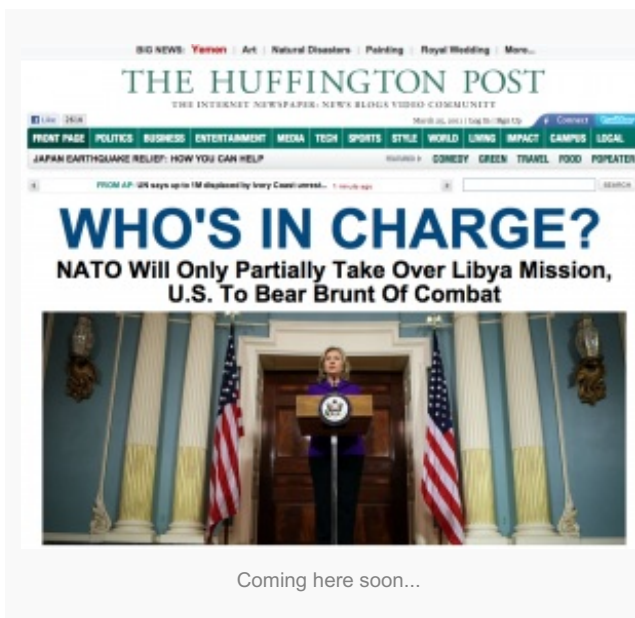


Why Is HuffPo Coming Here?

blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/03/25/why-is-huffpo-coming-here/

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Is the launch of a UK Huffington Post a serious venture, or is this just a half-hearted attempt to turn AOL's latest acquisition into a global franchise?

On the face of it there isn't much going for the idea. The online Guardian already provides a place where liberals get their news and they can fight with non-liberals on Comment Is Free.

There is already a relatively fecund political blogosphere in Britain. There's ConservativeHome, LabourList and LibDemVoice for the Party people – and a range of other more individualistic blogs that range from the scurrilous/investigative (Guido Fawkes) to the high-minded, academic OpenDemocracy.

And mainstream media in this country has always been much more lively than the US. We have a partisan press with a history of entertaining and occasionally insightful comment.

We now have people like the august John Rentoul as well as the less-august Richard Littlejohn bouncing their ideas off Twitter. I think it has effectively turned them into bloggers – both micro and macro. Even from behind their paywall, view-mongers like David Aaronovitch and Caitlin Moran provide acres of comment that makes much of the HuffPo output look rather staid and poorly-written.

What about HuffPo's claim to be a breaking news site? Well, in the UK most news websites have long gone 'live' updating content pretty much around the clock.

So will it work as an aggregator? Well, I generally use a combination of Twitter and some RSS feeds or even good old-fashioned email alerts to keep abreast of who I want to hear from. And of course, there's Google Reader etc to help customise your sources. What do you do? Do you yearn for Arianna to sort your online life out for you?

I am not sure HuffPo will be many people's home page. I think most news-conscious Brits tend to have a favourite newspaper – or the BBC – that will be their online starting point.

There are already specialist aggregator sites like PoliticsHome that provides an excellent platform to get all your Westminster-related news. It pulls in feeds from blogs etc very neatly compared to the sprawling mess that is the HuffPo front page. In addition it provides good insight from its own people like [Paul Waugh](#). Though you do have to pay if you want the premium service.

So please tell me what I am missing here? Is it that HuffPo has even lower costs than Comment Is Free (which still pays contributors). Will a UK edition have its own life (and staff) or will it be a spin-off?

Is it the non-political content that really gets the traffic and makes the money for HuffPo? Could it be that Arianna is aiming for the Mail Online's market in fashion, celebs and health rather than the broadsheets' political and international coverage?

It would be crazy to underestimate Arianna Huffington. Like Rupert Murdoch she has an aura of invincibility. People assume that what they do will succeed. But remember, Murdoch makes mistakes (MySpace).

Huffington did brilliantly to get her Post up and running and succeeding. I wrote approvingly of it four years ago in my book about innovative networked journalism. She got a very good price from AOL and they are obviously determined to take the brand to the world. They need to if they are to make serious money. As AOL's Tim Armstrong pointed out, the US market is rich, but it still makes up only 4% of the world's population.

Arianna and the HuffPo is not Google but it is more than a niche media brand. It has international profile. But whether it can really triumph outside of her heartlands of blue America remains to be seen. In a sense, this is a test of just how global digital journalism has become.

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