

# McCain 'scandal' – media democracy in action

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Whatever you think of the merits of the [New York Times](#) story about John McCain's 'affair' with a female lobbyist you have to admire how the newspaper has responded to the flak. It is [inviting](#) readers to go online to discuss the story with the journalists.

This is a terrific example of [networked journalism](#) in action: the journalists using new technology to make themselves and their working methods more transparent and accountable.

Here's an example of the [exchanges](#) that have already been published:

*Q. I must say that the McCain article left me embarrassed for your paper. So little substance, but trumpeted prominently as though you somehow had the goods on him or were raising burning questions. It makes it look like your reporters or editors had an ax to grind. I hope they didn't. Question: Do you read the coverage of your coverage? Did you see the piece at slate.com [ridiculing your paper](#) for this? Doesn't it smart?*

— Brian Mullaney

*A. I think we all expected the reaction to be intense. We knew from our experience last year, when word leaked out we were pursuing this story, that Senator McCain's operatives would set out to change the subject by making the story about The New York Times rather than about their candidate. That's a time-honored tactic for dealing with potentially damaging news stories. We knew some readers would disagree with our decision to publish this information. After all, we wrestled with our own doubts on that score. We anticipated that it would provoke at least a brief media firestorm — and that our efforts to put Mr. McCain's relationship with a lobbyist in a bigger context would probably get lost in the retelling.*

This is fascinating stuff. Perhaps they wouldn't have done this if there hadn't been such an outcry against the article which appeared to recycle unsubstantiated and off-the-record rumours. 2,000 mainly critical emails were sent to the editor. But it does prove once again that American newspaper journalists take their craft seriously. In this country we tend to think ethics is a county east of London. But this is not just about morality. A news organisation that listens and responds to its consumers is much more likely to keep their respect and their custom. See? networked journalism is not only noble, but it makes business sense, too.

Thanks to my LSE colleague Tim Watts for the tip. 

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