

July 2009

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Recommended Citation

Hasan, Helen and Hashim, Lina, "What's New in Online News" (2009). *PACIS 2009 Proceedings*. 42.
<http://aisel.aisnet.org/pacis2009/42>

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WHAT'S NEW IN ONLINE NEWS?

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Abstract

Although traditional news services have made some of their products available online since the early 1990s the changes that have taken place in this arena over the past few years has been phenomenal. Distributing news online has a significant impact on the traditional news cycle, the business model of news corporations, the work of journalists and the role of traditional news consumers among the general public. In addition to the online presence of the traditional news media, entirely new online news websites are emerging outside the mainstream media ownership, allowing both professional and amateur journalists a global forum for individual reports and opinions. In this paper, we revisit the results of the first phase of a longitudinal study of online news, conducted two years ago and compare those results with the current state of affairs. The most dramatic change that we are now witnessing in the news industry is the emergence of citizen journalism together with the trend to the convergence of the roles of news producers and news consumers. Here we describe and discuss the lessons learnt from this change and build on these lessons to speculate on where this will take us in the future.

Keywords: Online News, Interactivity, Immediacy, User participation.

1 INTRODUCTION

Online news is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of news and journalism. In the early 1990s, newspapers and other broadcast news providers were just beginning to explore the possibilities of delivering news content to readers via the World Wide Web (WWW) (Deuze 2003). By 2005, reading news online was becoming a regular habit for many people. According to the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) report at that time, the global readership for online newspapers rose by more than 200 percent between 2001 and 2005 (Asia Media, 2006). Since then, not only newspapers publishers but also television and radio stations, magazines, and other publications have constantly improved their presence online. Statistics from the Newspaper Association of America (NAA, 2009) report shows 67.3 million visitors in the year 2008, which is an increase of 12.1 percent over year 2007. Nielsen Online for the NAA also reported that in the fourth quarter of 2008, there were an average of 68.2 million visitors, an 8.6 percent increase, over the same period of 2007, when there were only 62.8 million visitors. In Australia Fairfax Digital (from Fairfax Media Limited Annual Report 2007) claim to be the 'No.1 online news site', and reported over 14.3 million unique browsers per month have visited their online site, which was a growth rate of over 33 percent. An obvious trend is the merging of information and communications technologies and the Internet with all forms of the entertainment and news media. In addition, entirely new online news websites are emerging outside the mainstream traditional news media ownership, allowing both professional and amateur journalists a global forum for individual reports and opinions (see e.g. Connery and Hasan 2005).

Distributing the news online has a significant impact on the traditional news cycle (Hall 2001). For both traditional printed and broadcast news services there is a decreasing need to meet production as deadlines and stories are "not set in type" until the next edition or program. In the online environment journalists can put up one version of the story as soon as it breaks and then continue to revise and update the content as more is known (Flavián and Gurrea 2008). In the same way that digital technology has revolutionised many industries the change in the world of news delivery has been rapid and transformational. What is more, as we will demonstrate in this paper, many online news sites are now discovering that more and more users want to become part of the media conversation. The once static sites of newspaper, radio and television corporations have become increasingly interactive, adding advance features and devices such as news chats and blogs, accepting pictures, video and audio, which allow readers to contribute, to become writers and reporters. In the process, we are seeing growing numbers the public who contribute media rich reports and opinions to news sites thereby creating a participatory flavour of news that is different from the traditional form of one-way broadcast news.

In this paper, we revisit the results of the first phase of a longitudinal study of online websites of newspapers, conducted two years ago and compare those results with the current state of affairs. This study demonstrates how the revolution in the functionality and use of relevant web-based technologies has introduced a radically different operational and business model in the news industry and the profession of journalism. Here we describe and discuss the lessons learnt from this change and build on these lessons to speculate on where this will take us in the future.

2 WHAT IS ONLINE NEWS?

As cultures evolve, it is reasonable to expect the form of news in print and broadcast to evolve. According to Martin and Copeland (2003), if society recognises its need and desire for news, and it retains the concept of a newspaper, it will surely have to accept the fact of an evolving format for this durable news conduit. The same is true for all forms of news media, principally radio and television, which have traditionally operated in broadcast mode where there was a clear distinction between the news provider and the news consumer. The research on which this paper is based began with a study of the "going online" trend where newspaper corporations, firstly set up websites, and then improved the sites to provide interactivity on those sites. Rapid recent changes to the Internet presence of the

news industry as a whole have driven this research into a broader focus where changes to the whole industry brought about by developments of information and communications technologies are examined. This section of the paper looks at the phenomena that initiated the research. It reviews those characteristic that led to the first expansion of newspapers into the online arena and draws a comparison between the new and old forms of news.

In general, online newspapers layout is different from print. Traditional print newspapers placed the most important story at the top of the front page. The allocation of space to an item of news, the size of the headlines, the photos used, the placement on the page, and the page on which story appears varies with the editor's preference. This is unlike online news, where the first few sentences of only a few top stories are placed on the home page at any one time but represented with variation of pictures, videos, and audios that are changed and frequently as new stories break. Online newspapers then offers the full story on separate pages reached through hyperlinks (either within the story text or as a sidebar). Sub-lists organised at the top or side of the front page are used to link to items under headings such as, politics, entertainment, international news, sports and weather. The links may also lead readers to related stories on the current topic that would enlighten readers revealing the interconnected nature of many events at the local, national, or international level (Eveland et al. 2004).

According to Flavián and Gurrea (2008), the use of online news is characterised by increased speed to reach the reader, a much lower cost in distribution information, the ability to update news constantly, and to establish more direct contact and interaction with users. For all these reasons, reading online news has become increasingly popular and newspaper organisations are providing an increasing range of online services. Indeed, the Nielson Online report shows that more and more people are visiting the Web to read newspapers. For example, the top 10 United States (US) online newspapers have increased readership by 27 percent from 199.6 million in December 2007 to 252.7 million in December 2008 (2008). The NAA report (NAA, 2009) states that users now visit online newspapers for an average of 45 minutes a month.

People are turning to the Web for news that is rich and instantaneous. Amongst the distinctive characteristics of the digital medium, compared to analogue media such as the newspaper, are interactivity, convergence of pictures, moving images, text and sound into one medium of distribution and, finally, immediacy, Karlsson (2007). Karlsson defined immediacy as virtually no lag between when information is received or created at a news producer and when the information is passed on to the news consumer. Immediacy to Massey and Levy (1999) is when web news sites provide the most immediate information. What readers need is news, of global and local happenings and fast-breaking events, updated constantly, throughout the day. For Bucy (2004) immediacy is a set of features that lend a sense of "nowness" and real-time urgency. Similarly, Eriksen and Ihlström (2000) described immediacy as 'live' reporting that the Web affords in provision of news in a continuous pattern.

In contrast, one of the other advantages of having the news on the Web is the easy access to archived news. These archives can be from broadcast, television, print or online news which now can be captured and kept on the Web. The presence of the archival features permit readers to automate (filter) the delivery of preferred news content (Massey 2000).

Content plays an extremely important role in online news. 'Content is king' is a well known slogan quoted from Huizingh (2000 p.124). According to Bucy (2004), content and structural features of messages may compel audience attention, increase viewer arousal, enhance memory, and impact subjective evaluation. At that time, 2004, Bucy elaborate on content elements in four broad categories of information: text elements (links to full news stories, press release, newsperson biographies, and campaign issue positions), photographs (photos of news reporters, anchors, and personalities, news sources, news events, political candidates, and other people and events), features that lend a sense of timeliness and immediacy to the page (date or time-stamped news stories, news ticker with current headlines, indication of new content, date or time of last update), and network presence items (network or corporate parent logo or organisation name in Web address).

Besides content elements, Bucy also posited interactive features into four categories: commercial transactions (for example, forms to buy memorabilia, donations or register to vote online, mechanisms

for volunteering, and community activism), interpersonal communication (feedback forms; email links to reporters and staff, presence of chat rooms, forums, bulletin boards, and other online discussions), content interactivity (multimedia), for example as, instant polls or surveys, games, puzzles, and contests, photos or graphics used as links, links to audio and video (archived or live), related sites, newsletters, news digests and listservs, links in news stories, emails postcards and stories, searchable database, downloadable graphics, and wallpapers, other forms and links. Lastly, information accessibility items that consists of search engines, indexes or lists of helpful links, a help page or forums, FAQ list, a site map, the provision of content in different languages, schedules or programming information, condensed information or story summaries, the ability to customise information displays (personalisation) and delivery .

According to Bucy (2004) media organisations may stand to benefit by recognising the nonmonetary contributions of online news to the broader news mission, of which there are at least three major types – enhanced coverage (‘hyperlocal’ coverage and updates throughout the day, offers more consumers more control over the news, customised information delivery, other features that engage users on an individual level), include, brand loyalty (the primary purpose of an online news site is to increase viewer loyalty to a station and its services – cultivate by adding more interactive features to invite more involvement and dialogue), and media credibility (as audience tend to pay more attention to and become reliant on media they consider credible and reliable) .

Up until the last couple of years, the majority of online news sites exhibited the characteristics just described but were still dominated by the traditional divisions of roles into news providers on the one hand and news consumers on the other. The next section of the paper summarises the results of research conducted by the authors in 2006-2007 involving a content analysis methodology focusing on the interactivity newspaper websites in Australia. This will be used as the basis of comparison with changes to the level of interaction between news providers and consumers that have emerged since then concerning user participation in news websites.

3 THE CONTENT OF NEWS WEBSITES IN 2006-7

A suitable method to study issues of online news and online journalism is that of systematic website content analysis. As McMillan (2000, 2008) stresses, content analysis techniques in a dynamic environment offer unique perspective to researchers of the WWW. The web site content analysis reported here examined twelve websites in Australia which originated from the major print-based newspapers. Two different assessments took into place; the first snapshot was taken in autumn 2006 and the second was taken in autumn 2007. The content analysis was structured by an adaptation of Heeter’s (1989) six dimensions of interactivity: complexity of choice, effort users must exert, responsiveness to the user, monitoring of information use, ease of adding information, and facilitation of interpersonal communication. This study examined and then redefined Heeter’s dimensions of interactivity into five major interactivity features subsequently used to collect data from Australian online newspapers’ home pages, which were:

1. content availability and choice: value proposition (news links placed at the home page, related news items, news updates, news in audio, video, and pictures, archives, and news alerts), and peripheral value proposition (sitemap, search engine, choice of languages, advertisements, graphs and/or charts, jobs, weather updates, and infotainment like games, polls, contests, cartoons, and entertainment guide),
2. communication opportunity: sessional (chat room, video conference, games), semi-permanent (Emails, forums, opinions letters, and bulletins), and permanent communication (web blogs),
3. effort of users: easy to navigate (offer registration before retrieve news, getting news with single click and multi clicks), and connectedness (offer links within same subdirectories and other sites),
4. responsiveness: user response time (communication between user and reporter/editor), and system response time (time taken in retrieving news),

5. customisation and management of information: personalisation (“custom make” news to suit reader’s need), hits counter, and privacy (clear statements of privacy policy act, user’s security and access to the collected information, shared third party or partners, and contact details).

The first significant finding of the analysis was that content availability and choice was the most significant element of interactivity features found on the websites of the top Australian online newspapers of the time. All twelve newspapers showed an increase in the amount of news on their homepage over the two snapshot views although not all top stories provide relevant links within the text. Archives and news alerts were the other most available elements in the Australian online newspapers of the time. Most offered both internal and external search engines some with in-house search engines while others used those offered by Yahoo. The majority of the online newspapers provided user input channels like Letters to Editor and Feedback columns and some provided communication opportunity for readers to interact and share opinions with semi permanent discussions capability. However, no chat rooms or reporter’s direct email associated with news articles were found in this study. Responsiveness, as determined by system response time and user’s response time, were rated in medium category. At that particular year and time, many were not clear on stating their privacy policy for customisation and management of information.

The results of this Australian study were not particularly surprising and in accord with similar developments of newspaper websites across the world at the time. The initial detailed findings of this study has been published elsewhere (Hashim et al. 2007). The impression was that the newspaper industry was just beginning to feel threatened by changes that the Internet was bringing to all those in businesses associated with the provision of information. While unsure exactly what they needed to do to retain viable operations in the face of this perceived threat, newspaper companies were willing, though somewhat begrudgingly, to yield to the demand from a growing cohort of readers for the trend to the interactivity that a website can provide. At that time some mistakes were made. The Los Angeles Times experimented with a Wiki editorial and invited readers to collaborate online to add facts or update information. This ‘Wikitorial’ only lasted three days because a few readers had posted obscene photographs on the site. The newspaper had to put the website out of commission because they could not prevent future disruptions (Shepard 2005).

In the two years since the study was undertaken the trend has, however, intensified and expanded. The rapid adoption and popularity of the social technologies of Web 2.0 has laid a platform for increased user participation in the production and distribution of news any where and any time. The following section of the paper describes some Australian and International examples of these.

4 WHAT HAS ONLINE NEWS TO OFFER IN 2009?

The message of this paper emphasises the transformational changes that are currently occurring in the information industries with the rise of Web 2.0 technologies. This change has made it impossible to continue the content analysis of our study using the same interactivity criteria so we have not attempted to do so in detail. Over the past of two years, we have generally observed that the newspaper web sites of our study have consolidated their importance and their level of interactivity. This has included the use of personal web logs (blogs); multimedia content including video and audio reports, pop-up advertising, repurposed short-form classifieds, or digital-expanded classifieds, personalised news choices based on topics and/or keywords, aggregated news from other sources, as well as expanded letters to the editor, user comments, and discussion forums. This demonstrates what many researchers have been called as the ‘evolution of the online newspaper’ (Domingo et al. 2008, Greer and Mensing 2003, Sääksjärvi and Santonen 2002).

In the major Australian newspapers we have studied, there was a trend towards standardising the design of the syndicated outlets so that more effort could be made on giving them a more professional status. For example, Fairfax Media as Fairfax Digital in Australia merged with Rural Press Limited, Trade Me and stuff.co.nz in New Zealand. This merger created a large integration of media news company across Australia, New Zealand, America, and worldwide (Fairfax Media Limited Annual

Report 2007). This emphasises the traditional disinclination between the corporate news providers and the public news consumers, and so may miss the boat in the current environment where there is a sharp change in the consumers' definition of what is 'news' (Outing 2008).

The most notable trend in the websites of the major Australian newspapers, following on from the 2006-2007 study, is that the dominant syndicates such as Fairfax (see Fairfax Digital¹) have a common production regime for all their sites with a professional corporate look and feel. They have included up to date features such as mobile and RSS feeds as well as linked to sites such as 'Myspace'. They also have retained features for reader input such as Letters to Editor and Feedback columns to which have been added blogs. Most of the journalists working for the major news syndicates have their own official or independent blogs. With all this obvious modernisation, however, the model remains that of distinct and separate roles for news provider and news consumers, with the big news paper companies still in control of news process and the work of the journalist. Nevertheless, outside the big corporate news media companies, the world is moving on. Many of the first images of world events are seen on 'Flickr' or 'Youtube' well before the 'official' media pick them up.

In the year 2009, large numbers of members of the public, who traditionally made up the community of news readers, are not only Internet savvy but avid users of Web 2.0 social technologies such as 'Myspace', 'Facebook', 'Meetup', 'FriendFeed', and 'Twitter'. Such users wanted more from news web sites than they did even two years ago and the online news sites have now discovered these latest trends. According to one journalist in Editor & Publisher (Outing 2008), the very definition of 'news' is changing and he urges newspapers to serve the complete news need of consumers, from the big picture events to high school friends. For these users, news is located within their social circle or social network, serving what he designates as the 'social networks addiction'. For him, the 'social networks addicts' want global-to-micro-personal news as well as news about the people they know.

Users of news web sites in 2009 wanted to become part of the media conversation to the extent that the news industry is now able to leverage users as reporters or content creators and combine this with conventional online news. The concept of participatory journalism (Domingo et al. 2008, Paulussen et al. 2007) encapsulate how everyday citizens are participating in the professional news making process.

Some online news broadcasters have put into practice the user-generated content or social networks addiction as predicted by Outing (2008). In Australia for example, the Australian Broadcast Corporation (ABC) online featuring 'Twitter' in three different modes: Feed, Active, and Hashtags. For instance, the ABC News Breakfast Show (from 6am to 9am every weekday) is using Active Twitter to allow users to actively interact and participate. Twitter is a mini-blog application that provides a free service for getting people connected via texting online or mobile phone. Besides the ABC News Breakfast Show, the ABC also features '774Melbourne', '612Brisbane' and 'ABCunleashed' in Active Twitter mode. Meanwhile, ABC News Network is an example of a news service that provides on Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds or a collection of RSS and other automated feeds to send out news updates. Elsewhere, the program the 'Howardyears' is a case where Hashtags inserted in a word or phrase by means of prefixed #, are used to encode Twitter messages.

Twitter is basically owned by an American podcast company and started to operate in year 2006. It offers a social networking and micro-blogging service that reaches the user by posting text messages, restricted to a maximum length of 140 characters. Users would need to sign in to Twitter.com, and set pool of preferred friends to enable them to communicate by just sending text messages or updates via Short Message Service (SMS) and/or Multimedia Message Service (MMS), which can be received through mobile phones and/or the WWW. There has been a tremendous growth of people who have started using this application as a tool for mass communication and collection news generation. In fact, Wikipedia claims that Twitter has reached about 4 to 5 million users (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>).

¹ <http://www.fairfax.com.au/>

How does it apply to online news? People who use Twitter are able to share their thoughts, lives, opinions, and links on any topic. It can also act as an advertisement tool or advocacy for community causes. Users are capable of doing so either by typing it through the Internet or communicating via their mobile phones. This is a new trend of how people interact with 'the news', expanding the experience to cover news from global significant views to the micro-personal aspects.

Besides the large public ABC organisation, in Australia the most participatory and innovative use of the Web for news generation comes from independent sites such as Cricky.com.au (<http://www.crikey.com.au/>). Their motto, "Telling what they won't" indicates the rebellious approach they take. This is similar to Slashdot.org, an American company which serves up millions of pages to online readers with the simple mission, "News for Nerds. Stuff that Matters" (<http://slashdot.org/>). 'Cricky' mainly sponsors number of blogs where debate represents a broad range of views from the public. News sites such as these spearhead the trend to citizen journalism and democratisation of news content.

Domination by the big news media organisations in Australia has meant that there was a decline in local news content delivered by the public print and broadcast companies. To counter this, the Australian government has tried to regulate the industry by demanding a certain percentage of local content in the news offering of the big media syndicates. The TV networks have adhered to these regulations mainly through the news on their websites. For example, 'Iprime' local news provides local content at (<http://www.iprime.com.au/>) for the Seven network. However, although these contain links called "send us your stories" and "send us your photos", there is no indication that there is much contribution.

An international example of where there is obvious active user participation in generating online news is IReport, from Cable News Network (CNN) (<http://edition.cnn.com/ireport/Slashdot>). CNN.com, best known as CNN Interactive, is an American news web site. Based on Wikipedia, it is one of the most popular news web sites. CNN Interactive first introduced IReport.com in August, 2006 and complete launch in March 2008 by using beta version. It features user-submitted news photos and videos (non-edited version that does not have to be screened by editors); send directly by users from all ages with different professions and backgrounds, and it is viewed world wide. It is now featured as a program on CNN cable TV which is viewed around the world and no doubt plays a reciprocal role in getting more people to contribute to IReport.

This initiative provides an opportunity for people to contribute their own news happening around their place, stories, and ideas through pictures and videos. This encourages people to participate to news and become public journalists. Most importantly, their news can be instantaneously watched on the web site and will be viewed globally. Once a critical mass is achieved these movements become self-sustaining at a low cost for either the large corporate media outlet or independent provider.

5 DISCUSSION: THE CURRENT STATE AND THE FUTURE OF ONLINE NEWS

Since their inception the Internet and digital technologies have been responsible for the periods of spectacular revolutionary developments among more gradual evolutionary changes in many aspects of human activity. There is currently a world wide phenomenon of social change fuelled by new Web 2.0 technology. The revolutionary change that the news industry is facing today is not unlike that in other information based industries, such as education and libraries, or industries with digital products such as in music, magazine and book publishing. Our study indicates that over the past few years, the rapid take up of the phenomenon of social networking is resulting in a dramatic revolutionary change in the news industry (Outing 2008). In this section of the paper we discuss what we see has happened, what is happening now and then use this to look towards how this will play out in the future.

We began our research with a study of twelve Australian Online Newspapers, the results of which demonstrated the growth and development of the interactivity in online newspapers from the year of 2006 and 2007. This is consistent with previous online news research results from Bucy et al. (1999),

Bucy(2004), Kenny et al. (2000), Li (1998), and Şanlıer and Tağ (2005). The study investigated interactivity based on five concepts, derived from Heeter (1989) namely, content availability and choice, communication opportunity, effort of users, responsiveness, and customisation and management of information were used to measure the front page features from online newspapers. The results showed that the interactivity of online newspapers not only allow users to link to local related news and relevant sites, access original source material, audio or visual materials, archives, online discussion groups and newspapers' staffs, but also permit users to create their own news stories in a limited way. New levels of control give readers the luxury to determine which stories they want read and in what order (d'Haenens et al. 2004).

Some traditional news organisations (such the TV broadcasters CNN and ABC mentioned above) and alternative news sites are sensing the consumers' gravitation to user-contributed content. These news organisations are realising that, this is part of a major shift in the industry, and they are starting to get serious about efforts to include the community in the news process.

It is useful to position these changes on Bucy's (2004 p.103) observation that online news is characterised by three different generations. During the first generation, of Net news, in the early to mid-1990s, where news organisations produced simple hypertext pages and print media learned how to take their efforts online. The second generation, from the mid-1990s to decade's end, moved online journalism to a more independent footing, engaging in original newsgathering and production. Continuous updates became more common, streaming audio and video appeared, news become more visual and in-depth, and interactive chats and online discussions emerged, creating news communities. In the third generation Internet news sites leveraged improved interactive applications that create an entirely new integrated news experience to engage consumers.

The phenomenon of user participation and diversification of sources of online news that is happening now could be seen as a fourth generation of online news. In many areas, readers who were once just news consumers from the general public are now taking control of providing and generating the news. Not only that, what we are seeing now is 'the era of convergence' news provider and news consumer as well as between news and a variety of technologies, for example more news publications include users' podcast, videos and photos often from mobile devices. Both reporting and reading news can happen not only at home using desktop computer or personnel computer but people can also access to news when they are 'on the move' via their notebook (wireless), podcast, and mobile phones. This convergence radically alters the fixed notions of time and place that governed the traditional news cycle. The blurred roles of news media owners, journalists and members of the public are leading to new business models in the news industry. The Internet provides support for multinational companies enabling global control of media outlets by a single organisation, such as News Limited. However, the Internet also enables global reach from the micro-business particularly in an area such as news where the product is digital. This allows individual voices to be heard world-wide and the social networking phenomenon enables these individual to link up and have considerable influence. This opportunity for global networked advocacy is a revolutionary aspect of the Internet as there are currently issues that require coordinated global attention in the areas of climate change and the financial crisis.

The emergence of each new generation of online news is a case of revolutionary change that happens almost overnight. Comparing the spread of fashion to viral epidemics, Gladwell (2000) uses the concept of a 'tipping point' to provide some insight into why this modern type of change happens the way it does. He observes how little causes can have big effects where "change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment" (Gladwell 2000 p. 9). Examples in the case of online news include Bucy's generation one where there was a sudden epidemic of newspaper websites and in generation three most began to include interactive media. The fourth generation that we propose follows the 'tipping point' in the world-wide use of social technologies. These had evolved in popularity, particularly with the young generation Y, over some time but suddenly appeared in the mainstream when their legitimate use for social networking became noticeable by the rest of us.

This leads us to speculate where this will go in the future. What will be the next 'tipping point' and when will it occur? Will we soon have a fifth generation of online news or will the rate of change slow for a while to let the fourth generation stabilise? The Internet is a great enabler of social change

and there is ample evidence that the Internet is a fruitful tool for change of, and through, news online. One study of Spiegel Online (2008), the most popular online resource for news in Germany, claimed that by 2018, the Web could be the 'newspaper' in Germany and the printed newspaper will have become obsolete. However, as Cassidy (1999 p.57) noted a decade ago:

"Newspapers are an industry that was supposed to go away when television came out; it was supposed to go away when cable came out; and it was supposed to go away when the Internet came out. But it's still going strong."

Franklin (2008) claims that newspapers are obliged to operate in increasingly competitive and fragmented markets for readers and advertising revenues and is hypersensitive to developments in media technology. This threat has always motivated newspapers constant changes to their design and contents to meet readers' shifting requirements for news and its presentation. Hence, many media experts are convinced that it is by using the Internet's added values, online media can distinguish themselves from their traditional counterparts, and it is this distinction that might be the precondition for all readers and advertisers to embrace online news media. The paradox of today's online news production lies in the fact that traditional news organisations follow a defensive media strategy on the Internet (motivated by profit concerns), in which online journalists cannot take full advantage of those internet-specific features that might make their website more 'valuable' and, thus more profitable. Convergence of digital media merging broadcast and interactive modes, as well as static and mobile sources and receivers is making the news landscape much more complex and dynamic.

The most emphatic 'tipping point' that we are currently observing is the one involving user participation in the news reporting and production business. At the same time journalists are engaging users through media such as blogs, both within their employer's online space and outside in their personal social spaces. So, there are revolutionary changes to the business model of the news corporation, to the work and life of the journalist, and to the role of the public. News corporations can certainly lower costs in the online environment with not only a reduction in the capital need to print and distribute printed copy but also using the unpaid public as news gathers. As in the traditional news cycle disappears, the work of the journalist become less structured and could be a 24/7 activity. Alongside the large media corporations and the professional journalist, there is now a growing role in the online news business for the individual independent commentator and the amateur reporter. This place a greater onus on the news consumers to be discerning in their interpretation of the information they receive. While independent sources are not 'official' and therefore, their authenticity suspect so are many, particularly young people, disenfranchised by the big-business controlled 'official' news syndicates. Dealing with and moving beyond this speculation may be one of the biggest challenges for new media professionals and scholars alike.

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