

# Quality In A Networked Age: Relevance

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/06/02/quality-in-networked-journalism-relevance/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/06/02/quality-in-networked-journalism-relevance/)

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On June 11th we host a [major conference on the Value of Networked Journalism](#) here at the LSE with some top media names who are revitalising journalism with new media technologies and innovative participatory, interactive production processes. You are welcome to [attend](#). We will also be publishing a new report on Networked Journalism at that conference.

In the run up to the conference a [book is being published in Sweden](#) that looks at the idea of Quality in contemporary news media. For me, Quality is one way of expressing value so I was delighted to be able to contribute to that volume. You can see [other extracts from my chapter](#) on Quality in Networked Journalism [here](#) and you can buy the book itself [here](#).

This is one section that looks at the idea of Relevance and tries to sum up what I mean by Quality.

## **Relevance as Quality**

Relevance is perhaps the most radical aspect of networked journalism. It means much more than simply having a direct bearing upon a matter or simply providing 'what the public wants'. In networked journalism relevance is conditioned by public participation and connectivity to produce journalism that is editorially much more material or germane to the issues. In its distribution it is also much more proximate to the public. It seeks to be where public discourse happens rather than creating a discrete space called news.

Editorial diversity and Connectivity are what create the circumstances for this kind of relevance. But relevance is a strategic imperative as well. It means creating structures that are genuinely open and engaged. That means allowing for transparency and accountability as part of the editorial system rather than as a regulatory addition. It means turning news into social media.

A case study in relevance: *Mumsnet*

*Mumsnet* is an independent, commercial parenting website that has achieved much greater relevance for its (large) target audience.<sup>[1]</sup> Its range of subjects are very germane to the concerns of mothers and fathers. Indeed, the selection of topics for discussion is largely self-determined. However, the tiny editorial team curates the site to stimulate activity and to promote more substantial exchanges. This is partly to generate traffic to attract advertising. However, it is also because *Mumsnet* is more than just a message board forum.

It also has specialist news, public information, issue-based campaigns and even a book club. If people's parenting lives are multi-faceted then the journalism about it must be, too. It has online web-chats and recipes but it also has off-line local meeting groups. So *Mumsnet* is a place to find a nanny or to fight for improved health care. It is also a place where top politicians love to come to talk online to a key sector of the electorate. <sup>[2]</sup>

By becoming more relevant to this significant community, *Mumsnet* has provided a connection that provides a quality of communication that is gold-dust for out of touch politicians and the future of news.

## **Conclusion**

It has to be repeated that in my version of networked journalism, not all of this simply replaces the old definition of quality journalism. Networked journalism builds on many of the traditional functions: to report, analyse and comment on our world. It returns to old (and neglected) virtues: independence, oversight, and human interest. It can enhance existing genres such as political reporting and specialist practices such as investigation. However, it offers more and it insists on change.

It connects journalism to the new forms of networked communication that are coming to form public discourse. It

taps into the knowledge and experience of that public. As it does so it creates a different relationship with the public based on a new contract of trust and value. That is one way to describe the nature of 'quality' networked journalism.

Here's a further claim. It adds value in creating a journalism that is useful, democratic and progressive. It reaffirms the idea that should be the underpinning of all 'quality' journalism. Good journalism is good for society.

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[1] <http://www.mumsnet.com/>

[2] <http://www.mumsnet.com/onlinechats/index>

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