

Editorial Diversity: Quality Networked Journalism

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/03/15/editorial-diversity-quality-networked-journalism/

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This is a second draft extract from a paper I am writing on the idea of 'Quality' in Networked Journalism. Read Part One [here](#). Comments more than welcome!

Networked Journalism creates 'quality' by adding value to news in three ways.

1. Editorial diversity: it creates more substantial and varied news
2. Connectivity and Interactivity: it distributes news in different ways
3. Relevance: it relates to audiences and subjects in ways that create new ethical and editorial relationships to news

Public participation through networked journalism also adds economic value to the news media in the sense that the contribution of the public literally creates content – usually for free – from the citizen. Journalism must be one of the few industries where the consumer volunteers material and services to the producer.



A network of quality?

Counter-intuitively, the abundance of disintermediated information may also give quality networked journalism a market advantage. The plethora of data sources and competing platforms and outlets means there will be a premium (or 'freemium') for authoritative and trustworthy curating and filtering of news. The demand for transparent and relevant mediation will increase. Networked Journalism as a kind of intelligent and pro-active engine will create quality by adding value to search. BBC News Online, for example, has already become a kind of global topical reference work.

1. Editorial Diversity

There are more diverse sources of news available online than was ever the case in the analogue and print world. Even allowing for the aggregation and duplication online there are more channels of information containing more material. Floating on that rising tide are more specialist, expert and informed sources of data and commentary.

There are also more ways of witnessing our world more rapidly and comprehensively than ever before. Again, among that almost infinite crowd of local and global citizens as reporters are more varied voices and more knowledgeable minds. If we put all that under the heading of bloggers and

citizen journalists we have much of value amongst the mass of communication.

As an incredibly rough rule of thumb I generally estimate that only 1% of the public will participate at any given time, although it may be a different 1% at any given time. And within that contribution perhaps only 10% is of much value in terms of adding quality. However, that is still an enormous addition to our knowledge and understanding. It is what runs Wikipedia.

If you take the UK *Daily Telegraph* that equates to 700 people's worth of contribution – the equivalent of an extra newsroom. Not surprisingly, even a historically conservative news organisation like *The Daily Telegraph* has invested in building those communities by hosting readers' own blogs and cultivating photographers amongst its readers. When combined with new ways of working by the networked professional journalist this can have exponential effects on value and the quality of what is produced.

Mainstreaming Diversity

More diverse participation in the creation of journalism means that the agenda of professional media is broadened. *The Huffington Post* group blog, for example, has a more varied editorial outlook than that traditional 'liberal' newspaper *The New York Times*. This helps balance the growth in the Right-Wing blogosphere in America as well as the rise of conservative radio and cable such as *Fox News*. However, perhaps its most significant contribution was mainstreaming networked journalism. Its bloggers are part of a wider platform that combines agency and citizen news reporting, commentary and analysis in a very interactive way.

The Huffington Post editorial strategy of much more open commissioning of material gives easier access to its platform to more diverse authors including politicians, civil society groups and campaigners, as well as individuals, alongside traditional media content. The audience then help decide, in part at least, how stories are prioritised.

Guerilla Journalism

I am not suggesting that *The Huffington Post* is some sort of ideal model but it also shows how new forms of news-gathering are adding diversity to journalism. Its 'On The Bus' coverage by citizen journalists of the Presidential campaign helped nudge the mainstream agenda. Mayhill Fowler's scoops where she reported 'accidental' statements by both Barrack Obama and Bill Clinton unsettled American journalism commentators and mainstream journalists. Regardless of the merits of the stories they were precursors of a kind of 'guerrilla' journalism where politicians can no longer rely on the complicity of the political correspondents.

So we see how the news industry is forced to open itself up to greater editorial diversity. It is also a way of increasing social and geographical diversity in an industry which in the UK was in danger of becoming more concentrated in its makeup and less creative in its production.

However, as BBC News executive Peter Horrocks has said, this influx of more disparate material raises serious issues for 'quality' journalists about traditional editorial values such as objectivity and authority. If the public is participating then how do you prevent bias, subjectivity or unrepresentative content?

I would argue that the benefits of improved diversity far outweigh the risks. Traditional journalism with its more narrow production base was also given to a particular view of the world. It is one function of the networked professional journalist to act as a filter and facilitator. For example, it is one thing to allow people to post or comment on a website, but there is no reason why there can't still be a moderation policy. As we shall see, trust is secured by connectivity and relevance, not by excluding the public from participation.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2008/01/value_of_citizen_journalism.html

That is also Horrocks' conclusion – hence the injunction to his journalists to embrace social media
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/pda/2010/feb/10/bbc-news-social-media>

Here's some evidence for that rule: http://www.churchofcustomer.com/2006/05/charting_wiki_p.html

<http://my.telegraph.co.uk/>

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mayhill-fowler>

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