal accounts of tourists and travellers caught amid the confusion; to sites where people could register the details of the missing; to NGOs organising relief efforts; and to real-time images and photographs of the devastation. Many of the weblogs posting links and photos had no connection to the event beyond a human interest, an emotional investment in the plight of those caught up in the tsunami and its

³³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/world/2004/asia_quake_disaster/

³⁴ The layout of Guardian Unlimited's special report on the tsunami (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/tsunami>), like many within its network of sites, is very weblog-inspired: with a single column of information, articles linked in sequence, and a plethora of hyperlinks.



Figure 4.1
Screenshot of BBC News's coverage of the tsunami disaster (captured September 10 2005)

far-reaching aftermath.

But the blogosphere did not just concentrate on the tragic, human side of the tsunami. Postings to weblogs and group blogs alike focused also on the science of the phenomenon, in an attempt to explain how it happened. Bloggers became armchair economists and sociologists, commenting on and discussing the lasting effects of the tsunami in the poorer regions it destroyed³⁵. Much of this was far and beyond the coverage that the mainstream press and broadcast media had the time, the space or the resources to present, even online.

This raises an important question: was the blogosphere enriching the news journalism produced during this time, or was it doing a better job?

³⁵ See http://www.boingboing.net/2004/12/27/tsunami_blog_covrag.html or <http://www.metafilter.com/tags/tsunami> for some examples of postings like these.

4.2 London, July 7, 2005

At 8:50am on the morning of July 7, 2005, a series of explosions rocked the Underground train network at three points in central London – near Aldgate, Russell Square and Edgware Road. They were followed almost an hour later by an explosion on a bus at Tavistock Square, north of Oxford Street. The effect on the city’s transport infrastructure was immediate. The Tube network was suspended, as were all buses a short time later. The city was paralysed, not only by the gridlock that ensued on the streets, but by the sheer fright of such a widespread attack, which took 56 lives.

4.2.1 Coverage of the event Though there was nothing unique about this attack on London’s transport network when compared to the bombings in Madrid in 2004³⁶, which actually caused more damage and resulted in more casualties – or indeed compared to the events of 9/11 – the overall media reaction to ensuing events was.

As with 9/11, the news event was driven by the broadcast media – but not by imagery, at least in the initial stages. Conspicuous by its absence was on-the-scene footage of any of the affected areas as events unfolded in the first few hours. This was for number of reasons, most obviously that three of the blasts occurred in tunnels underground, and the traffic chaos that ensued on the city’s streets restricted access by news crews to the exploded bus at Tavistock Square, which was anyway quickly sealed off by the emergency services.

What the broadcast media did do, then, was to act as channels for any information about events that was coming through to keep the public at large informed – and the major news broadcasters performed this task in notably different ways.

For instance, Sky News – the most ‘tabloid’-style of Britain’s three main news broadcasters – was far quicker to air than its rivals with breaking information. Whether all of this information could be considered news (if one defines ‘news’ as ‘an accurate portrayal of the world around us’) is, however, debatable, considering that much of what they reported throughout the day, in their attempt to build a bigger

³⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_11,_2004_Madrid_attacks

picture, was derived from hearsay and speculation (MediaGuardian, 2005).

In contrast, the BBC's reporting was more restrained, a legacy of the fallout of the Hutton Inquiry³⁷. The corporation was slower than its competitors in terms of repeating information that was emerging from the disorder in the city, but this was due to the news division's hesitation to run with the story without checking the facts. As a result, the BBC's broadcasts were a model of restraint in comparison to the opposition; the information it provided in its day-long coverage was more accurate much earlier; and the corporation fulfilled its role as a public service broadcaster with great aplomb, even in spite of subsequent criticism by its competitors (ibid.).

But while the day provided an opportunity for Britain's broadcast media to prove their mettle on their own ground, what was also noteworthy about their coverage was the direct role played by the public in the newsgathering and news-making process.

With camera crews stuck in their tracks, the online operations of both BBC News (see Fig 4.2) and *The Guardian* asked their readers and viewers to send them their accounts and images. Many of those trapped underground by the Tube blasts managed to take snapshots with their camera phones (see Fig 4.3) and send them out – to the web, to forums and newsgroups, to photo-sharing sites and weblogs, and to the mainstream media – before the cellular network shut down. The BBC received 50 images from commuters within an hour of the first blast (ibid.).

The Guardian's Newsblog also kept a running tally on the news of the day as it happened³⁸, with their site linking to eyewitness reports and commentary on weblogs (including my own³⁹) and providing reciprocal links to other weblogs commenting on their reports.

Another site that was useful on the day was Wikinews, the fledgling citizen journalism project from the team behind the popular Wikipedia. Like Wikipedia, Wikinews entries are created and maintained by the site's users, its articles “based on

³⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hutton_Inquiry

³⁸ http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/news/archives/2005/07/07/explosions_plunge_london_into_chaos.html

³⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/terrorism/story/0,12780,1523459,00.html>, quoting from http://macdaraconroy.com/archive/2005/07/explosions_in_london.html



Figure 4.2
 Screenshot of BBC News's coverage of the London bombings (captured September 10 2005)

the synthesis, checking, and triangulation of news coming from a number of sources". "For now," Rebecca MacKinnon (2005: 34) asserts, "Wikinews is doing very little original reporting." And this is true for the Wikinews entry on the London bombings⁴⁰ (see Fig 4.4). But the sheer speed at which this article appeared online, and was updated with the facts as soon as they emerged throughout the day, was impressive to say the least.

The news coverage of the London bombings, not to mention the coverage of the tsunami disaster, leaves us with new questions to answer. For instance, how did the reporting of these events differ from or contrast with the media response to 9/11? Was citizen journalism a defining factor? It would also be pertinent to ask if this is

⁴⁰ http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Explosions%2C_%27serious_incidents%27_occurring_across_London

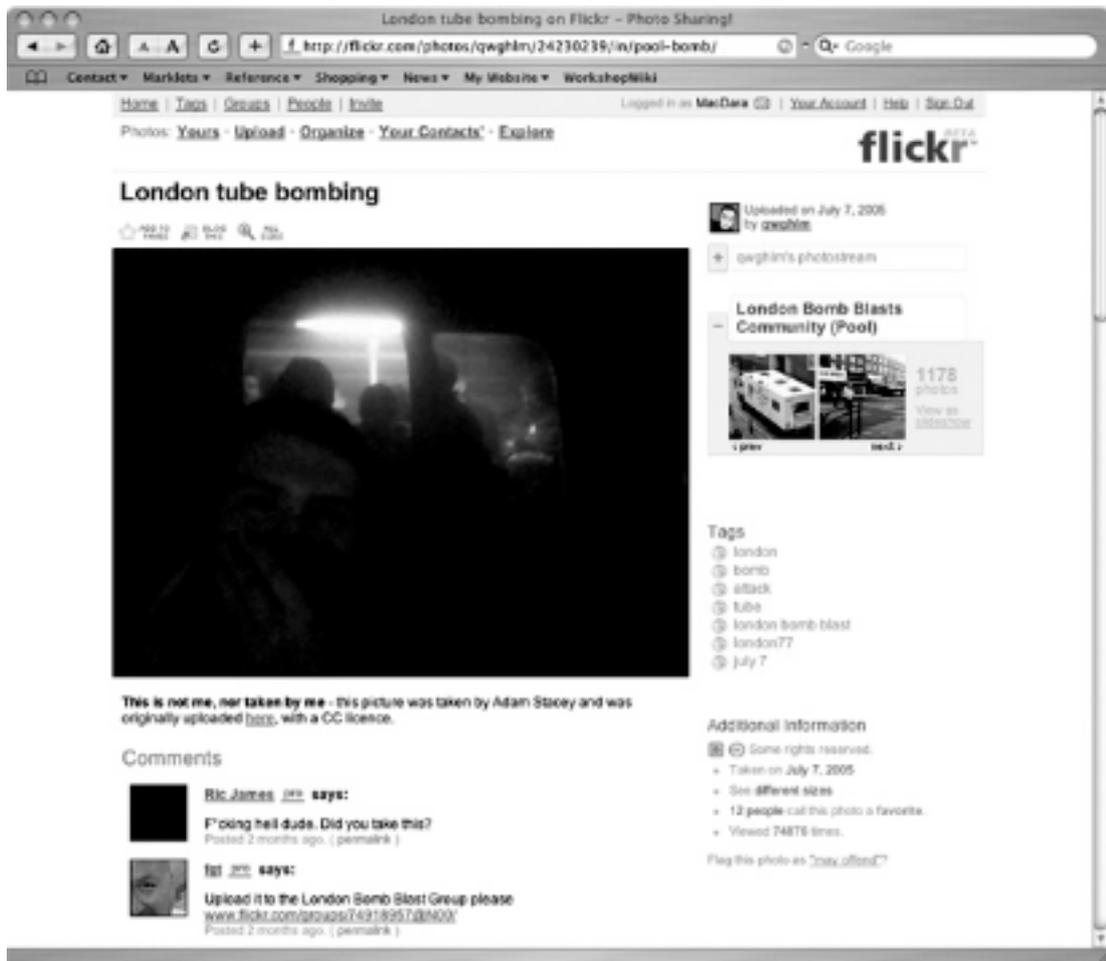


Figure 4.3
 Screenshot of one of the pictures taken underground with camera phones in the aftermath of the London bombings. (Captured September 10 2005 from <http://flickr.com/photos/qwghlm/24230239/in/pool-bomb/>)

was collaborative process, or whether the new citizen reporters being exploited as ‘free labour’ by the mainstream news media.

4.3 Exploring the issues

4.3.1 How far has the blogosphere come since 9/11? The biggest difference between the London bombings and the attacks of 9/11 has to be the much greater accessibility of technology that can allow anyone to document their lives and the world around them.

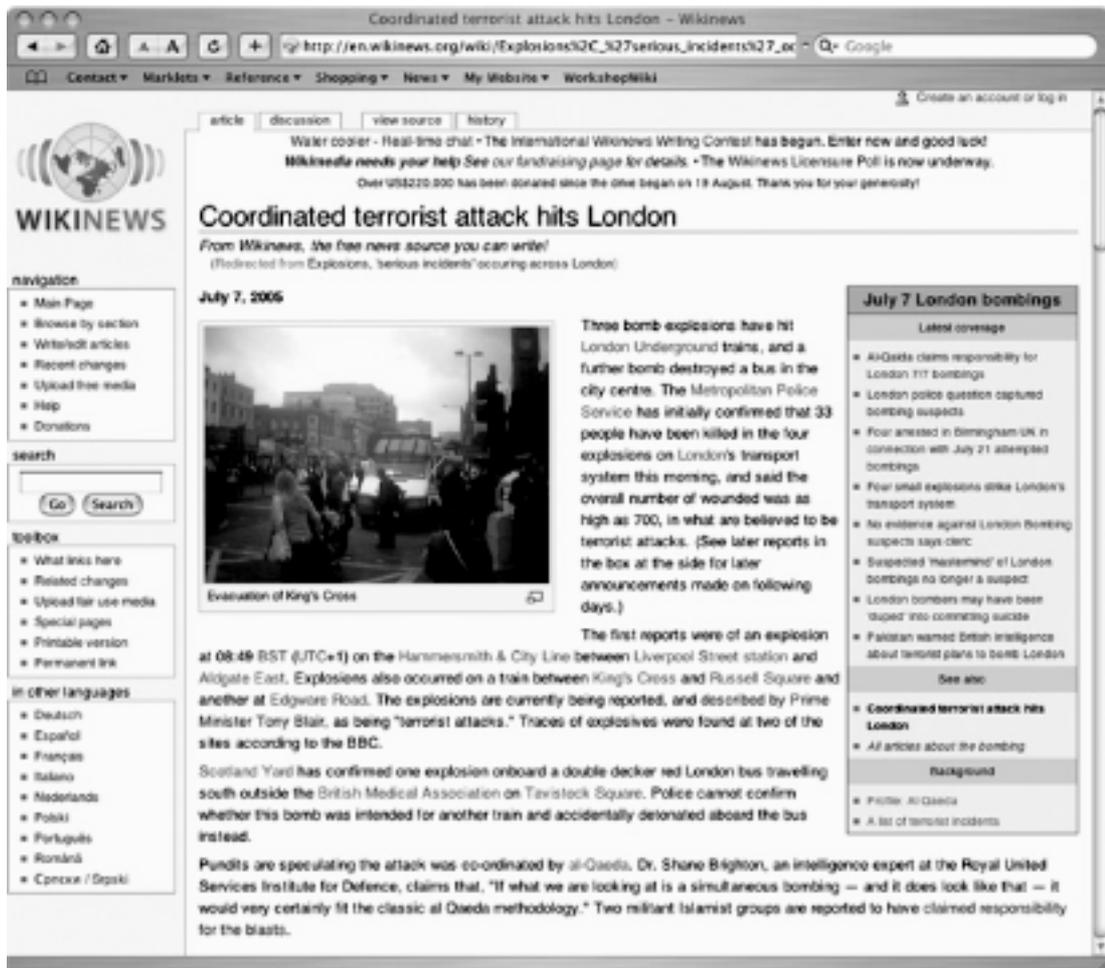


Figure 4.4
 Screenshot of Wikinews's page covering the news and comment on the London bombings (captured September 9 2005)

Of great significance also is that news media now relying much more on contributions from their audience, in terms of photos and witness accounts and opinions, to sew a more vivid tapestry of big news events. “The mobile phone photographers, the text messengers and the bloggers” were “a new advance guard of amateur reporters” (MediaGuardian, 2005).

Already shown by the Wikinews entry mentioned before, the collective power of the blogosphere and of citizens' media is something to behold – though not necessarily enriching of the journalism produced that day. Even so, *The Guardian* declared July 7 to be “a momentous day for journalism,” when even “seasoned news executives

talk[ed] of a ‘tipping point’, a democratisation of the news process, the true birth of the ‘citizen reporter’” (ibid.).

4.3.2 The immediacy issue The increasing prevalence of mobile phones equipped with digital cameras played a major role in illustrating the news that was produced during the day of the London bombings.⁴¹

As previously mentioned, many commuters trapped underground by the tunnel blasts took pictures with their camera phones, while witnesses above ground used digital cameras to photograph the discord on the streets, and uploaded the images to the web. The weblog-like photo-sharing site Flickr hosted groups of such images pooled by contributors from a wide variety of sources throughout the day.

For others, group blogs and discussion forums⁴² provided firsthand accounts that were arguably more accurate than some of the scare stories being propagated by the mainstream media.⁴³

4.3.3 The attempted attacks and the Stockwell shooting Two weeks after July 7, London was stunned by another attempted attack on the city. Luckily the bombs failed and no damage was caused. But the blogosphere’s reaction to this was criticised by the journalism academic Vincent Maher⁴⁴, a supporter of citizen journalism who couldn’t stifle his disappointment about the lack of firsthand accounts or photographs circulating in the blogosphere on that day.

His argument was taken to task, however, by *The Guardian*’s Neil McIntosh on his weblog, *Complete Tosh*⁴⁵. McIntosh (2005) pointed out that Maher was “doing what so many champions of citizen journalism tend to do; insisting or applying old journalism models of working to judge what citizen journalism is, or is going to be.”

⁴¹ <http://flickr.com/groups/74918957@N00/pool/>

⁴² The discussion forum Barbelith featured a thread on the bombings (<http://www.barbelith.com/topic/21667/>) as soon as the first mainstream reports were coming in.

⁴³ The rumour that shots had been fired at a suspected suicide bomber at Canary Wharf was swiftly debunked online and ignored by BBC News, yet was repeated on air by Sky News in the first few hours.

⁴⁴ <http://nml.ru.ac.za/menthol/?p=25>

⁴⁵ <http://www.completetosh.com/>

McIntosh feels that the arguments promoting ‘citizen journalism’ as ‘news journalism’ have been overstated. He quotes from a comment by Frank Jordans on a posting to *The Guardian*’s Newsblog:

News journalism requires a level of commitment that only the hardcore amateur news junky could muster. Taking a picture of an event you happen to be close to is not journalism. Let’s face it: new forms of independent journalism have and will continue to appear, but don’t expect a flurry of well-written and accurate on-the-scene reports from the public at large any time soon. Weblogs and flickr (sic) can complement traditional journalism, but they can’t supplant it.

(quoted in Perrone, 2005)

Instead, McIntosh posits the idea of ‘citizen storytelling’. “Stories really are very important,” he says. “They’re the way we communicate. Or, at least, they’re the way we communicate whenever we’re being our most interesting or engaging.” For him, what weblogs and camera phones – ‘we media’ – allow us to do is to publish our stories for a wider audience.

“Very occasionally,” he says, “these stories ... will intersect with a story which a very large audience is interested in, as happened to the mobloggers [camera phone bloggers] who got pictures of the July 7 bombings.” However, he insists that “a big, mainstream audience is never the intention – we’re just using technology to do what we’ve always done, and tell stories.”

Many of these stories were told following the shooting of Jean-Charles de Menezes⁴⁶ at Stockwell Tube station the next day. Despite the misinformation and spin surrounding the events that lead to de Menezes’ tragic death at the hands of armed police, one question was being asked everywhere – on the broadcast news, in the papers, and on weblogs – ‘what does this mean for us?’ Though little light was shed on what actually happened that day until many weeks later, there was instead plenty of commentary and opinion, a lot of soul-searching, and a lot of truths that came home to roost, which was, arguably, equally as valid.

⁴⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Charles_de_Menezes

4.4 Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath

The reaction to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans⁴⁷ and surrounding areas once again showed the blogosphere at its best; blending three elements – newsgathering and aggregation, commentary and analysis, and eyewitness testimony – to produce a constantly growing, almost organic body of necessary information being created in real time.

The weblog Boing Boing, in particular, did a superb job of compiling up-to-date reports, threading the news media's reporting with contributions from individuals (residents, medical and relief workers, etc.) on the ground.

Between August 28 and September 11 2005, Boing Boing featured at least 140 individual posts, many of them running into thousands of words, related to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast, running the gamut from satellite images of the hurricane to reports from volunteers⁴⁸ and citizens trapped in New Orleans; commentary on the effectiveness of government to manage the relief effort, to shocking accounts of the conditions within the makeshift evacuation shelters.⁴⁹ That's not bad for a site that normally specialises on the quirkier side of geek culture.

But Boing Boing's reaction to the tragedy in New Orleans and beyond is just one more example of that trend which was outlined in Chapter 2, of non-news sites reorienting or adapting for the sake of 'do-it-yourself' journalism – or better yet, 'citizen storytelling'. Even a site for sharing photos can be reoriented as a wonderfully striking example of amateur photojournalism⁵⁰ (see Fig 4.5).

4.4.1 Gatekeepers or gatecrashers? But there was also a downside to the blogosphere's reaction to Katrina which represents a malignancy within the blogosphere in general.

⁴⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effect_of_Hurricane_Katrina_on_New_Orleans

⁴⁸ http://www.boingboing.net/2005/09/07/katrina_jasmina_tesa.html

⁴⁹ http://www.boingboing.net/2005/09/07/katrina_rape_murder_.html

⁵⁰ <http://flickr.com/photos/ioerror/sets/905698/>

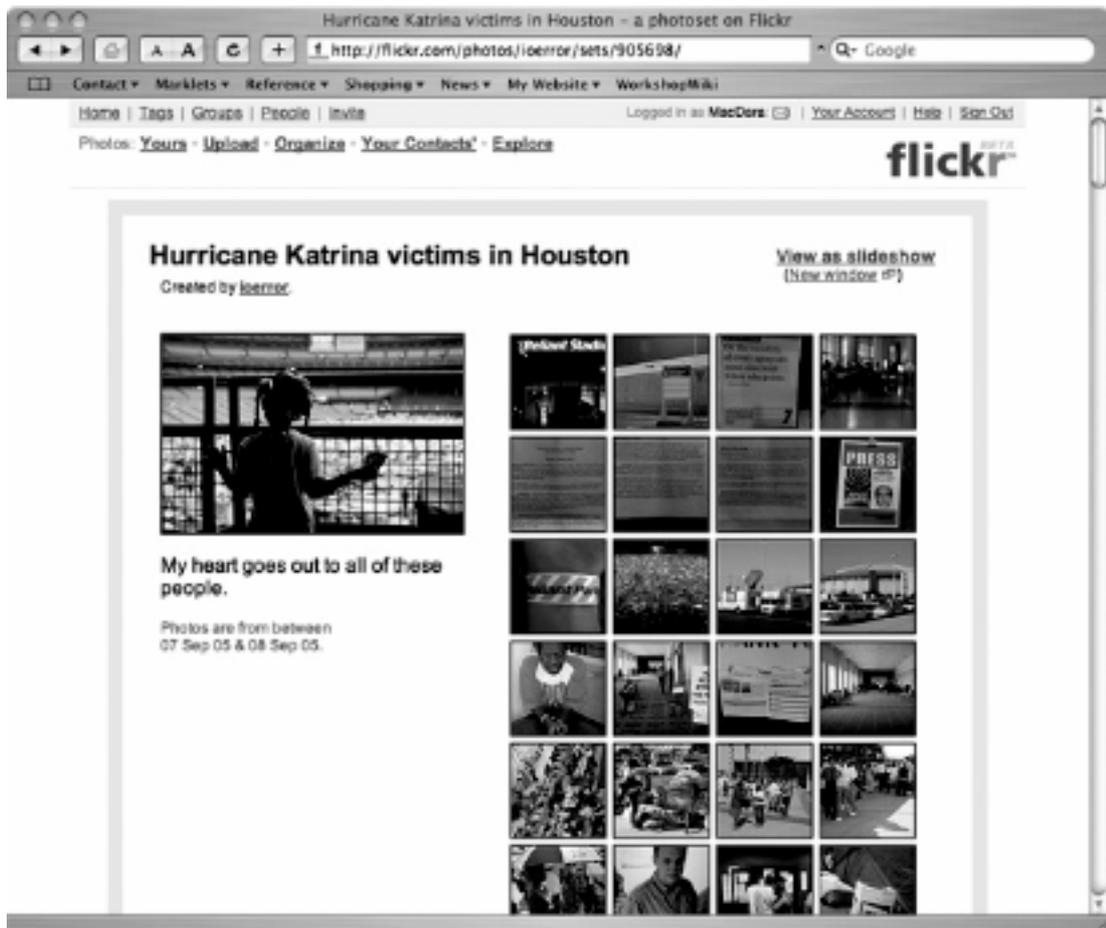


Figure 4.5
Screenshot of the Hurricane Katrina victims in Houston photo set at <http://flickr.com/photos/loerrorr/sets/905698/> (captured September 12 2005)

Rather than acting as independent, distributed gatekeepers, weblogs still more often than not acts as a mill for insidious rumour. What makes this more of a worry is not only web users' increasing dependence on the blogosphere for news and information, but the growing interdependence of the blogosphere and many parts of the established news media.

Rather than the mainstream's professionalism (in terms of verification of information, etc.) rubbing off on the more raucous, untamed elements of the blogosphere, the opposite often happens; the rumours and Chinese whispers of the blogosphere are filtering into mainstream reports, unchecked and unsupported, and lending weight to fantastical stories and ideas that just aren't there. This is plainly evident in the many

stories of rapes and murders in the Louisiana Superdome being re-evaluated as apocryphal many *days*, not hours, later.⁵¹

In the rush for immediacy, the blogosphere might well be influencing the mainstream media to allow rumour to masquerade as news – when the established media should be holding everyone up to higher standards, not giving in to the push for immediacy at the risk of accuracy. While the capacity of the blogosphere to influence in this way is the same reason why it is also effectively self-correcting, and correcting of mistakes made by the media, it is still something to be aware of.

⁵¹ <http://www.metafilter.com/mefi/44825> and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/katrina/story/0,16441,1563532,00.html>

Chapter 5

Bloggers and journalists on the new media environment

5.1 Overview

This chapter is divided roughly into two sections. The first (section 5.2) is an overview of the two-day conference on blogging and journalism which took place at Harvard University in January 2005, where media professionals and prominent bloggers met on an equal footing to debate the issues and arguments that the expansion of the media sphere and the growth of the blogosphere have provoked.

The second (section 5.3) consists of the responses of bloggers and journalists – both in Ireland and the United States – concerning some of same questions raised at the Harvard conference, as well as others more directly related to the thesis, from a series of interviews conducted during August and early September 2005.⁵² These interviews were conducted in an attempt to gauge the reactions of journalists both in America and here in Ireland to the evolving media environment, to discover whether journalism today is being enriched by the blogosphere, or whether their influence has been overstated.

5.2 The Harvard conference

In January 2005, the Berkman Center for Internet and Society held a two-day conference at Harvard University entitled ‘Blogging, Journalism & Credibility: Battleground and Common Ground’⁵³, to which a host of influential journalists, editors, academics and bloggers were invited to discuss the issues at hand, and to attempt to cut through the rhetoric polluting the arguments, to find out where they stood and where they see themselves going. Their conclusions make for some fascinating reading.

5.2.1 Trends at play On the question of what trends are at play in the new media environment, journalism academic Jay Rosen⁵⁴ sees three main ideas in action (MacKinnon, 2005: 12):

⁵² Details of these interviews are listed in Appendix A.

⁵³ Full transcripts and audio recordings of the conference sessions are available on the conference website at <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/webcred>

⁵⁴ Jay Rosen’s PressThink weblog can be found at <http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/>

1. A shift in the balance of power “from the producers of media to the people formerly known as the audience”;
2. A loss of sovereignty or “exclusive control” over the news process; and
3. That the first two “have caused people (especially bloggers) to challenge mainstream journalism”.

Rosen believes that:

[i]f we look at tapping distributed knowledge around the web, the people who know how to do that are bloggers. If we look at news as conversation, which is such an important metaphor today, the people putting that into practice are bloggers.

Thus, while bloggers depend upon the work of professional journalists that is available on the web as raw materials for their conversations and web of links, they have created new kinds of information flows, along with the and structures and norms to deal with them.

(ibid.)

Rosen also points out that journalists “are learning how to tap their audience as collaborators on stories” (MacKinnon, 2005: 14). In other words, for journalists working today “the quality of your information is deeply related to your connection to the people you’re trying to inform” (Rosen, quoted in ibid.).

5.2.2 Trust and credibility On the question of whether credibility is “a zero-sum game – in which credibility gained by blogs is lost by the mainstream media and vice versa”, the conference participants felt that the answer is no: “Bloggers and professional journalists alike share a common goal: a better informed public and a stronger democracy” (MacKinnon, 2005: 3). Indeed, those participants representing the established media intimated that their organisations are beginning to view blogging, or blogs as participatory media, “as a way to build loyalty, trust and preserve credibility” (ibid.). This is something that the recently relaunched Guardian Unlimited weblogs⁵⁵ are proving in practice.

⁵⁵ <http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/>

On the question of trust, Technorati's David Sifry⁵⁶ stated that his faith in newspapers and media organisations lies in “knowing that there are fact checkers, that there's an editorial board, that there's an attempt to be objective” (MacKinnon, 2005: 16). But he admits, according to Rebecca MacKinnon, that the “greater transparency about a reporter's background and biases [that bloggers encourage] can help make their reporting more credible” (ibid.), and in turn keep their audience better informed.

Returning to the question of credibility, blogger David Weinberger's suggestions for improving the credibility of reporting in the mainstream press in the eyes of the blogosphere include “allowing links to pages off of the paper's website”; “letting readers hold discussions around certain topics”; and “showing what other bloggers are saying about specific stories” (MacKinnon, 2005: 23). A few press institutions, like *The Guardian*, have already implemented such features with positive results.

5.2.3 Connecting the dots Jan Schaffer, head of the University of Maryland's J-Lab⁵⁷, wonders “[w]ho will connect the dots for me on big issues ... Who will ask the missing questions for me?” and feels that both weblogs and the established media have yet to answer this to her satisfaction. The University of Iowa's Jane Singer⁵⁸ agrees: “People are now coming at their news through the opinion space – which is what most blogs are. How does the user sort through everything? How do we encourage members of the audience to search out ideas they do not agree with?” (MacKinnon, 2005: 17).

MacKinnon herself warned the conference to be aware that the blogosphere “is driven by the ‘early adopters’ who are primarily white, middle class, and first-world”:

The danger is that the interests and voices of certain groups who are not participating in the online conversation will be excluded as much from the new conversation – or perhaps even more – than they were

⁵⁶ <http://www.sifry.com/alerts/>

⁵⁷ <http://www.j-lab.org/>

⁵⁸ <http://myweb.uiowa.edu/jsinger/>

from the old. Concerted efforts must be made to bring people who are currently not participating into the conversation.

(MacKinnon, 2005: 39)

This was something that the conference could not provide an answer for, but Berkman Fellow Ethan Zuckerman⁵⁹ hopes that:

[w]e will have the ‘American voice’ of the professional journalist writing for a US newspaper, but we will also be able to compare it to many ‘raw, unfiltered’ local voices. This is valuable, and it will enhance our understanding of other parts of the world, in addition to enhancing – and keeping honest – the professional reporting.

(MacKinnon, 2005: 23-4)

5.2.4 What are blogs for? Weinberger insisted repeatedly during the conference, MacKinnon relates, that “journalism is not what most blogs are doing”:

A small percentage of the largest blogs look like media because they have many readers who do not comment or participate in the blog’s conversation, and many of those blogs are creating content that is indeed a form of journalism. But most blogs are something else. Instead, he believes, most bloggers are creating a “permanent place” where “we build public selves.”

(MacKinnon, 2005: 29)

In his own words: “My weblog is *me*. And that’s why I care about it ... I’m writing myself into existence. As you all are who are bloggers” (ibid.).

⁵⁹ <http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/>

5.3 The interviews

As explained in Chapter 1.5.1, additional primary research for this dissertation was conducted by way of a series of interviews with working journalists, long-time webbloggers, and journalists who also maintain weblogs (or ‘j-bloggers’).

As many of my interviewees were located in the United States, and others were unavailable to meet in person, each interview was conducted by one of three methods: face-to-face; by e-mail; or by instant messaging. Further details of the interviews conducted for this dissertation can be found in Appendix A.

The following section consists of a selection of the many responses I received to my questions, from working journalists and bloggers alike. Though most of the responses were relevant to the thesis, there is simply no room to include them all; I selected the following to most accurately reflect the opinions of interviewees overall.

5.3.1 The internet and working habits I tailored this topic towards the journalists in my sample, to get a general feel for their relationship with the online world, asking whether the internet had changed anything about the way they work as journalists.

The responses varied. The *Irish Times* columnist John Waters, for one, is wary of the claims that have been made for the internet’s significance:

Fundamentally it hasn’t changed things for the better. But there is a very strong possibility that it will change things for the worse, precisely because information on the internet is not reliable. And you can already see the effects of that, not just in public consciousness but also in journalism.

In contrast, fellow *Irish Times* writer Fintan O’Toole has a more positive outlook:

In general, the internet has revolutionised the way I work. At its simplest, it has made research vastly easier and quicker. Reports and research that had to be acquired physically can now be accessed in a fraction of the time. The range of material that is available is hugely

expanded. For example, when I wrote about private hospitals this week, I was able to read and quote from The New England Journal of Medicine and other American sources that would previously have been available to relatively few people, most of them medical specialists.

Though she considers herself a “techno-illiterate”, the Irish Independent’s Justine McCarthy has, like O’Toole, felt the influence of the internet on the way she works. “I would do far more work at my desk than I ever did before,” she says, “and I think that my work is better informed as a result of [the internet].” Unlike Waters, she finds that “85 per cent” of the material she retrieves online turns out to be accurate.

5.3.2 Reciprocity I questioned here whether the internet, or the blogosphere, has facilitated a two-way channel of communication between journalists and their audience. Overall, the internet has made such communication much more manageable, but judging from the responses received there is nothing to show that the blogosphere has had any unique influence in this respect.

For John Waters, only e-mail has had an impact with respect to reciprocity with his readership, but even that has been a challenge for him. Though the accessibility aspect has made a big difference, the downside came when his e-mail address was published with his byline in The Irish Times:

I wrote a column attacking the concept straight away ... Really, it was just venom. Most of the e-mails were just venomous attacks. Personalised, you know, very ugly, nasty stuff. I was told that ... it was going to be a source of material, of stories... Not one. Not a single [e-mail] that I get [was worth reading]. I might have gotten some interesting information from time to time, or pointers, people recommending books, occasionally. But you get that in letters.

However:

Having said that, I did become much more adept at exchanging in dialogue with people. I find that if people really want to get to me they'll get to me. Some of the poison still gets through, but more often it's more constructive stuff, because they actually go to the

trouble of working out what the e-mail address is, if they have something important to say.

Though he has “always interacted directly” with his readers via his ‘Today’s Papers’ column for Slate magazine⁶⁰, the media commentator and blogger Eric Umansky⁶¹ feels that his weblog “has encouraged a feedback loop”. “It becomes more natural to think of [weblog] posts as part of a conversation,” he says, “which is I think a good thing.”

Fintan O’Toole’s is similarly positive about the benefits new media for interactivity:

Already there is a great deal more response to what I write myself, and it’s much easier to reply to it. In the future, I suppose newspapers themselves will become much more interactive, with the printed edition acting as a kind of portal and journalists being required to present their research sources, interview notes, etc. in the online editions. We’ll get away with less, which has to be a good thing.

5.3.3 The media’s participation in the blogosphere The question of the established media’s participation in (or relationship with) the blogosphere thus far was geared towards those journalists who also maintain weblogs. With one foot in each world, I felt they would have the most enlightened outlook on the changing environment.

Dan Gillmor – author of *We the Media* – believes there have been some good starts. “The best so far,” he thinks, “have been topical and news-breaking blogs. What the New Orleans paper [the *Times-Picayune*] did after the hurricane⁶² is a great example.”

Karlin Lillington, of *The Irish Times* and sometime contributor to *The Guardian*, feels that *The Guardian* in particular has embraced the blogosphere far more than others, at least on this side of the Atlantic:

⁶⁰ <http://slate.msn.com/Code/TodaysPapers/TodaysPapers.asp>

⁶¹ <http://www.ericumansky.com/>

⁶² <http://www.nola.com/newslogs/breakingtp/>

The Guardian I think is exceptionally good and supportive of using blogs, both as a major part of their Guardian Unlimited site and for Online, the Thursday tech section ... [The paper] however has always been at the forefront of using the web – they had a significant budget way back in the early web days, through the latter half of the '90s, to play around with the medium. I would have been surprised had they *not* used weblogs and experimented with their use.

Lillington has also noticed other organisations, hostile to blogging in the past (see Chapter 3.5.2), who have begun to realise the benefits. “CNN has a reporter blogging [Hurricane] Katrina at the moment⁶³,” she says, “so that’s a sign that they have started to go quite mainstream,” even though “the approach is fairly traditional.”

As far as The Irish press goes, though, Lillington is less impressed. “*The Irish Times* unfortunately has not brought blogs in,” she says, “though I’d offered to have them link mine in from three years ago. But then mine is more like a columnist’s asides, not a blog used for reporting.”

Remaining on the Irish experience: though she does not have much familiarity with the blogosphere as such, Justine McCarthy did find the networks of sites maintained by anarchist and anti-globalisation activism very enlightening for her research on a story about the May Day protests in Dublin.

In the American media experience, Eric Umansky is seeing that “when the blog-world erupts about something, it seeps into the journalism world. I wouldn’t over-interpret that or make it into some tidal wave of a trend but it does happen.”

5.3.4 The media’s understanding of the blogosphere This question is closely related to the previous one, but with scope to include the responses of bloggers and how they perceive the media’s conception of their domain.

The San Francisco-based freelance journalist and blogger Mathew Honan doesn’t know if any real understanding has been founded yet:

⁶³ <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WEATHER/08/28/hurricane.blog/>

For the most part, my conversations about blogs with other journos have typically taken one of two directions: one, news organisations trying to figure out how to get attention from blogs; and two, news organisations or journalists trying to set up their own blogs ... It seems to me that sometime around 2003 every journalist and publication around decided that ‘We Need A Blog, Although We’re Not Quite Sure Why (sic).’

Honan believes that news outlets tend to be more interested in the publicity that blogging generates, rather than what tangible benefits blogging could have for their journalistic output. “I think the larger issue is not understanding the medium,” he says. “They see it as a bandwagon they are required to jump on. At least that was my experience with one or two publications.”

But even so, Honan is of the impression that this attitude is improving. “I do think that many do get it [now],” he says, “if only because of the Dan Rather fiasco ... But it still seems hit or miss to me when you look at a [newspaper] weblog where the writers are *required* to post. You get a lot of spiritless content.”

Long-time blogger Jessamyn West has experienced both ways the question of understanding:

I’ve seen people get it and people not get it. Part of it is that bloggers really used to be people who lived online, [who] knew the technology. “Rolled their own”, so to speak. A lot of people only know about blogging as end users ... which gives you a different idea. And I’ve seen some people not get it at all. “Why talk about yourself? I don’t get it.” But that’s just a different perspective.

The Stockholm-based journalism academic Mark Comerford sees that his journalism students are now learning how to use the many different tools available to them, from databases to Flickr, and to evaluate information coming from the ‘opinion space’, that which is being produced more and more by individuals on weblogs.

5.3.5 Citizen journalism I asked both journalists what they thought about the concept of ‘citizen journalism’. It’s an idea that agrees with Mathew Honan:

I think citizen journalism is the future of journalism. I wouldn't be surprised if some sort of content aggregation system develops over the next couple of years that allows anyone to get their reports into the mainstream media; a sort of AP [Associated Press] wire for the rest of us, that can take pictures, reports, etc. and syndicate them across the web, television, and print.

“The problem with that,” he warns, “is that citizen journalists – since they have no professional obligations – may not have the same codes of ethics that journalists do ... For a ‘traditional’ reporter, there’s always at the very least the threat of having one’s career ruined. Of course, that didn’t stop Jayson Blair.”

Eric Umansky wasn't very familiar with the term ‘citizen journalism’:

But if you're asking me what I think of not-by-profession journos doing journalism on blogs, well, I'm all for it. I don't see why or even how people could be against it. The issue in all this stuff is that the person and their [credentials] don't matter much. The quality of work does.

5.3.6 Journalists' take on the London bombings I asked the journalists to give their take on the news coverage produced on the day of the London bombings, with relation to the significance – if any – of the blogosphere and the associated citizen journalism, in terms of how news was both produced and communicated.

Fintan O'Toole thought that “the citizen journalism aspect of the response to the London bombings was significant”:

What we're seeing -- and this was a very good example -- is the increased capacity of witnesses and participants to tell their own stories, capture their own footage (on video cameras and mobile phones) and feed into the professional media. I think this will have an increasing long-term impact of mainstream media, not least because it creates a huge resource that journalists can use to get quick access to a range of experiences and responses.

But was this trend born from the blogosphere? Dan Gillmor doesn't think so. "The most notable aspect of citizen journalism after the bombings was not blogging," he says. "It was photos, exemplified by the pictures from inside the underground" (see Fig. 4.4).

Was the public breaking news on July 7? Mark Comerford's answer is yes, and no. While many people were able to produce the images that Gillmor refers to, in places where the media could not gain access, these photos were mostly sent direct to the established media. People are becoming more aware of the possibilities, he says, but mostly this means that they know how to feed directly into the media. The blogosphere has little to do with it.

5.3.7 Are weblogs enriching journalism? This is the big question, one that most interviewees did not have any definitive answer for – but some were more forthcoming. Karlin Lillington cites *The Guardian* as a key example:

I think the growth in the media's use of weblogs, from the Iraq war onwards, proves that there's a readership for them, an audience who likes and perhaps increasingly expects them, and a wider official media willing to take the risk of having something as open and unedited as weblogs as part of their reporting armoury.

But even so, she doesn't think the impact of weblogs has been widespread,

if you gauge that as something that has totally changed the way news is covered, how stories are selected, how the public perceives those stories or looks for information on them. I still know *very few* people who use weblogs outside of the weblogging fanatics and the more enthusiastic, always-online segments of tech/internet community though some stories are first launched or significantly updated and expanded by webloggers.

"I think that citizen journalism [by bloggers] is absolutely enriching traditional media," says Mathew Honan, "and will continue to do so, and I think it will do across local, national, and international lines. Bloggers and citizen journalists have

already proved themselves as reporters, fact-checkers, editors, photographers, and videographers. There is no reason why this should not continue to be the case.”

Jessamyn West hopes that the blogosphere is making journalists more honest:

There is a quicker response time to ‘news’ now and if you care about stuff like accuracy and integrity it’s an instant bullshit detector. On the other hand, people with axes to grind can become total dicks about tiny word choices and blow them out of proportion equally fast. It’s mostly about speed and location. News is no longer where all the reporters are, the way it used to be. We hear more about Africa, more about poor people, more about other countries generally, and can get deeper information on topics that pique our interest. So mainstream media is more to get people started; it used to be more of the whole story.

Mark Comerford sees huge possibilities for enriching journalism in the developing world, where it is often easier to get a mobile phone than a newspaper. He cites the Soros Foundations’ Open Society Initiative for West Africa⁶⁴ as one welcome example where participation democracy is being encouraged by education in the diversity of media ownership.

He agrees that the media industry overall is in a state of flux, that the evolution of the media sphere has heralded “the end of one-to-many” in favour of a more interactive sort of news creation. “It doesn’t mean it’ll be better,” he says, “or even more democratic. It’s up to society whether the technology will be used to the best of its potential.”

5.3.8 Final analysis If only one thing strikes as quite clear from the responses of both bloggers and journalists here, it is that there is a wide gulf in the relevance of the blogosphere to the practice of journalism between America and the Irish media. Even Britain, our closest neighbour and a major player in our own press market, is adapting more readily in this respect to the changing media environment.

⁶⁴ <http://www.osiwa.org/en/node>

But the responses of Irish journalists, and the cautions and admonitions of others, are valuable in reminding us that even as the media environment evolves beyond our wildest expectations, the blogosphere – in spite of all its potential – is not yet quite the global, all-pervading phenomenon that it has been made out to be.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

6.1 A blogosphere of influence?

When starting into this research project I knew that my thesis, the main question at hand, was a difficult one to answer. And I was not surprised when the results of my research signalled that the answer, if there even is a single answer to a question with many dimensions, was indeed both yes and no.

The findings of **Chapter 2** do much to show that the blogosphere has the capacity to step in as an understudy when the mainstream media infrastructure fails. But that is only because bloggers have been refining their craft and learning from experience. As quoted in Chapter 1 (MacKinnon, 2005: 12), bloggers “make sense of the jumble of information out there on the web” by “pointing people to other sources of information” online. For these experts in “the art of linking”, it is not such a huge leap from blogging about technology issues and the latest software releases to tracking major news events during times of crisis – which is what many bloggers did after 9/11, continued to do during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and are doing today as New Orleans recovers from the assault of Hurricane Katrina.

Chapter 3 delved deeper into the issues of the post-9/11 media environment, as blogging expanded far beyond its tech culture origins, and made the blogosphere a place where anyone can find news about something (the blogosphere as the ‘Long Tail’ of the media/information sphere) and can debate about anything (a ‘Speaker’s Corner’ for the virtual world, as it were). Though this was driven by a select few – the warbloggers, the political bloggers, and to an extent the new correspondents – it was radically more inclusive than the established media had ever been, and at times made them seem distinctly behind the times.

Jay Rosen agrees. For him, the newspaper today must be

more open to citizen scrutiny and peer-group criticism, more willing to give reasons for its actions and discuss them publicly, less the citadel of news judgement and more conversant with the political culture – and with the public, which can reach the paper more easily than in eras past.

(Rosen, 2003: 37)

However, while the voice of the people is louder, yet we haven't turned – and we won't turn – away from the established media for our news (McNair, 2005: 152). What we will do, and what bloggers *do* do, is supplement the news that the mainstream provides us with other sources: of analysis, of witness testimony, of greater detail, more depth and more context than the mainstream can provide. But the triumph of blogging over the 'MSM' has been overstated, and reports of the death of 'old media' have been greatly exaggerated.

Chapter 4 took three recent major news events as case studies to compare with the pivotal changes after 9/11, to see whether the blogosphere had fulfilled the wild promises that had been made for its future. In some ways, it had: unexpectedly, July 7 saw the camera phone change from an annoying fad to a vital tool for newsgathering in the hands of mobloggers; while postings and comments on weblogs and forums helped people connect with their friends and family amid the confusion of both the London bombings and the aftermath of the tsunami throughout South-East Asia.

While the immediacy of the medium has its drawbacks – the spread of rumour as news, for one – the blogosphere played a strong supportive role in both the reporting and aggregation of news and, significantly, in the channelling of funds and donations for relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent deterioration of New Orleans. The blogosphere, therefore, has shown it can do much more than the traditional media ever could, given the right circumstances.

Chapter 5 highlighted a gulf between journalists in the US and in Ireland when it came to the blogosphere. American journalists, especially those who maintain weblogs, are much more confident moving about in the online world, and are much more optimistic about the benefits that the blogosphere can bring. Irish journalists, on the other hand, by and large see no great evolution in the work that they do beyond the internet making it easier to research.

That their conception of the blogging phenomenon was limited is understandable; the Irish blogosphere is a late starter compared to the rest of the English-speaking world. But it is growing, as the links at planetoftheblogs.com can testify, and while Irish journalists have not taken to the medium as rapidly as others have overseas, when

they do – like the *Evening Herald's* Richard Delevan⁶⁵ – they do it well. The next general election will be a valuable litmus test for Irish blogosphere's potential to democratise the media here and keep our society informed.

Taking everything into account, we can see that journalism is being enriched by blogging, at least potentially, in two distinct ways. Firstly, the process of journalism itself is being enriched by the direct participation of the public, which is evident anywhere from the blogosphere's response to 9/11 to the citizen journalism that marked the news coverage of the London bombings as noteworthy.

Secondly, the work produced by the institution of journalism, by journalists and news organisations, is also being enriched; by participating in the blogosphere (either sanctioning blogging by writers and reporters⁶⁶, or setting up weblogs under the umbrella of the organisation itself) transparency is being increased, and in turn the bond of trust with the audience is being strengthened. Rather than weakening “the cultural authority of the institution of journalism” (Winch, 1997: 3), the blogosphere may be doing precisely the opposite.

But is this happening in every case? The answer to that is: not yet. Even within the American media experience, the arguments have been overstated. Where blogging's enrichment of journalism is proving most effective is on the local level; the ‘civic journalism’ of smalltown newspapers across America like the *News & Record* of Greensboro, North Carolina⁶⁷, which are using weblogs to connect and interact more closely with their readers, to inform them on the issues most relevant to them, and to assist the paper itself in targeting its resources for the best interests of their audience (Rosen, 2005).

On the national, macro level, however, bloggers are still often derided as cranks, or as the ‘pajamahadeen’⁶⁸. Their influence on journalists, if the bad taste left by the

⁶⁵ <http://richarddelevan.blogspot.com/>

⁶⁶ BBC journalist Paul Mason kept a weblog to supplement his reporting at the G8 conference in July 2005 at <http://paulmason.typepad.com/newsnig8t/>

⁶⁷ http://blog.news-record.com/jrblog/archives/2005/01/update_on_the_1.html

⁶⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pajamahadeen>

'memogate' scandal is anything to go by, might well be to turn them away from the blogosphere in disgust, which would be a big mistake.

6.2 Remaining questions

As the Harvard conference determined, the conversations now happening within the blogosphere, and between the blogosphere and the established media, are as yet not inclusive of many socioeconomic groups. The attendees agreed that we need to find out how to include those who are not currently involved in blogging, or have little or no internet access, or who don't see the benefits of such access (MacKinnon, 2005: 4).

A survey conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2005) found that 32 million Americans admit to reading weblogs; that 27 per cent of all web users in the US read or have read blogs; that 7 per cent have started blogs of their own; and that weblog readership shot up 58 percent between February and November 2004, no doubt thanks to the prominence of blogging as a tool of the US presidential election campaign. The numbers are rising every year; the web is becoming a bigger and bigger part of more people's lives, as improved access opens the web to all strata of society.

But the same survey also found that 62 per cent of online Americans are not even sure what a blog is. Presumably, if less than 5 per cent of the population do know, and only a fraction of them are considerably involved in blogging, the blogosphere has a long way to go before it can have any real relevance for the average person – and that's only in the States. Elsewhere it might take even longer. It will be some time before the numbers reach a level where significance is unavoidable.

Another important question that remains is: "How much of this conversation is relevant only to the US, and how much is relevant to the entire world?" (ibid.). To reiterate what has been noted elsewhere in this dissertation, the conditions of the media sphere within the United States might appear close if not identical to those in other similarly industrialised, English-speaking nations, but upon closer examination

is it clear that they are indeed unique. The Irish, especially, have not taken to the blogosphere with the same enthusiasm as even our closest neighbours in Britain, though this is changing slowly.

Events do regularly demonstrate the power of the web to influence the ‘powers that be’: this can be something as frivolous as convincing *The Guardian* to restore the comic strip ‘Doonesbury’ to its pages⁶⁹, or something as important for the value of democracy as the Norwegian video-blogger, or vlogger, putting his nation’s politicians under scrutiny.⁷⁰ When will something this be seen regularly in Ireland?

What can be said, taking into consideration all of the arguments and findings of this dissertation, is that even an act as simple as linking to a cross-section of news reports on a weblog post can start a chain reaction that can have far-reaching consequences for how the end user – the reader, the viewer, the commenter, the audience – comprehends the world at large.

Is this journalism? The jury is still out on that one. Is it enriching journalism? There’s no reason why it shouldn’t. No one doubts that the potential is there; but it is up to society – bloggers, journalists, and everyone else alike – whether this potential is fulfilled.

Whether this will happen soon remains to be seen, but it’s worth investigating. The next few years, into the second decade of life on the internet as we know it, should make for some interesting times.

⁶⁹ http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/editors/archives/2005/09/13/doonesbury_returning_to_g2.html

⁷⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4229698.stm>

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Appendix A

Index of interviews conducted

Mark Comerford: interviewed online by instant messaging; August 29, 2005.

Dan Gillmor: interviewed by e-mail; reply received September 9, 2005.

Mathew Honan: interviewed online by instant messaging; August 23, 2005.

Karlin Lillington: interviewed by e-mail; reply received August 29, 2005.

Justine McCarthy: interviewed in person; August 29, 2005.

Fintan O'Toole: interviewed by e-mail; replies received August 24 & 25, 2005.

Eric Umansky: interviewed online by instant messaging; August 25, 2005.

John Waters: interviewed in person, August 25, 2005.

Jessamyn West: interviewed online by instant messaging; August 26, 2005.

All interviewees were initially approached by e-mail. Of 23 journalists and bloggers originally contacted, 10 responded, and nine replied in time for inclusion in this dissertation.

Appendix B

Recommended readings

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Websites:

First Draft by Tim Porter
<http://www.timporter.com/firstdraft/>

Global Voices Online
<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/globalvoices/>

Irishblogs Yahoo! Group
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/irishblogs/>

Articles:

A Whole Lotta Nothing: New Rule

http://a.wholelottanothing.org/2005/04/new_rule.html

Blogware: Blogging Katrina

http://blog.blogware.com/blog/_archives/2005/8/29/1178548.html

Demos: The Pro-Am Revolution:

http://www.demos.co.uk/proamrevolutionfinal_pdf_media_public.aspx

Guardian Newsblog: Katrina links and blogs

http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/news/archives/2005/09/07/katrina_links_and_blogs.html

Into the Blogosphere: Weblog Journalism: Between Infiltration and Integration

http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/weblog_journalism.html

MediaChannel.org: How Journalists Use Blogs

<http://mediachannel.org/blog/node/710>

MediaGuardian: 'We are changing the nature of news'

<http://media.guardian.co.uk/mediaguardian/story/0,7558,1549057,00.html>

MetaFilter threads related to Hurricane Katrina, as of September 6 2005

<http://metatalk.metafilter.com/mefi/10112>

Newsnig8t: A balanced sheet of the blog

http://paulmason.typepad.com/newsnig8t/2005/07/a_balance_sheet.html

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http://www.plasticbag.org/archives/2003/09/weblogs_and_the_mass_amateurisation_of_nearly_everything.shtml

Plasticbag.org: On how journalists write about bloggers...

http://www.plasticbag.org/archives/2005/05/on_how_journalists_write_about_bloggers.shtml

Poynter Online: Tasking Tsunami Coverage into Their Own Hands

http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=76520

PressThink: What's Radical About the Weblog Form in Journalism?

http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2003/10/16/radical_ten.html

Online Journalism Review: Blogging as a Form of Journalism

<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1017958873.php>

Online Journalism Review: Weblogs: A New Source of News
<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1017958782.php>

Online Journalism Review: When Bloggers Commit Journalism
<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/lasica/1032910520.php>

Rebecca's Pocket: Weblogs and Journalism in the Age of Participatory Media:
http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblogs_journalism.html

Strange Attractor: blogging and journalism – reframing the debate
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<http://www.technorati.com/weblog/2005/08/34.html>

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Updates to these listings will be made available at <http://macdaraconroy.com/thesis/>