# Citizen Participation and Online Media: Crossroads of Technology and News

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

(2009)

#### **Abstract**

This work examines the growing trend of citizen journalism and its influence on traditional media outlets. By taking an in-depth look at the online web presence of three media outlets, CNN, BBC and Global Voices, and how they use or incorporate citizen journalism into their news reporting, I will seek to explore the changes taking place in the news industry and the ramifications of citizens producing their own news. Exploring these changes is important for understanding the news industry and how technology is changing the way news is gathered and reported.

Using a qualitative approach, this paper will outline the characteristics of the online media outlets, how they handle citizen journalism and analyze the differences between them. By evaluating three case studies, I hope to elucidate how citizen journalism has been incorporated into traditional and non-traditional media outlets. After careful analysis of the cases, this paper demonstrates not only that citizen journalism is changing how news is reported, even within mainstream news outlets, but it is also remaking the definition of news.

#### **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated first and foremost to my family, without whose love and support I would not have been able to see this through the end.

I would like to especially dedicate this work to my grandfather, Dr. Robert Evans, Professor Emeritus at the University of Minnesota Duluth. He has been the best mentor I could have received throughout my education. He has been there to discuss the tough questions, edit the last minute papers and further stimulate my interest in a subject. When getting engaged in a topic, I could always be sure that the next time I saw him, he would find some additional reading for me to follow up with. My grandfather added both foundational knowledge and brought in current material for me to think about. Throughout my master's program at the Central European University, he was always available to discuss the course material and help me gain a better understanding and perspective on it. For this thesis, he was next to me every step of the way, providing coffee, discussion and encouragement. For this and more, there is no way to shown my appreciation and love.

#### Acknowledgements

This work was enriched by the time spend with my classmates this year at CEU. Their lively class discussions and diverse insights inspired me to work harder and learn more. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the support of Matej Kurian and Eva Bördős, two friends with whom I spent many hours discussing, not only classes, academia and what is Political Science, but also life, love and all the other important stuff.

Of course this project would not have come to completion without my thesis supervisor, Kate Coyer, who helped me see the vision of my research more clearly. She pushed me to do my best, even when things were tough. Her help and valuable insights were deeply appreciated.

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#### Introduction

New technologies are driving profound changes in the ways we access and produce information. Not only are changes taking place in the ways we choose to communicate, moving rapidly from physical mail services and telephone calls to e-mails and text messages, but also in the speed that information travels from one place to another. The Internet of course, is the crucial site of how technology is revolutionizing the way information is communicated and received. Tools such as: instant messaging, online chat rooms, discussion forums, blogs, and vlogs¹ are only some of the ways the immediacy of communication is privileged over 'older' forms of information flows. These technological advances allow a crossover and convergence between print, broadcast and online information. The line between mediums is blurred. This paper aims to elaborate on how these developments are changing the face of news, particularly on the Internet where the blurring of lines and mediums is intensified. Adapting to technological advancements influences the ways in which we receive and impart news.

'News' can be defined as, "a report of recent events", "previously unknown information", "material reported in a newspaper or news periodical or on a newscast," and it can mean, "matter that is newsworthy" (Merriam-Webster 1997, 782). Traditionally, media, in various forms have been a primary source of information for people to find out what is going on in their community, state and country. We also find news and information essential for a functioning democracy. Thomas Meyer claims that all democracies, "assume that citizens will have complete, undistorted information about the most important political issues as well as about the intentions and programs of the political actors who represent them"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See glossary for definition of terms

(Meyer 2002, 8). However, an important shift has taken place, enabling non-professionals to receive news *and* produce it. Posting news items on the Internet can be immediately available for anyone to view. There is a breakdown of a wall not only between producer and receiver, but also between production and audiences. In this paper, we use the term 'citizen journalist' to describe a non-professional journalist who utilizes the Internet to submit news items online. We will also very briefly touch upon the links between media and democracy, drawing on Jurgen Habermas's criteria for a public sphere (Garnham 1996, 361). The changes in the definition of news and who is reporting on it are critical to observe and monitor, as information is a key commodity in democratic societies.

#### Research Question

This paper intends to explore the relationship between citizen journalism and traditional news outlets. It will specifically look at how tools of citizen journalism are used or incorporated into news websites. The question that this paper attempts to answer is: how is online citizen journalism changing traditional news production?

As part of that question, this paper will also discuss the questions: what is the importance of citizen journalism on the news making process and what are the implications for the future of news production. It is not possible to address the issues of citizen journalism, traditional news media and technology without discussing the following points of how the Internet *in general* is changing mainstream news production, how the Internet aids citizen journalism and participation and the current state of the news industry. The primary focus, however, is to analyze the impact of citizen journalism on traditional news production. Does it pose a threat to professional journalists or will citizen journalists help the news industry? While this paper acknowledges the importance of professional institutions that provide normative guidelines for the profession, it also recognizes that citizen journalism is on the

rise and is changing the news in many ways.

Developments in communication technologies have often been associated with heralding societal change, although, with each new advancement, it has been difficult to predict exactly how it will shape society. Throughout history, the news industry, a communications industry, has been changed by the development of new technologies: the telegraph proved to be a vital tool for reporters to get short items quickly to their newspaper to report news from distances. Phones also cut the time to deliver news over distances and reporters could dictate the story over it. Both these technologies were expensive to use at the beginning, but for newspapers in tight competition to break a story first, it was a necessary investment in order to gather information and get it to the public faster. The Internet is a recent new technology that news organizations are using as a way to send information quickly, but it also allows them to display and gather news in innovative ways.

The Internet has already shown that it can connect people in novel ways. Howard Rheingold, in his book *The Virtual Community*, was an early advocate of the positive aspects of virtual communities (Rheingold 2000, 347). He defines a virtual community as, "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold in Trend 2001, 155). New mediums do change how we communicate, but it does not render obsolete older methods. With new technologies, humans both lose and gain from different ways of communication (Rheingold 2000, 346). The Internet in particular, is having a large impact on changing the news industry. It stands apart from previous innovations in regards to the cost, speed, scale, intensity and content of information available. Another change is who has access and the ability to participate. With

ubiquitous Internet access, it is more direct and easier for the average person to participate in the creation of information. It is not the goal of this thesis to engage in the debate of how different the Internet is in comparison to prior technological developments. Still it suffices, for the aim of this thesis, to acknowledge the distinction of the Internet for its expanded capabilities of information consuming and producing in relation to other technologies. This paper assumes that is significant for the news making process and for the ways that ordinary people can become engaged in the news making process.

The news industry has experienced many changes in recent years, but especially in the past year (2008). "The newspaper industry exited a harrowing 2008 and entered 2009 in something perilously close to free fall" (PEW Project for Excellence in Journalism and Edmonds, 2009). Traditional newspapers are closing down, reducing production, or merging. Many newspapers have an online website in addition to their print edition. Some, notably the *Christian Science Monitor*, now publish exclusively on the web. Broadcast media outlets now post their nightly newscasts online so viewers can watch it on demand. In some cases, blogs have become news sites, often operated by just a few people<sup>2</sup>. According to John Pavlik, in 2006, 164 million Americans were online news consumers (Pavlik 2008, 60). Media outlets have changed in order to survive in the market for news on demand. They have to respond to the changing technology and also, a changing business model.

With the Internet, news is updated online throughout the day and is available to users whenever they wish to access it. People do not need to wait for the morning paper to be delivered or for the six o' clock newscast to start; they can log on to the Internet and find news of interest. Traditional media has been slow to respond to these changes as seen in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Most famously in the United States, blogs like "The Drudge Report" and "The Huffington Post" are both run by few people and are considered to be must-read political news sites

rapid decline of print newspapers and ad revenue (See Figure 1). Mergers have taken place that ties the news industry more closely with commercial interests. Cross promoting media products through different outlets has become more common as will be discussed in section 1.5 of this paper. In the United States the three major news networks; CBS News, ABC News and NBC News, all make their broadcasted video and text news reports available on their news websites (Pavlik 2008, 134). These are changes that commercial broadcasters have had to cope with, but public service broadcasters, like the BBC in the United Kingdom, have also had to adjust to similar challenges faced in the U.S. Increasingly, niche audiences bring about fiercer competition. The intersecting of print, video and audio comes together on the Internet. But there, in that public sphere, it is not just the news organizations that set the agenda - it can be set by anyone with a little technical savvy. The two brief examples that follow explicitly show this intersection of media, technology, citizen producers of content and its impact on news.

# Example: 'The Obama Girl'

In the past few years, ordinary people have been able to shape the news agenda. A good example is the "Obama Girl" music video that was posted on YouTube on June 13, 2007. This music video featured a song entitled, "I Got a Crush on Obama". The video became an Internet viral video, getting many views shortly after being posted. Once the mainstream news media became aware of its popularity, they also covered the video as a new angle in the U.S. presidential campaign. This increased media coverage of Obama's campaign before he had gained more mainstream support in the polls<sup>3</sup>. The video spawned

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Data from various polls (USA Today/Gallup, AP-Ipsos, Fox, NBC News/Wall Street Journal, American Research Group, Rasmussen) placed Obama behind Hillary Clinton. At the beginning of June 2007, his support ranged between 21% to 30% of the vote. Clinton's support ranged between 29% to 39% of the vote. Data accessed from <a href="http://www.pollster.com/polls/us/08-us-dem-pres-primary.php">http://www.pollster.com/polls/us/08-us-dem-pres-primary.php</a> on May 20, 2009.

numerous responses and copycat videos of young girls supporting other candidates in the running<sup>4</sup>. The 'Obama Girl' video was produced by the website www.BarelyPolitical.com and after the video's popularity, the website has become a popular place for political and news satire. As of May 11, 2009, it is still listed as the most popular video on BarelyPolitical and has had almost 14 million views.

User-generated content increasingly has the power to set the news agenda as shown by this example. Not only that, it has consequences beyond information and into the business side of the news industry. While the video was released in June, Next New Networks bought the site in October of 2007 for an undisclosed amount (Hefflinger 2007). Additionally, this example shows the blurring of the line between politics and entertainment, and also reveals how content generated and posted on the Internet can, in a very short time, become part of the national news agenda. In this case, it resulted in raising news coverage of Obama's campaign at a time when not many people knew much about the Illinois Senator's presidential bid.

#### Example: The 'Dean Scream'

The second example of how the Internet has an impact on news and how it can shape events is Howard Dean's 2004 primary presidential campaign. Dean entered the primary contest in spring of 2002. The campaign made effective use of the Internet as a campaign tool by using it to organize meetings, publicize his political platform, participate in online forums, and request feedback on the Internet. These actions aided in building an online network of supporters, who could in turn, use the Internet to participate in politics. Most significantly, he was able to raise large amount of money early in the campaign soliciting individual donations

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Notably one supporting Obama's main competition, Hillary Clinton, "Hott 4 Hillary" by Taryn Southern <a href="http://www.taryn-southern.com/Viral Videos.html">http://www.taryn-southern.com/Viral Videos.html</a>

online<sup>5</sup>. Dean's campaign gained momentum and by fall of 2003, he was emerging as a frontrunner.

In Iowa on January 19, 2004, the first Democratic primary caucus, Howard Dean finished third. In a speech given to his supporters later that night, while optimistically saying how far the campaign was going to go in the primary contests, he ended his comments on an awkward sounding scream or shout. This sound bite was replayed in the national news media, according to the Associated Press, 633 times, (Bauder, 2004) and was dubbed the, "Dean Scream" or the "I Have a Scream" speech. The press portrayed Dean in a negative light in the weeks following. The next few primary contests he lost, only able to secure a win in his home state of Vermont. The campaign eventually ceded the race and supported the eventual nominee, John Kerry as the party's presidential candidate. While it is not possible to measure precisely the effect of the media's portrayal of Dean with its replaying on the video clip, this example does show, not only the power of new technology having an effect on a candidates popularity, but also the media's power in influencing people or events with what it chooses to focus on.

What these two examples briefly show is how the relationship between news media and ordinary citizens is changing. The Internet provides a space for consuming information that the news media draws upon and then feeds back into the information sphere. In addition, this changing relationship has the power to impact politics and democracy, even if we cannot predict how.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> An effective campaign strategy later refined and perfected by the Obama campaign in the 2008 primary contest

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Video available on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5FzCeV0ZFc

#### Structure of the paper

To better understand the ongoing changes taking place in the news industry and their effects (as we saw briefly in the examples of 'Obama Girl' and the 'Dean Scream'), I will focus on three online news organization case studies to see the implications of how these issues of citizen journalism and traditional news media come together. This paper approaches the information from a qualitative approach. First, it will discuss the literature on participation, media, citizen journalism and democracy. Then it will describe the current situation using three case studies, *CNN iReport, BBC Have Your Say* and *Global Voices*. Finally, it will compare the cases selected and analyze the relationship of citizen journalism and new organizations.

By looking at the history, structure, organization and use of citizen journalism, this paper will illustrate in what ways citizen journalism is transforming traditional news organizations. By comparing the similarities and differences of the sites, we can better comprehend how different models deal with the technological changes. By the end, I hope to develop an understanding of what citizen journalism is, the forms it takes, how it is used by news organizations, what the consequences are and tentatively see the direction news organizations are moving due to evolutions in technology and the communications industry.

# **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

#### 1.1 What is participatory media?

Participatory is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as, "providing the opportunity for individual participation" (Merriam-Webster 1997, 847). Media is defined as "a medium of cultivation, conveyance, or expression" (Merriam-Webster 1997, 721). Together, a definition of participatory media would include elements of opportunity, individuals, participation and expression.

In their report, *We Media*, the authors came up with a definition of participatory journalism:

The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires. (Bowman and Willis 2003, 10)

This definition provides some characteristics of participatory journalism. It also shows the links between news and democracy and how important the media is in a democratic society.

J.D. Lasica provides six categories of participatory journalism that serves as a useful guideline. The categories are: audience participation at mainstream news outlets, independent news and information Web sites, full-fledged participatory news sites, collaborative and contributory media sites, other kinds of 'thin media' and, finally, personal broadcasting sites (Lasica, 2003). Two of the case studies examined in this paper, CNN and BBC fall into the first category of 'audience participation at mainstream news outlets'. The third, Global Voices could be considered a 'full-fledged participatory news sites' or 'collaborative and contributory media site'. As technology develops, websites can fall into more than one category. The categories are also fluid depending on how people choose to use it. Even so, these categories provide a useful way to understand the many types and how many different

forms there are.

Citizen journalism is growing. For the purposes of this paper, the scope is limited to defining citizen journalists as people participating in the creation or production of *online news*. This is opposed to participation in entertainment media<sup>7</sup>. For this paper, we use a working definition of citizen journalism that includes the following characteristics. One is that the content is news or news related. There should be some public value in sharing the story, even if it is personal. This characteristic excludes personal life stories or miscellaneous commentary. Another characteristic is that citizen journalism is done by anyone who is not a professional journalist. A working definition of professional journalist for this paper is one who is employed or paid by and also is able to affiliate them self with a news organization. A final dimension of citizen journalism that we consider essential is that it not only harnesses the modern technology to have stories created by citizen journalists, but also enables others to respond.

# 1.2 What is the significance of participatory media?

Traditionally the media has filled the role of information provider in modern democracies. It has been called the fourth estate<sup>8</sup> in democratic societies, fulfilling many important functions. It gives information to the public about how democracy works, while being a public watchdog on government workings. The media also provides a measure of social cohesiveness. Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities*, theorizes that people experience a shared experience by simultaneously consuming the same information, thereby leading to a shared identity (Anderson 2006). Participation has always been a core

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> One example of entertainment media participation is voting for a contestant on a television program either online or by a mobile phone

The other three including the clergy, the nobles and the commoners.

component of democracies and the media have aided that by providing information about how to participate.

A classic example of how people can participate in the media is by writing a letter to the editor of a print newspaper. The idea is for citizens to give their opinion and the newspapers provide space for societal discussion. The difference between writing a letter to the editor and writing an online piece is that, typically, a letter to the editor was a reaction to a newspaper story or event that happened. An online piece can be about anything, a response to a story, commentary, an event the person wants highlighted. Editorial control over letters to the editor was practiced due to the limitations of space of a print newspaper and content and quality assurance. With the Internet, space is no longer an issue and anyone can publish their writings online sans editorial control.

Terry Flew has three attributes to computer-mediated communication, which, he says helps develop online communities (Flew 2005, 62). One, they build social networks and social capital; two, they share knowledge and information, and finally; three, they enable new ways to participate in democracy (Flew 2005, 62). These characteristics set the groundwork for citizen journalists to participate in these online communities or sites. Flew also claims that promoting online communities is a way to encourage more democratic participation (Flew 2005, 64).

Society has moved into uncharted territory with the Internet enabling more direct participation in both the media and democracy. In *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, the links between democracy and media are discussed:

Democracy involved democratic participation and debate as well as voting. In the Big Media Age, most people were kept out of democratic discussion and were rendered by broadcast technologies passive consumers of infotainment. Access to media was controlled by big

corporations and a limited range of voices and views were allowed to circulate. In the Internet age, everyone with access to a computer, modem, and Internet services can participate in discussion and debate, empowering large numbers of individuals and groups kept out of the democratic dialogue during the Big Media Age. (Kellner 1998, 6 in Lister et al 2003, 179)

While this paper focuses on participation in the media and news making, it is critical to be aware of the consequences for democracy. Jurgen Habermas's, a prominent scholar in the field of normative theory, argues for the importance of 'indissoluble link between the institutions and practices of mass public communication and the institutions and practices of democratic politics (Garnham 1996, 360). As this paper tries to discover the changing nature of the news, it is important to consider media's role in a democratic society.

## 1.3 Media and democracy

The significance of the public sphere in democracy has been discussed by many authors, perhaps most famously by Jurgen Habermas. Polat interprets Habermas' definition of the public sphere as consisting of three characteristics. First, it must be open to everyone. Second, accord is reached as a result of rational debate. Finally, the public sphere should be independent from commercial interests and power (Polat 2005). None of these conditions precisely define the public sphere as the Internet. While Polat indicates she believes these conditions are not met in the case of the Internet, she does point out that online communities do still hold as a place for political participation (Polat 2005, 450). Prior to the Internet, these conditions of the public sphere were not met either. Still, Habermas' original idea of the public sphere can be held as a normative ideal.

Michael Schudson states a way to achieve that ideal; "The more people participate as citizens in politics, the closer one comes to the ideal of a public sphere" (Schudson 1996, 147). He describes the importance of public media for "carrying on and informing public

discussion" (Schudson 1996, 152). A discussion of the move from a "conversation" to "information" model of the press, Schudon claims, has limited the ability to participate in political events (Schudson 1996, 152-153). With the Internet, is that trend reversing? There are more details about meetings, organizing and taking part in the political process easily accessible to the public online. The Internet has the potential to enhance the public sphere by providing more information on means of participation.

Peter Dahlgren is of the opinion that, "a functioning public sphere is understood as a constellation of communicative spaces in society that permit the circulation of information, ideas, debates" (2005, 148). Dahlgren continues this definition by saying that these spaces facilitate communication between citizens and elites (2005, 148). Another definition of the public sphere is, "the communicative institutions of a society, through which facts and opinions circulate and by means of which a common stock of knowledge is built up as the basis for collective political action" (McNair 2006, 136). By these definitions, the Internet qualifies as a modern public sphere and a place for people to communicate. For this definition, this thesis recognizes the Internet as a public sphere, but will focus on how people are communicating within it, especially as citizen journalists.

The conversational style of participatory media as opposed to previous methods of consumed media, presumes an open and equal relationship between the people communicating which, perhaps, approaches Habermas's ideal public sphere. Prior methods had a more hierarchical structure. One of the unique features of the Internet is how it enables the many-to-many forms of communication with different interactions and interpretations, rather than the one-to-many form, which is a feature of mass media such as radio, television or newspapers (Dahlgren 2005, 150).

With the Internet, it is possible to start a conversation about a news item immediately by posting a comment and keep the dialogue going by responding to comments. Writing a blog can *make* a story. The Internet also allows more styles of response through text, audio or video. This signals a move from passive consumption of information to active participation, interpretation and creation. These changes implicate a power shift. "Direct participation... shifts the balance of power from television producers and journalists, towards audiences" (Street 2001, 260). If citizens are now directly participating, do they have more power?

While this paper assumes that citizen journalism is changing the news making process, which may have political consequences, it realizes that there is no formal (or constitutional given authority) role for public opinion in the political decision making process. The links between media and democracy are key as, "Democracy is not possible without a functioning political public sphere that puts the individual in a position to decide and act autonomously" (Meyer 2002, 1). However the media, or even participation in media, does not have the authority to make political decisions. Voting is one method of control over how decisions are made through voting for a preferred candidate. Yet public opinion and polls do not have the same weight as voting. While it is not proven how influential public opinion is over politicians, there are some popular ideas, like the 'CNN effect', which will be discussed later in the paper, that hold the idea that public opinion can influence political decisions.

While, "public opinion plays no formal role in policy decision making...Citizens thereby have an informal role in democratic politics – one that is heavily dependent *on the way they are represented in new media*" (Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgenson 2005, 31). This

informal role is key. Here is one of the crossroads that links citizen journalism with power, media and politics. When citizens participate with their own voices, particularly in politics, they empower themselves.

One trend in the news industry is that power is shifting to the individual journalist and away from traditional journalistic institutions (Project for Excellence in Journalism and Edmonds, 2009). This move has also shifted professional journalists' coverage of events. While there is the factual reporting, increasingly, there are also personal stories of the journalists behind the story, telling how they choose to cover the story, deciding between what video to use and even sharing their side of a news event in professional news outlets. In the New York Times, one of its economic reporters published a powerful article online describing his personal experience with the mortgage crisis<sup>9</sup>. This particular article shows the expectation of the work journalists must do has risen tremendously. Not only must they provide the facts and the story, but also a running commentary on that story with personal insights. Many journalists write blogs as part of their professional duties. A quote in *The* Economist, illustrates this point, "Phil Griffin, the chief executive of MSNBC, calls it "newsplus". The aim is to complement and give meaning to the mass of disconnected information that viewers pick up during the day" (The Economist 2009 76-79). There is a move by the news industry to focus less on reporting the facts to emphasizing interpreting the story, which, can also be construed as an effort to compete with citizen journalists.

Along those lines, another trend, more alarming in relation to the media's democratic function, is the tendency for the press to be more 'reactive and passive' in its campaign coverage. In a report on America media, it found that news outlets produced fewer profiles on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/magazine/17foreclosure-t.html?\_r=1&em">http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/magazine/17foreclosure-t.html?\_r=1&em</a> "My Personal Credit Crisis" by Edmund L. Andrews. Published May 14, 2009.

the candidates that were running for president (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2009). Political campaigns have become savvy about the information they release to the public. Newsroom resources have shrunk, thereby leaving less time for people to carefully research candidate's backgrounds. Losing the critical and investigative voice of the media, leaves a space for politicians to control the public sphere's conversations or, at the very least, information about themselves. Professional journalists are the ones who invest the time to dig up information not readily available. Can citizen journalists fill the information gap?

#### 1.4 How the news is made and when the news industry is news

Media scholars find the current situation of the news profession in transition. In *We Media*, the authors state, "...journalism finds itself at a rare moment in history where...its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is threatened by not just new technology and competitors but, potentially, by the audience it serves" (Bowman and Willis 2003, 7). Elsewhere, in an article from the Associated Press from 2005, points out that the news organization is in flux; "It sort of requires a rethinking of the entire traditional news process, and that's hard for news organizations to do," (Jesdanun 2005). News organizations struggled how to handle the growing league of 'citizen journalists' who were posting news stories online, sometimes even scooping the news. The same article sheds light on both a shift in the nature of news and a change in who holds the power to control what information is published.

"OhMyNews<sup>10</sup> is based on the theory that every citizen is a journalist, every voice is legitimate...Traditional media begins with the premise that our voice is authoritative and our voice is better informed" (Jesdanun, 2005).

With technological tools available, individuals are often able to beat the news organizations for finding out information first. An early example is from 1996 was when

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> OhmyNews is a news site where the majority of the information is generated by citizen journalists. Its motto is "every citizen is a reporter".

Matt Drudge broke the news that Jack Kemp would be Bob Dole's running mate in the 1996 presidential election campaign<sup>11</sup>. This demonstrates a dramatic shift in news reporting, who is reporting and where information is reported.

People are aware that the news organizations are changing, but each next step is unpredictable. For example, an article titled, "Social-networking sites share breaking news" posted on the CNN website, talks about how social networking sites are often sources of breaking news (Respers, 2009). The news industry endeavors to keep up with the challenge of rapidly changing technology and demand for it. This news article shows that not only is the news industry aware of the changes and talking about it, but also that as time moves on, technology enables changes that are different than imagined just a short time ago.

## 1.5 Economy of the newspaper industry

News organizations have had to rethink their traditional business model with the changes in technology. With the economic situation of 2008, the impact was especially heavily felt on print newspaper industries – a section of the news industry that was already struggling to adapt to a changing business environment has been hit hard by generally bad economic conditions. In Britain, "70 local papers shut down since the beginning of 2008" (*The Economist* 2009, 15). Bankruptcy, shut downs and struggling budgets have been common topics where the news industry has been concerned lately.

News organizations have primarily relied on advertising revenue to run their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> A question that may be raised here is what is the difference between an individual bringing out information and when a group focuses on getting information out. While a difficult question to resolve, here we are more interested in how individuals are gaining power on their own, without necessarily having to organize into a group.

operations. The latest trends in advertising has been moving away from advertising in print media publications that reach to mass audiences to online advertising that targets specific populations<sup>12</sup>. Robert Samuelson, while not specifically discussing advertising, criticizes the fragmentation and niche media markets that are emerging and the constant mantra to celebrate diversity and individuality (Samuelson 1999, 425). He believes that this is at the expense of community and national identities (Samuelson 1999, 425). The shift in advertising revenue has impacted print newspapers business model the hardest. They were unable to adapt their business models to cope with the shift in advertising dollars moving online. As illustrated in Figure 1, newspaper revenue has dropped sharply each quarter in the past three years, while online advertising revenue has been steadily increasing.

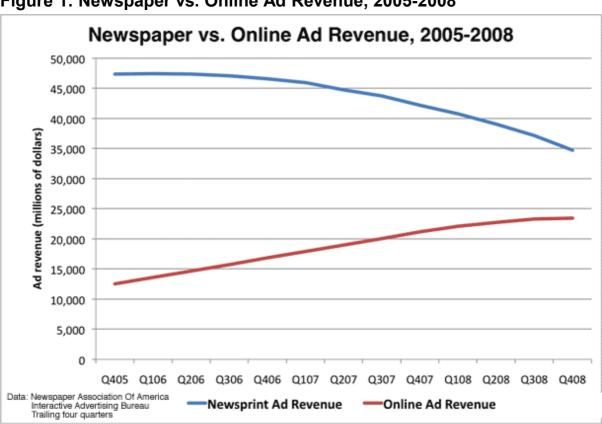


Figure 1: Newspaper vs. Online Ad Revenue, 2005-2008

From: http://www.businessinsider.com/chart-of-the-day-how-soon-will-newsprint-adrevenue-slide-below-online-ad-revenue-2009-4 Accessed May 13, 2009

xxi

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Google has been a major leader in this technology.

News organizations are finding that they need to rapidly restructure their business models to keep pace with shifting demand. One general response has been mergers. As shown in Figure 2, over the past 25 years, companies have increasingly merged different branches of media production into larger companies. As of 2006, there were eight major companies left that run many smaller branches of media that had previously been independent.

Figure 2: 25 years of media mergers

From: http://www.scribd.com/doc/2258662/And-then-there-were-eight Accessed May 13, 2009.

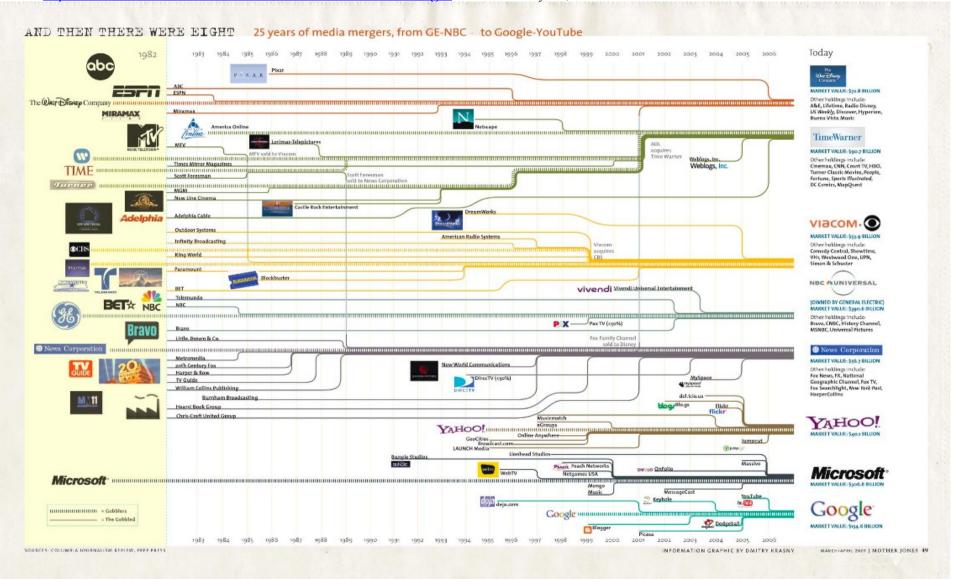


Figure 2 shows the mergers and entries of new media outlets on the market over the past 25 years. These mergers have allowed cross-promotion of different media products within a company. For example, a movie made by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox can be promoted through Fox News on TV or the New York Post in a print publication. While this commercial business model may be more efficient, it does raise ethical questions of the news being influenced by business interests. While commercial media has always dealt with the pressure of the ratings affecting their income, these mergers bring the commercial stakes to a whole new level.

#### 1.5.1 Economic theory and people's participation options

Albert Hirschman's book, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* raises important issues for people's options of participation that can be related to media business models and the concept of citizen journalism. He discusses what 'responses' consumers when they are not satisfied, have available to them. Hirschman develops these concepts in both economic and political systems. He offers two possible strategies for consumers to express their opinions about a product. 'Exit' is when the consumer leaves the firm or in other words, stops buying into whatever the firm is producing. Hirschman posits this as a response to a decline in quality (Hirschman 1970). 'Voice' is, "...any attempt at all to change rather than escape from, an objectionable state of affairs" (Hirschman 1970, 30). These concepts provide theoretical background on allowing feedback from the consumers. While he contextualizes it as responses to shifts in quality of a product, it has further application in the political sphere, where citizens can express dissatisfaction with policies. One sphere where exit and voice are possible is on the Internet through either stopping visit a website or by posting feedback on it.

A crucial point that Hirschman makes is that the relationship between producer and

consumer does not have to be fixed. Through the tools of exit and especially voice, an interaction can take place through means of feedback and adjustments on the firms' part. He also shows that this is a delicate process depending on the elasticity of demand, whether the firms get the feedback, and how quickly firms can respond. The additional concept of loyalty can come in with loyal consumers of a product. Or in media terms, a product can be a journalist, media outlet or web site. This is especially true with people who only read certain journalists or use particular news sites to get their information.

These theories relate to the behavior of consumers and how on one hand, they are able to articulate what they want from the news industry; on the other hand, the news industry is better equipped to respond to that demand. Hirschman's theories provide a relevant way to look at the news industry's changing business model and what options citizens having in consuming and participating in the news.

The question that remains to be seen in the changing business model of the news industry is: How much is citizen participation a challenge to the business models or used as a tool? While citizen journalism seems to be on the rise, will the citizen journalists remain as separate individuals or become incorporated into mainstream media? Another factor is the possibility of the commodification of citizen journalists. Will they become susceptible to or influenced by commercial interests or can they retain their independence? Citizen journalists can be a low cost way to increase the amount of information available. They can also be competition for traditional news organizations. A third option, which will be examined in the case studies, is news organizations working with citizen journalists. While these questions are not directly answered in this paper, economic concerns are raised by the changes in news production. By examining how citizen journalism is a part of the change, it is important to

bear in mind the financial consequences too.

#### 1.6 Who is participating?

As of 2005, more than 70 million Americans report using the Internet daily and half of those used it to get news (McNair 2006, 118). As of June 2008, according to Internet World Stats, 220 million Americans are online. The numbers show an increasing amount of people with Internet access. But with an estimated world population of 6.7 billion people<sup>13</sup>, not everyone even has access to the Internet.

One of the major issues with online participation is, who is *not* participating. There may be many reasons for people who have access not to participate actively online. Some reasons might be: they don't have time, they are not interested, or they are not tech-savvy However, most people in the world simply do not even have the option to participate. They don't have access to either computers or the Internet. There is an abundance of literature on this topic <sup>14</sup>, but this paper will cover a few basic points. To complete a discussion about issues of participation and the public sphere, it should be kept in mind not only those who are online and participating, but also who are not.

There are two dimensions to this issue. First, there is the global divide between rich and poorer countries and their access to the Internet. Internet World Stats reports that 5.1% of the population of Botswana use Internet compared to 68.3% in Austria or 82.9% in the Netherlands. The second is within countries, the division based along economic, class, race or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> From the U.S. Census Bureau <a href="http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html">http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* by Pippa Norris; *Social consequences of Internet use: access, involvement, and interaction* by James E. Katz and Ronald E. Rice; *Technology and social inclusion: rethinking the digital divide* by Mark Warschauer; and *The Internet Galaxy* by Manuel Castells

gender categories. Dahlgren points out that the structural dimension of the public sphere deals in issues of access and people who are included or excluded (Dahlgren 2005, 149). The structure of the Internet and the costs associated with access to it, therefore, does limit who is able to go online and who can or cannot participate.

There have been precedents for people being excluded from the public sphere; women and minorities for a long time did not have the right to participate in elections. Not all hope for bringing access to the greater population is lost. Dahlgren claims that, "the criteria for access and use are such that the "digital divide" in the Western democracies has been diminishing, even if it would be unrealistic to assume that it will disappear" (Dahlgren 2005, 151).

## 1.7 Types of media outlets

The three cases chosen<sup>15</sup> for their research are three different types of news outlets.

CNN is considered an American, commercial, profit orientated news organization. The BBC is a British public service broadcaster. Global Voices calls itself a participatory media newsroom with a global outlook. It is a non-profit organization that grew from a bloggers meeting. For the purpose of this paper, it is considered a type of community media. In this section, I will briefly discuss the differences between these types of media outlets.

Public service news organizations have the following characteristics: promote cultural diversity, support democratic values, provide social cohesion, promote education, cover minority issues and be available for everyone (Irion 2008). Ideally, they are impartial,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> There are many other cases such as ABC's i-Caught, Fox's uReport, MSNBC's FirstPerson, but due to time and space constraints we cannot cover all the examples here.

independent and provide high quality content to its consumers. One common characteristic of public service broadcasting is that it receives a portion of its funding from the government.

Some scholars argue for expanded public service media. McChesney in particular advocates:

...a broad and diverse nonprofit, noncommercial media sector. Some participants could receive direct state support, and some might receive none, but effective means of generating effective subsidies must become a central component of democratic media policy making. (McChesney 2004, 251).

This quote shows how closely linked media and democracy are. Media, independent from business and government issues, is considered by many media scholars to be essential for democracy.

The benefit of a public service broadcaster is that ideally, it is protected from market and advertising demands (McChesney 2004, 241). It provides a public service in providing information to citizens. McChesney opines that a new vision for public broadcasting would be to use new communication technologies at the center of its services (ibid, 250).

Commercial media is owned by a profit seeking company. Typically, this means that, while capable of producing independent, high quality news programming, it relies on advertising revenue and other revenue sources to fund its operations. This reliance can often bring a conflict of interest between airing a story about an advertiser and public information needs. Some find that, in relation to the media, the commercial market has "flaws that could be damaging to a self-governing or humane society" (McChesney 2004, 214).

Community media, in this paper, is a non-profit seeking media. Non-profit media organizations typically are funded through grants or donations. While public service media is not-for-profit, there is often direct governmental support. Non-profit media organizations are

separated by the idea that they do not receive direct government support <sup>16</sup>. Community media has numerous definitions, but most of them have certain characteristics in common.

Typically, community media caters to small and limited audiences (Hollander, Stappers, and Jankowski 2002, 23). Another way to look at community media is that, "As members of the same community they have the same concerns *and* they are interested in the same topics because they share the same background" (ibid). The community shares the same frame of reference (ibid) towards the information being presented. Establishing these characteristics leads us to see that there is also a difference between specialized mass media and community media. The difference is in the "relationship between senders, audiences, and messages" (ibid). Community media can provide opportunities for citizen participation in the media.

Knowing about the types of media organizations is important for any discussion of a media outlet. The structure and principles guide the media and therefore news, production within an organization. Keeping in mind the basic differences between commercial, public service and community or non-profit media organizations is important as we discuss the specific case studies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Although they may receive grant money

# **Chapter 2: CNN**

#### 2.1: Background and iReport.com

CNN, which stands for Cable News Network, was founded in 1980 by Ted Turner as a 24-hour news-broadcasting network. By broadcasting 24 hours a day, it broke the traditional morning and evening news cycle that had previously existed. The global news network with around the clock coverage did alter the previous model of news organization, expanding their coverage and for many of them, adding additional broadcast channels to keep up with demand and the expansion of other news organizations. One of the ramifications of increased news coverage is the, "CNN Effect". Steven Livingston discusses three features of it as: "1) a *policy agenda-setting agenda*, 2) an *impediment* to the achievement of desired goals, and 3) an *accelerant* to policy decision making (Livingston 1997, 2). This term was coined during 1992-1993 when images of starving children lead the U.S. to send troops to Somalia. Later, the broadcast image of a U.S. soldier's body being dragged through the streets pushed the U.S. to pull troops out (Livingston 1997, 4). While stated earlier in this paper that public opinion has no formal role in the political decision making process, the CNN effect was thought to influence policy-making through the images shown on media outlets.

On the Internet, CNN launched its website <a href="www.cnn.com">www.cnn.com</a> in August 1995. As of May 21, 2009, it was ranked as the 54th highest traffic website by Alexa, a website that tracks website traffic (<a href="http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/cnn.com">http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/cnn.com</a>). CNN's iReport section of their website grew out of other initiatives to get people to comment or give feedback on the news. The program, initially begun in 2006, utilizes citizens who have news, information, videos or photos of breaking news. The site as it is set up today, was launched in March 2008.

#### 2.1.1 Description of iReport

CNN provides a couple different ways to access the iReporter website from their homepage. From CNN's main webpage of <a href="www.cnn.com">www.cnn.com</a>, the iReport site link is accessible from the upper right hand corner. Frequently, they have a link to iReport.com in their Latest News headlines, but it directly links to a story, rather than the homepage of iReport itself. There are also other links set up on CNN's main page to directly link to the iReport site when there is a relevant story. However, the only consistent links to the site are either from the top right hand corner or under the categorized news towards the bottom of the page. The iReport site can also be directly accessed by its url of <a href="http://www.cnn.com/ireport/">http://www.cnn.com/ireport/</a>.

On the iReport website, at <a href="www.cnn.com/ireport">www.cnn.com/ireport</a>, prominence is given to those stories that have been selected to be broadcast on CNN television; however, the site is full of other links and tools. CNN makes it easy to and actively encourages users to upload information. Browsing the site, it directs you to view the reports and also find out information about the 'iReporters' or citizen journalists who contribute to the site. One of the tools is an 'Assignment Desk' where there are topics and guidelines for generating discussion or iReports. Another section offers tips on how to create a good iReport. All these tools enable citizens to participate in the news through creating user-generated content.

There is an 'iReport blog' specifically for blogging about the iReport website. It covers subjects from upcoming events to featuring stories. Occasionally, it complements what the Assignment Desk is requesting, but the blog can also request reports on current topics. On the site, the blog invites the reader to, "Follow along with iReport staffers as we build a new kind of news site." This has interesting implications for what CNN is doing. What do they mean by a new kind? Here, it is apparent that CNN is trying to merge

traditional news coverage with citizen journalism. Or at the very least, they are actively encouraging citizen journalism reports to be run alongside traditional journalistic reports.

The website is generally easy to navigate and focuses almost exclusively on user generated content or encouraging user generated content. It maintains the same header and footer as the CNN homepage and has links to other news site sections, but the main frame of the website is for iReports and iReporters. Throughout the iReport website, user feedback and participation dominate, which is to be expected due to the nature and set goals of the site to provide a space for users.

#### 2.1.2 Citizen journalists or 'iReporters'

The most important feature of CNN's iReport website is the prominence given to the citizen journalists. The contributors to the iReport website are called iReporters<sup>17</sup>. As of May 21, 2009, iReport had 23,197 iReporters registered. The site has a directory of all the registered iReporters. Clicking on an iReporter pulls up their profile, which can include, but is not limited to; username, name, occupation, hometown, homepage, bibliography (written by the iReporter), when they joined, the iReports uploaded, comments posted, and their following. It also gives data on the number of page views, comments on iReports, followers and how many reports were on CNN. This information can be broken down by, the current day, the current week or the total.

The site also ranks some iReporters as 'superstars'. They are the top members on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> For this paper, we consider iReporters to be citizen journalists. We use the term 'iReporter' when speaking specifically about a citizen journalist that has contributed to CNN's iReport website.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> The number of people who 'follow' an iReporter or who are notified when they upload new content.

iReport.com. CNN calculates the following factors; members' contributions, ratings, popularity and site activity. Then they put the iReporters who are in the top 20 percent each week into the superstar category. The iReporter site also features an interactive map that shows where the iReports come from. You can view the iReports by; 'latest', 'most viewed', 'most commented', 'most shared', 'on CNN' and 'newsiest'. The majority of iReporters come from the United States, but you do see other reports from all regions of the world.

#### 2.1.3 Why iReporter?

One of the most striking features of their website is how much time they devote to answering the question, "What is news?" Of course this is a valid question, but unusual to allocate space and discussion of it. An interesting dimension is that one of the stated goals of the website is 'to expand the definition of news<sup>19</sup>'. With the rise of citizen journalism and the technology that enables it, news organizations have had to redefine news. Another question that follows from the question of 'what is news' is, how is the news on iReport different from the news on their main page<sup>20</sup>? This is where the line starts to blur between user generated news and traditional methods of news and reporting. While CNN may only be explicitly asking the question what is news on their iReport website, the question still stands in traditional news coverage too. Citizens can report on issues they themselves perceive as important.

CNN has even created a new category for their iReports, 'Newsiest'. According to the website, they describe it as follows:

The "newsiest" iReports are sorted in lists at the top of each section on the homepage and in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Under Frequently Asked Questions section, What counts as "news" here? http://www.ireport.com/fag.jspa#news

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> According to the site, the difference is iReport has user generated content that is available the moment it is uploaded and what is broadcast on CNN has been vetted.

other places around the site. Newsiest is a calculation that combines freshness, popularity, activity and ratings. The idea behind newsiest is that all the contributions the iReport.com community of users make to the site – stories, comments, ratings, pageviews – and what CNN producers pick for their own stories could add up to tell us something new about what people think is newsworthy.

This is a significant shift from the editorial power of editors choosing what is important. In essence, this is a shift from a group of journalists deciding what is fresh and what people should know about, to a calculated formula based on a number of factors that can push a story to the lead story. On iReport, the 'newsiest' combines a number of factors that includes some professional editorial influence, but also popularity and a value attached to discussion generated. This may be a more democratic way of combining popular demand and ranking for news with traditional editorial control. However, what are the implications of what is the top news of the day becoming influenced by a variety of factors?

Another distinguishing feature of iReport from the main CNN news page is the tagline: "Unedited. Unfiltered. News." This is a major change from the traditional news method, which is carefully fact checking, editing, and screening the story by numerous professionals before making it public. The site does contain a disclaimer about the accuracy of the information posted stating, "iReport.com is a user-generated site. That means the stories submitted by users are not edited, fact-checked or screened before they post. Only stories marked "On CNN" have been vetted for use in CNN news coverage." While clearly this disclaimer is for citizen produced content, the fact the CNN, a news organization, is providing a space for unedited material signifies a shift in the underlying model of traditional reporting.

What is interesting about what is happening with the iReport website is that one finds a subtle shift in defining core concepts, such as the question of 'what is news?'. By creating categories of 'newsiest', or 'superstars', that are calculated on formulas that include direct

feedback from other members of the iReporter community, this site is changing what defines the top stories of the day. As the blog says, it really is building, "a new kind of news site."

# 2.2 CNN Sample<sup>21</sup>

The method used to choose all the examples from CNN, the BBC and Global Voices was done by first picking one day at random to select the examples. The day that the examples come from is Sunday, May 24, 2009. While the types of examples available were more than this paper can account for, I choose one example that was featured prominently on the website. The examples were also chosen for their political nature and therefore excluded various other topics available on that day.

The first example from CNN iReport is titled, "Obama Would Have Sanctioned Virtual Manslaugher by Insurance Industry If He Does Not Act Now". It was submitted by iReporter, EWillies 1961, whose name is listed as Egberto Willies on his profile page. This example was found in the category of 'newsiest' stories of the day. In his biography, Willis writes about himself, "I am a true liberal that believe [sic] in a well regulated capitalist society where work and innovation is rewarded<sup>22</sup>." He goes on to describe a personal issue that motivates his interest in healthcare. From his iReporter profile, he directs people to his 'Twitter<sup>23</sup>' account, his website and his homepage. While his biography clearly states his interest in health care issues, a perusal of his other submissions shows that he contributes pieces on a variety of subjects: "Michael Vick SHOULD NOT be allowed back in the NFL", "We must be willing to pay more for efficient cars", and "Credit Card Companies Have No Incentive To Change". By the statistics posted on his biography for contributions on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> See appendix for screenshot of example

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> From <a href="http://www.ireport.com/people/EWillies1961">http://www.ireport.com/people/EWillies1961</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> A social networking website that allows people to 'tweet' messages up to 140 characters

iReport.com, it shows that he is an active contributor to the site. As of May 24, 2009, he has uploaded 68 iReports, had 34 of them on CNN (broadcasted on CNN television channel), and has posted 148 comments.

His piece, "Obama Would Have Sanctioned Virtual Manslaugher by Insurance Industry If He Does Not Act Now", is a video piece that uses clips of Obama speaking, commentary from the iReporter himself, and television clips from a separate television news program he is referencing. That program is done by Bill Moyers, a journalist that works for PBS<sup>24</sup> the main public service broadcaster in the United States. This is interesting because he is promoting another news organization's work on CNN's website. This video is long, nine minutes and 49 seconds and does advocate an issue, in this case single payer insurance. While visually, it lacks the polish of a professional report, the report appears to be carefully thought out and put together to make a well-reasoned argument about the issue.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Public Broadcasting Service

## **Chapter 3: BBC**

## 3.1 Background and Have Your Say

The British Broadcasting Company was formed in 1922. It was originally broadcasting radio programs. In 1927, it was granted a Royal Charter, which is a legal instrument to create a corporation granted by a Sovereign entity. The Charter grants the BBC independence from government and private interests. After the charter, it became what it is called today, the British Broadcasting Corporation, or the BBC for short. The BBC<sup>25</sup> has a number of different services it provides including, radio, television and online programs. Today, the BBC has the largest global audience of any other news organization.

The BBC, a public service broadcaster, according to their website, is the world's largest broadcasting corporation. It employs correspondents all around the world in a variety of mediums such as radio, print, broadcasting and the Internet. In Britain, the government levies a special tax on television service to raise the money. The BBC receives its funding mainly through an annual color TV license that currently costs £142.50 (black and white TV license is £48). These prices are regulated by the government and the BBC gets about 74% of its annual budget from the license fee and the remaining 26% from commercial enterprises, although not through advertisements (Irion, 2008). Interestingly, the BBC World Service is funded by a separate government grant.

The BBC's online presence was first begun in 1994 when they established a public Web server (Naylor, Driver and Cornford 2000, 140), and created a number of websites and online projects<sup>26</sup>. With initial complications due to the renewal of the Royal Charter in 1996

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> In this paper, when using the term BBC, it does not explicitly separate the different branches of the company, it rather refers to it as a whole entity

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> One commercially orientated and funded web project was <u>www.beeb.com</u> that was

(ibid, 143), BBC Online was launched in December 1997. Today, the BBC Newsline Ticker or <a href="www.bbc.co.uk">www.bbc.co.uk</a> is ranked as 46 on Alexa's ranking of website traffic <a href="http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/bbc.co.uk">(http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/bbc.co.uk</a>). The BBC had a 'Have Your Say' television program, which is now off the air, but still maintains a daily radio program that is broadcast globally.

## 3.1.1 Description of Have Your Say

From the main homepage, <a href="www.news.bbc.co.uk">www.news.bbc.co.uk</a><sup>27</sup>, the Have Your Say link is along the left hand side bar menu. There is also a link on the right hand side of the site that usually links to a Have Your Say story teaser, question or headline. There are no other links to access the Have Your Say site that are immediately visible from the main news homepage of the BBC.

Once on the Have Your Say website<sup>28</sup>, the main shell of the website does not change. The BBC header, footer and side bar remain the same as on their main news webpage. The dominant content featured is a question posed to readers. Underneath a photo and the question are quotes pulled out that have responded to the question. On the right side of the site, a box solicits information and ideas. Directly below that are more ideas and topics for readers to submit their views. In the middle of the page are boxes on different topics that link to viewer's pictures and stories. Overall, the site is organized mainly by topics that citizens can either consume what others have posted or post their own content.

launched in 1996. The site now redirects to a BBC shopping site at <a href="www.bbcshop.com">www.bbcshop.com</a>
<sup>27</sup> The UK version, as opposed to the International version of the webpage was used in this

paper.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Accessible directly at <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking\_point/default.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking\_point/default.stm</a>

#### 3.1.2 Citizen journalists

Exploring the site offers many opportunities to participate. There are places that request photos, comments, opinions, and stories to be uploaded to the site. It asks for ideas from people as to what should be debated. It even, by soliciting story ideas, asks the question of what should be a news story.

The BBC does not have a public area where it shows its registered users for the site. You do not have to be a member to comment on a story. In general, the information about a user on the site consists of their name (that they give to the site) or username and location. There is no contact or profile information available to the public on users who contribute to the website.

### 3.1.3 Overlap between citizen and professional journalists

One interesting feature is while the site is designed for user content, it still gives prominence to direct links to BBC reporters' blogs. At the bottom of the page, directly below the pictures and stories submitted section are links to BBC reporter's blogs. This is significant because it starts to link the professional journalists with citizen journalists. Even if they are not filing news articles, rather blogging, their work is featured alongside citizen journalists' work.

Part of the impetus for starting the original BBC website was the desire for tighter editorial control (Naylor, Driver and Cornford 2000, 145). This control would maintain the BBC's reputation for quality (ibid). It is clear from the Have Your Say site that this legacy persists. The BBC retains editorial control over the citizen journalists submissions, even

incorporating user submitted material into BBC produced video. Of course, they credit the contributor, but edit the content into a BBC produced report.

An example where the professional journalistic work and citizen journalism is combined is on the right hand column menu called 'Your World News'. This video feature of BBC Have Your Say is actually done by BBC and is a compilation on submissions from citizens. This is yet another section where the professional work overlaps with citizen's submissions. In light of this paper's focus, this example of a professionally produced news video that features citizen submission in another arena in which citizen journalism is changing traditional news organizations presentation of the news.

## 3.2 BBC Sample<sup>29</sup>

The example<sup>30</sup> from BBC's Have Your Say is differently formatted from the one on CNN iReport. This story was feature on the center of the main webpage and posed a question, "Will the expenses clamp down work?" Citizen journalists are expected to 'have their say' so to speak and post a comment on that question. As of 14:51 Central Standard Time, the total comments on the story were 4,139. Of that, 3,532 have been published<sup>31</sup>. The comments can be viewed either by 'most recent', or 'readers' recommended'. For a sample, I chose only one, due to space limitations; from each of the view options are here. From the 'readers' recommended' list, this comment by 'saccol' in Norwich, United Kingdom, that has been recommended by 373 people says:

"What a joke, the very people who made the farce that is expense claims and their enormous loopholes for personal gains now are repentant and honest all overnight. These greedy liars are hiding behind as many smoke screens possible in the hope that the public will somehow forget how these expenses were allowed through in the first place. Simple fact I for one don't trust a word anyone of them says anymore. Sack them all and start again."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> See appendix for screenshot of example

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> See method of choosing example under section 2.2

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> 445 comment had been rejected by the moderator

The information available on saccol's profile is that they have commented 23 times and they registered as a user on October 27, 2008.

From the 'most recent' comments, 'AntKnee' posts, "I hope the honest and low claimants get elected for the next 20 years. This user, according to their profiles has commented twice and registered on the site on February 21, 2006. There is no location listed.

While brief and not generating new content to the story, these comments leave a more authentic feel what people think about the issue. It also provides direct views from citizens on a current issue. By being able to view the statistics, it is possible to gauge how interested people are in the issue. The statistics also show that people are reading and responding to news stories.

## **Chapter 4: Global Voices**

### 4.1 Background and Description

Global Voices was founded in 2005. It is located at <a href="www.globalvoicesonline.org">www.globalvoicesonline.org</a>. It began as a blog site, but expanded. It receives support from the Berkman Center at Harvard University, Reuters, The Knight Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation. They also solicit donations on their website. It was set up as something to fill a perceived need. It was created by media professionals and nurtured in an academic environment, not as a citizen's grassroots initiative. However, it appears as a grassroots or alternative media site, especially in comparison to CNN and the BBC. As Chris Salzberg puts it, "Global Voices as a project may be said to be situated between the world of mainstream media and that of user-generated content" (Salzberg 2008).

The Global Voices website is dominated by blogs. There is usually just a photo to go along with the blog and no videos accompany a written story. There are videos, but they are in a separated section that is slightly difficult to find. The preference is given to the written word, rather than more visual elements. This is most likely due to the fact that the contributors are bloggers, or online writers, rather than vloggers, or video bloggers.

The website is set up in sections. The main page clearly highlights important news stories of the day. At the top of the page are links to search the information. The sections are divided by 'regions and countries', 'topics' and 'authors. The main section of the website has 'featured stories' that are fresh. Next to the featured stories they have a map and below the map, links to main stories from different regions of the world. Scrolling down the site's main page a little further, we find a link to donate to Global Voices, links to two other Global

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Co-founders Ethan Zuckerman and Rebecca MacKinnon

Voices sites<sup>33</sup>, special coverage of current events, and recent comments that are highlighted.

The website is laid out in a narrow style with two main columns.

### 4.1.1 Bloggers

As of May 21, 2009, there are 133 active contributors or bloggers. There are 208 contributors listed as not active. The bloggers who write for the site have profiles available when you click on their name. The profile gives one or two sentences about that person, a photo, how many posts they have written and when they joined. Global Voices actively seeks out bloggers from regions or countries that "is ignored by traditional media". While all the authors are volunteers, not everyone can post to the site. It requires first contacting a regional editor. This is different than previous discussion of citizen journalism because there is a process to go through before being able to contribute to the site.

While the bloggers, who are volunteers are screened and registered users, anyone can comment on the blogs. Global Voices also asks for help in what they should link to from their website. They also do take input from readers on if there is a breaking story that should be featured on Global Voices. However, they do not specifically request a lot of user generated content to post to their website.

#### 4.1.2 Goals of the website

The stated goals of Global Voices as stated on their website at

http://globalvoicesonline.org/about/ are:

Call attention to the most interesting conversations and perspectives emerging from citizens' media around the world by linking to text, photos, podcasts, video and other forms of grassroots citizens' media.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> RisingVoices <a href="http://rising.globalvoicesonline.org/">http://rising.globalvoicesonline.org/</a> and Global Voices Advocacy <a href="http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/">http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/</a>

Facilitate the emergence of new citizens' voices through training, online tutorials, and publicizing the ways in which open-source and free tools can be used safely by people around the world to express themselves.

Advocate for freedom of expression around the world and protect the rights of citizen journalists to report on events and opinions without fear of censorship or persecution.

These goals demonstrate a clear mission to direct people as to what is important. "The Global Voices Manifesto frames the goals of the project in terms of the right to free speech and the right of all voices to be heard" (Salzberg 2008). The editors are making decisions about what people should be reading, have access to or at the very least highlighting events going on that are in conjunction with their aims.

Global Voices, besides the stated goals, also has a slogan, "The World is Talking, Are You Listening?" This shows a focus on listening, which is in stark contrast to mainstream media. The organization is interested in conversations from around the world (Salzberg 2008) and highlighting and encouraging discussions about regional issues.

Following from their goals and the blogging community on their website, Global Voices is a type of community media in addition to being a non-profit media outlet. Community media, while encompassing many features, can be defined as, "media that allows for access and participation" (Rennie 2006, 22). Typically community media is non-professional (Rennie 2006, 3). The bloggers fall somewhere between professional and amateurs because of their semi-official status. The bloggers are identified as part-time contributors with the organization, but it is unclear whether they are paid. For this paper they can still be considered citizen journalists. Another feature that Ellie Rennie raises that fits Global Voices' stated goals is that community media often have a small, but specific audience that is interested in information from a different viewpoint (Rennie 2006, 91). It is different from community media in that it is more open and flexible, while still being

centralized and edited. While Global Voices does explicitly not call itself community media, it does share many features of what defines community media such as being non-professional, allowing for access and having a small, specific audience.

Not only does Global Voices showcase blogs from around the world, they also encourage citizen journalism through trainings and tools. Their proactive stance on citizen journalism provides insight on how citizen journalism is valued in grassroots media. While Global Voices is not a traditional media outlet that provides mainstream news information, by providing a space for citizen journalists, they demonstrate that there is value is what citizens' have to report.

## 4.2 Global Voices Sample<sup>34</sup>

The example<sup>35</sup> from Global Voices is the first article featured on the page. It is dated May 22, 2009 even though the website was viewed on May 24, 2009. The title is, "Sri Lanka: Abuse, Disbelief and Bitterness Persist" and was submitted by 'Rezwan'. On Rezwan's profile, it says they have 974 posts and joined on April 30, 2005. Rezwan is from Bangladesh and lives in Germany. The profile provides a link to another website where Rezwan also blogs and a link to email Rezwan directly. Above the article shows how Global Voices has categorized it and it also shows which other languages it is available in. The piece is written in a journalistic style. The piece makes use of other news reports, (and quotes from their story) on the situation and also includes hyperlinks embedded in the articles that take you to additional websites on the issue. It also pulls out significant quotes, has photos and even a video clip to enhance the story. As of May 24, 2009 16:33 CST, there were 3 comments on the story.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> See appendix for screenshot of example

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> See method of choosing example under section 2.2

At the end it states, "The world needs to be aware of the situation and take measures to stop these human rights violations to pave the way for some kind of reconciliation." This quote implies that the author would clearly like to raise awareness of this issue. While not precisely in line with the stated goals of the website, it does fulfill the criteria of calling attention to an interesting perspective and advocating for freedom of expression.

# **Chapter 5: Comparative Analysis of Case Studies**

#### 5.1 Similarities and differences

BBC Have Your Say, CNN iReporter and Global Voices all have some features in common. All three sites place primary importance on citizen's reports of the news. All of them promote the reporter's individual voice. They all give significant space for the story, plus commentary and feedback from other users. The sites all have a loosely defined community of users. To participate, or even leave a comment, some information about the contributors, usually as basic as a name and email is required.

The content varies from site to site. Typically CNN and BBC call for responses on a topic. They might have one or more than one subject on which they are asking citizens to report or comment on. Both CNN and BBC tend to guide the conversation topics and reports. That is not to say that citizen journalists cannot comment or report on any topic of their choosing, but by providing topical questions, the news organizations direct the dialogue. Global Voices, in contrast, does not directly solicit responses on a given topic. Rather it highlights news that it deems important. This is in direct opposition to CNN's system on their website that allows some input from the users to direct the important stories of the day.

CNN iReporter gives the most space for ordinary citizens to contribute. The site almost entirely consists of user-generated content. Global Voices also is dominated by user-generated content. The BBC, while having user content, also directs viewers of the page to its own contributors.

One feature that seems to give a citizen report more reliability is the use of contact

information. Global Voices also has a feature that allows you to directly email the person who wrote the article. CNN iReporters have the option to post contact information on their profile. The BBC, in contrast, does not give any contact information on the people who post comments, photos, articles or videos on their site. The BBC does publish, at least what appears to be, the contributor's real name and location.

A significant difference between the sites is the language usage. Global Voices has material available in many languages, while CNN and BBC maintain all their information in English. While both CNN and BBC have a global audience, Global Voices seeks a global audience to receive the news it highlights; by having material available in many languages, it is more accessible to non-English speakers.

Both CNN and the BBC have broadcast outlets available to them as part of their organization. Both media outlets cross promote material received from citizen journalists not only on their website, but also on their broadcast channels. Global Voices does not have a broadcast channel available to them, but they do promote sister sites of their on the website.

One thing that is common across all websites that has serious implications for consumers of information is the non-categorization of citizen journalistic pieces. On the sites for users there are no labels declaring a piece, commentary, opinion or editorial, report or response. Sometimes it is clear based on there being a definite question posed to the citizen journalist and them answering it. However, none of the sites categorize the pieces submitted. For consumers of this information, it can be misleading. In the case of CNN, they clearly state that they do not check the accuracy of the reports posted. Relying solely on these sites for information can lead to a seriously misinformed public. While it is valuable to be able to

freely express a point of view on a story, editorial control is also valuable for the people who do not critically examine the information they consume. By reviewing some examples of citizen journalism on the websites, we can ascertain the types of content being generated on these sites.

## 5.2 Analysis

What do these examples, the sites and the changing in the news industry mean? One negative normative aspect to participatory media is that there are no standards. This is in direct contrast to professional journalism where there are norms and ethics trained into the journalists themselves and reinforced in a professional environment. Another disadvantage in terms of the quality of information is that with the Internet, information can be hard to verify. On the other hand, the Internet can also be a reference tool for crosschecking facts. Even with these negative aspects, there are some advantages to citizen journalism.

While citizen journalism might not adhere to objective professional journalistic standards, it does provide one side of the story. While their stories might not be the most important aspect of a news story, there is now a space for multiple sides of the story to be heard and dialogues to be generated. No longer is there just the reporter's interpretation of the story; citizen journalism adds another dimension to news stories. As Jane Braaten interprets Habermas, his consensus theory of truth (Braaten 1991, 24) is relevant here. "Mutual rational agreement is...rather an indicator of reliable beliefs, some of which, in the end, may turn out false" (Braaten 1991, 26). This is critical as Habermas emphasizes the value of mutual understanding that is necessary for society and social relations (Braaten 1991, 27). The variations of a story that citizen journalism provides can lead to something that resembles Habermas's consensus theory of truth. Stories are not just interpretive and evaluative at the

level of information presented, but also at the descriptive level. Ideally, a move towards more critical assessments of information by an informed public would take place, alongside the growth of new dimensions of the story presented.

Citizen journalists are also less constrained by restrictions than professional journalists are. They do not have to worry about repeat access or a career, they can pursue the story as they see fit. A major concern about citizen journalists is that they do not have traditional journalism values such as: balance, fairness, accuracy, credibility, instilled in them and their work (Pavlik 2008, 116). This is due in part to a lack of training (Pavlik 2008, 116). Citizen journalists in general, are not likely to attain regular access to politicians, nor the reputation and clout of professional journalists<sup>36</sup>.

One positive aspect of participatory media is that more voices can be heard. The sheer number of people and their capability to put ideas in the public sphere and have a conversation about them is unprecedented. It provides a place for a plurality of options, which modern liberal democratic societies tolerate and encourage.

The example that seems to be the most effective at combining citizen journalism and professional journalism is the BBC. It keeps the material produced by either citizens or BBC reporters separate, but makes use of both in tandem. It is the most complex organization with different branches, and also maintains the most editorial control over citizen journalists submissions. CNN heavily dominates with user content, but often does not direct the reader to its own journalists. Global Voices has a more targeted audience that does not solicit as much commentary or reactions to daily news events, but provides a journalism that bridges the divide between professional and amateur.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> For example David Brooks or Maureen Dowd, *New York Times* editorial journalists

The sites are updated frequently, although Global Voices did not have a lead story from the day the examples were drawn. They are all user friendly, but CNN does seem to be the easiest to provide content. Both Global Voices and the BBC make it easy to comment or provide feedback quickly on stories. This ease of participation not only encourages citizen journalism, but also for professional news organizations, helps them incorporate into their material available.

One question that emerges from this is how do individual stories, blogs, reports or testimonials relate to the power of change? One answer that this paper shows is that it does have an impact on changing how news is created. Another change is the kind of information available to citizens. These sites provide a different look at current events. While they approach it in different ways, there are more viewpoints out there on what is happening and what is news. While Global Voices, the BBC Have Your Say and CNN iReporter provide slightly different approaches to reporting on current events, they have incorporated citizen journalism as a part of that news coverage. While only a small selection of news media outlets online, they suffice in demonstrating the impact of citizen journalism on news organizations.

#### Conclusion

After examining three case studies in depth, some conclusions can be drawn. First, there are a number of dedicated citizen journalists who are contributing on a regular basis to news website. However, they are not likely to replace professional journalists, but they will rather work in tandem with them. Citizen journalists will be adding a new dimension and voice to political issues and current events. They don't replace, but rather enhance professional journalists reports.

Second, while the large media does, to an extent, incorporate citizen journalists into their news organizations, they still keep it at an arms' length. What citizen journalism is doing, rather than being incorporated to news organizations, is making the news industry rethink the definition of news. It is evolving from "a report of recent events", "previously unknown information", "material reported in a newspaper or news periodical or on a newscast", or a "matter that is newsworthy" (Merriam-Webster 1997, 782), to what citizens think is important or events that happen in individual lives. While not complete, the examples discussed in the paper do show the beginnings of a shift in defining news.

This paper examined the impact of citizen journalism on traditional news organizations. This paper drew on theories of participation and Habermas' idea of the public sphere. It also looked at the relationship of technology and the media. Further research could include more online case studies and deeper analysis of the content produced by citizen journalists. The relationship between media and democracy can be explored further. Due to space and time constraints, this paper covered only three examples, but the findings of the impact of citizen journalism on traditional news organizations are significant enough to

justify expanding the research. More potential areas to look at are; changing weekly news magazines, analyzing a larger sample of case studies or more carefully looking at how a news organization links their broadcast material to their online websites.

Initially, this paper held the idea that citizen journalism will grow and lead to a more equal and democratic society. Based on the research here, citizen journalism will not replace traditional media organizations, but rather it will be incorporated in unpredictable ways. One difficulty in assessing the value of online participatory media is that it is still only one method of communication. Books, radio, television have not disappeared, but we do see more overlap and interaction between the forms. While the possibility of citizen journalism could bring more equality to democratic societies, there is not enough research to prove its impact on democracy. Further research might explore the ideas of communicative action and how the Internet contributes to deliberative democracy. Online citizen journalism might provide, in the future, more voices in discussion of democratic values and policies, however, at the moment, it is still maturing and developing.

# **Appendix**

The following pictures are screenshots of CNN iReport, BBC Have Your Say and Global Voices taken from May 23, 2009. There are also the screenshots of the examples discussed in this paper.



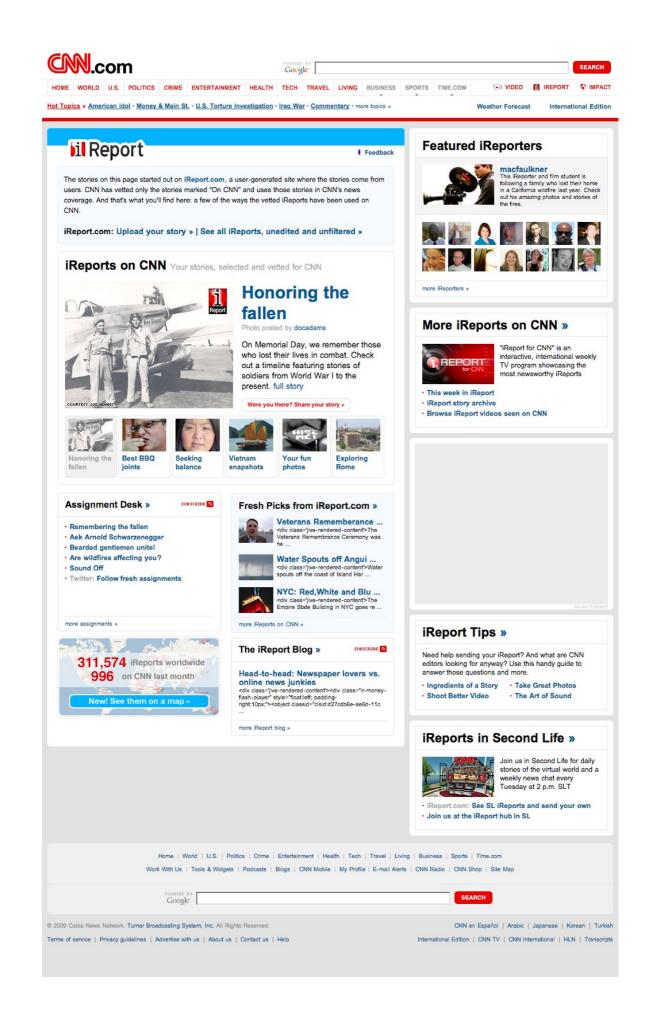
This is a screenshot of <a href="http://www.ireport.com/docs/DOC-262091">http://www.ireport.com/docs/DOC-262091</a> taken on May 24, 2009

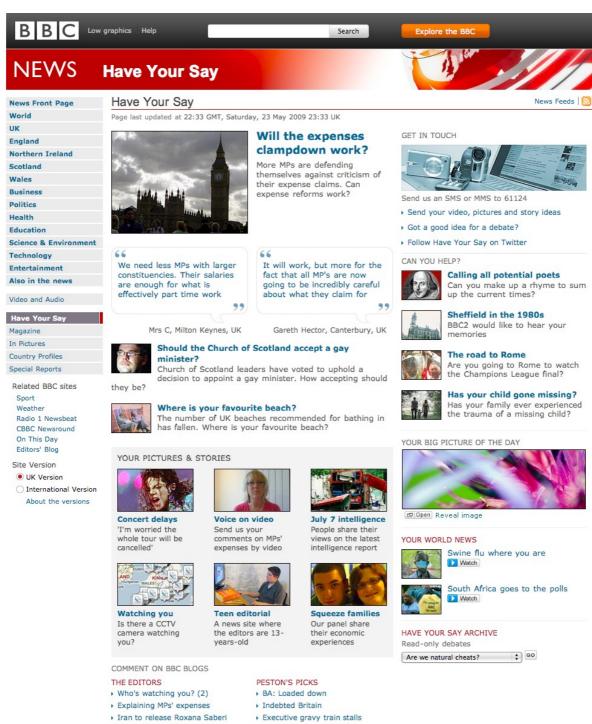


This is a screenshot of <a href="http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk/nol/thread.jspa?">http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk/nol/thread.jspa?</a>
forumID=6470&edition=1&ttl=20090527030103
taken on May 24, 2009



This is a screenshot of <a href="http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/05/22/sri-lanka-abuse-disbelief-and-bitterness-persist/">http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/05/22/sri-lanka-abuse-disbelief-and-bitterness-persist/</a> taken on May 24, 2009





#### NICK ROBINSON'S NEWSLOG

- An equality of shame?
- Back-slapping
- He failed to lead

#### MARK EASTON'S UK

- More institutional decay
- We need windows as well as doors
- Time to do our duty

☆ SKIP TO TOP





Berkman MACARTHUR HIVOS People unlimited Final Knight Foundation

# **Glossary**

blog: short for weblog, is a type of website usually with commentary written by an individual

mashups: information, (can be music, video, text, audio) that is combined and recreated into a new works

**podcasts:** similar to RSS feeds, this is audio or video files that are available to download

social bookmarking: publicly bookmarking a website

social networking: uses social websites to stay in contact with friends and acquaintances

**url:** short for 'uniform resource locator', it is the global address of documents and resources on the world wide web

**viral video:** a video clip that spreads, like a virus, on the Internet, usually through sharing via email, blogs or social media cites

vlog: video blog

wikis: web pages that can be edited communally

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