

FROM GATEKEEPING TO GATEWATCHING

The First Wave of Citizen Media

A number of scholars have argued that the daily chroniclers and pamphleteers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be regarded as the first citizen journalists; Michael Schudson, for instance, suggests that “Joseph Addison in *The Spectator* of 1710 was essentially a blogger” (2013: 199). Modern-day citizen journalism, however, finally emerged in the mid- to late 1990s, and the establishment of the first Independent Media Center (IMC) as an alternative news outlet to cover the 1999 World Trade Organisation summit in Seattle is commonly seen as its break-through moment:

several hundred media activists, many of whom have been working for years to develop an active independent media through their own organisations, came together in late November 1999 in Seattle to create an IMC to cover protests against the WTO. The Seattle IMC provided coverage of the WTO through both a printed publication called *The Blind Spot* and the first IMC website. While Indymedia is not a conscious mouthpiece of any particular point of view, many Indymedia organisers and people who post to the Indymedia newswires are supporters of the so-called ‘anti-globalisation’ (alternative globalisation, anti-corporatisation) movement. (Platon and Deuze 2003: 338)

In the Seattle Independent Media Center (which soon became known under the colloquial name of *Indymedia*), some of the core tenets of citizen journal-

ism are visible, therefore: the production of news that is positioned as inherently alternative, and even oppositional, to mainstream and commercial media coverage, by a dedicated group of participants—concerned citizens—who may have had some experience producing news and media content, but are not formally and professionally accredited as journalists.

The activities of *Indymedia*'s citizen journalist operation were in line with the broader DIY media ethos that was prevalent in the late 1990s, which was inspired by the emergence of the first 'Web 2.0' platforms for the creation and publication of user-generated content; the Seattle IMC, and a host of *Indymedia* sites which would soon be set up in locations all over the world, all put an "emphasis on the *production*, rather than the *consumption*, of media texts" (Meikle 2002: 87). For *Indymedia*, this attitude was driven also by a deep distrust of the accuracy and objectivity of mainstream media, which were perceived as being too closely aligned with dominant political and corporate interests (Hyde 2002)—inspired by a lyric from musician Jello Biafra, *Indymedia* therefore adopted "don't hate the media, become the media" as an underlying motto.

Given such distrust of the editorial decisions made in and by the mainstream media, the alternative vision of news and journalism that *Indymedia* developed therefore embraced an ethic of radical openness and transparency. Central to its initial operations was the principle of 'open publishing': "there is no gatekeeping and no editorial selection process—participants are free to upload whatever they choose, from articles and reports to announcements and appeals for equipment or advice" (Meikle 2002: 89), with the custom-built *Indymedia* online publishing platform immediately posting such articles to the Website and its newsfeeds. Tarleton therefore describes the IMC publishing philosophy as "an end-run around the information gatekeepers, made possible by the technology of the Internet" (2000: 53).

Indeed, internal plans for the further development of the *Indymedia* platform, and of the publishing processes it was intended to enable, envisaged an even more comprehensive redesign of conventional news production approaches: in order to fully realise another IMC catchphrase, "Everyone is a witness. Everyone is a journalist. Everyone edits." (Arnison 2002: n.p.), *Indymedia* developers planned to move away from the immediate and unedited publication of user-submitted stories by introducing a fully transparent "open editing" stage, which would continue to provide full access to all submitted articles but would also reveal the subsequent changes made by other members of the *Indymedia* collective and enable the public to review their editorial

discussions and decisions; leading developer Matthew Arnison outlined this agenda in an article that describes open editing as “a crucial part of open publishing” (2002). Although never implemented in their entirety, such proposals demonstrate that the Seattle IMC and the multitude of Independent Media Centers that followed it were never just meant as short-term responses to specific political events or issues, but—as their very name implies—also offered a radical critique of the *modus operandi* practiced in the journalism industry of the late twentieth century.

As Atton puts it, then,

Indymedia reporting not only presents an alternative agenda, it also presents different ways of thinking about the world. To explore the construction of news is to ask questions about how reality is constructed; the professional norms of sourcing, framing and storytelling establish expectations for journalists and audiences about how to represent the world. ... By placing apparently competing representations of the world alongside each other, Indymedia offers the possibility of a comparative critique. (Atton 2013: 139–40)

Such critique carried considerable force at first, and the initial impact of *Indymedia* on the public and scholarly perception of conventional journalism should not be underestimated. As noted, *Indymedia* also rode the wave of a broader move towards user-generated content and DIY media that was associated with the emergence of what at the time was described as ‘Web 2.0’, and the visibility of the Seattle IMC, whose activities were themselves covered by the mainstream media, led quickly to the establishment of a range of affiliated *Indymedia* sites around the world, usually drawing on the same open-source publishing platform developed by Matthew Arnison and a number of other volunteers. As Meikle reports, “in the ten months following Seattle, a network of more than 30 such IMCs had been set up, each using the same freely circulated software, and each relying on individual participants or visitors to submit content” (2002: 90). By the mid-2000s some 150 *Indymedia* sites were in existence, though at varying levels of activity and quality.

However, such genuine successes in spreading the *Indymedia* approach must also be contrasted with increasing challenges in sustaining this effort. The singular, event-driven focus of the Seattle Independent Media Center, which temporarily united activists of diverse political persuasions under the same IMC banner, did not translate easily to the longer-term challenge of providing general, multi-issue alternative news coverage; the short-term enthusiasm for ‘becoming the media’ during the event was difficult to sustain as

contributors returned to their everyday lives. But most crucially, perhaps, the light-touch open publishing philosophy of the *Indymedia* content production model also proved too easy to subvert and undermine in the absence of more fully developed open editing procedures:

it is as if in its rush to privilege non-hierarchical, ultra-democratic and non-professionalised ways of doing newswork, the Indymedia project has ignored the threats to its independence that come through its open-publishing technology. When racists, anti-Semites and homophobes can 'publish' on its sites as easily as can the human rights campaigner, the environmental activist or the social anarchist, are we truly seeing a socially responsible journalism in action? When even the liberal mainstream press does not permit such unfettered access to its pages does alternative journalism even get close to its ideal of progressive social change? (Atton 2003: 269–70)

Although the *Indymedia* initiative must be recognised for its initial successes and its thoroughly innovative approach to generating and publishing citizen journalism content, then, we must also note that the organisational models it adopted turned out to be thoroughly unsustainable. Nonetheless, in spite of these practical challenges (many of which we will encounter again in different guises throughout this book), its role in popularising the idea of citizen journalism at the close of the twentieth century makes *Indymedia* the appropriate place to begin our account of how news practices have transformed in the context of continuing and considerable changes to local, national, and global media environments. Although *Indymedia* itself could not sustain the success of its intervention in the media coverage of the Seattle WTO meeting, and was ultimately hampered by internal contradictions that were never successfully resolved, it also provided an inspiration and a partial blueprint for many collective and individual citizen journalism and alternative news initiatives that followed.

Most importantly, by adopting a distinct journalistic ideology, implementing that ideology in the design of its site and the publishing processes underlying it, and applying this approach to a major news event, *Indymedia* became one of the first alternative media initiatives to model the core traits of citizen journalism as Kaufhold *et al.* describe them:

citizen journalism is defined by a number of attributes which make it distinct from professional journalism, including unpaid work, absence of professional training, and often unedited publication of content, and may feature plain language, distinct story selection and news judgment, ... free accessibility, and interactivity. (Kaufhold *et al.* 2010: 517)

Inherent in this description, and in the very term ‘citizen journalism’ itself, is a fundamental distinction from professional journalism—but this goes beyond the mere circumstances under which the journalistic work is performed (that is, whether news authors are paid or have had training as journalists): arguably much more crucial to the self-definition of citizen journalists is their departure from long-held principles of professional journalistic news coverage, and especially from the role that “journalistic values and norms such as objectivity, accuracy, and fairness” (Kim and Lowrey 2015: 300) play in the production of news. Citizen journalists did not necessarily dismiss such values outright, but held the view that professional journalism in the late 1990s and early 2000s often itself failed to realise such lofty ambitions, and that there was both a need and an opportunity to counterbalance these shortcomings by establishing alternative news publications. Where professional journalists were disinterested observers first, and citizens second, citizen journalists were in the first place also personally, immediately involved.

Perceptions of the technological potential of new communication platforms on the World Wide Web, and of the failure of contemporary news outlets to realise this potential, also played an important role here: the prevailing view was that the Internet had become “a new site for old activities”, and “mainly dominated by existing political actors and other elites. It was politics as usual” (Lasorsa *et al.* 2012: 21). Citizen journalists saw the opportunity to establish alternative voices online and encourage the interactive participation of other citizens, not least also by exploring the opportunities for new processes and formats that ‘Web 2.0’ technologies afforded them.

The impact of the considerable technological shifts occurring at the time must not be underestimated here. Growing levels of Internet access and emerging platforms for user-generated content (UGC) lowered the barriers to access and participation in online publishing to a considerable degree (Jenkins and Thorburn 2003: 12), enabling what Douglas Rushkoff has described as a “leap to authorship” (2003: 35) for a growing number of people at least in developed and democratic nations. Although the majority of the content creation and publication activities that ensued were not overtly related to news and politics, the societal and democratic implications of this development were then and have continued to this day to be widely recognised by practitioners, scholars, and policy-makers alike; as Chadwick writes, “the Internet is creating a more open and fluid political opportunity structure—one that increasingly enables the public to exert its influence and hold politicians and media to account” (2011: 5). This should not be misunderstood as an imme-

diate and inevitable democratisation of media production, however—a range of sociodemographic, economic, and other factors continued to prevent a full levelling of the media playing field.

Key Elements of Citizen Journalism

Indymedia was neither the first nor ultimately the most widely read citizen journalism site—yet in its own development after the ‘Battle of Seattle’ it also demonstrates the gradual emergence and crystallisation of a number of key practices and approaches that were widely embraced by citizen journalists. In the first place, of course, *Indymedia* in its original Seattle model focussed on first-hand reporting: this is citizen journalism in the truest sense of the term—an inherently activist and oppositional form of journalism performed by citizens disenchanted with the coverage of major events by the established mainstream media. Except for the ‘open publishing’ approach used on the platform, the news gathering, authoring, and publication activities carried out by these citizen journalists would have been immediately familiar to professional journalists, even if they may have disagreed with the attitude, style, and political leanings of the eventual outcomes.

Such first-hand citizen reporting remained exceptional, however: citizen journalists were only in the position to report in this way if they took the time to travel to the scene of major events, or were unexpectedly caught up in them. The voluntary and unpaid nature of citizen journalism activities made it very unlikely that aspiring citizen journalists could afford it regularly to take substantial time off from their day-to-day commitments to engage in intensive first-hand reporting. Where such first-hand citizen reporting continued to occur, therefore, it was largely limited to local and hyperlocal reporting activities that required no more than a hobbyist’s commitment—a model which the creation of an international network of localised Independent Media Centers actively encouraged. Only a handful of the first generation of citizen journalists—including for instance the *Drudge Report*’s Matt Drudge or *Crikey*’s Stephen Mayne—were able to sustain a more intensive commitment to the cause, supported by independent wealth and/or online advertising income.

Consequently, the vast majority of citizen journalists turned their focus towards the other major role of journalism in contemporary society: that of analysis, interpretation, and commentary. These activities depend not on a personal presence at the scene where newsworthy events are being played out, but in-

stead require access only to reliable reports about these events, or to the original source materials that underpin them. Citizen journalism of this type can therefore be seen as a kind of second-order journalism: it feeds on, processes, and evaluates the products of first-order, mainstream journalism, and puts these into greater context by examining them in combination and from a range of perspectives. This citizen journalism thus comes to represent what Herbert Gans described as a “second tier” of media, whose core purpose it is to interact with and interrogate the outputs of the first, mainstream tier of news media. Gans identified a need for the establishment of such a second tier as early as 1980:

one of the purposes of the second tier is to continue where the central media leave off: to supply further and more detailed news for and about the perspectives of the audiences they serve. In the process, these media would also function as monitors and critics of the central media, indicating where and how, by their standards, the central media have been insufficiently multiperspectival. (1980: 322)

The technological changes that occurred between Gans’s initial sketch of a two-tier media system in 1980 and the arrival of citizen journalism in the late 1990s further supported the establishment of this monitorial role. The introduction of cable television, 24-hour news channels, and eventually of online news platforms during the 1980s and 1990s meant a substantial multiplication of readily accessible channels through which citizen journalists could access diverse news stories about a given event, issue, or topic. Further, the growing use especially of online platforms for the direct publication of press releases, expert reports, scholarly analysis, and other source information to the public—which commenced in earnest with the introduction of the World Wide Web—now meant that “in effect, the pipeline goes straight to the citizen” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 1999: 89): interested users could now bypass journalistic filters altogether. Sources themselves were “increasingly geared towards addressing their constituencies directly instead of using the news media as a go-between” (Bar-doel and Deuze 2001: 98; cf. Neuberger *et al.* 2010: 13)—as a recent BBC report on the *Future of News* puts it, “the journalist’s competitor is no longer another journalist. Often, it’s the subject of the story. Political parties, celebrities, corporations communicate directly with the public” (BBC 2015: 8). This enabled interested citizen journalists to compare mainstream news reports across news outlets, or with original source material, to detect and critique different choices of framing or emphasis, or to introduce additional background information into the evaluation of a news story even if such information had not been incorporated into the articles authored by professional journalists.

Gatewatching, Not Gatekeeping

Most crucially, then, this monitorial, second-tier citizen journalism presents an important challenge to the role of mainstream journalists, editors, and outlets as news gatekeepers. “Editors and news directors might still be minding gates for their organizations, but so many gates now exist that one or two—or even a hundred—closed gates will not prevent information from being published. There will always be an open gate somewhere” (Vos 2015: 6). This raises questions about the continuing relevance of the journalistic gatekeeping model.

At a time of information and channel scarcity—when access to original news sources was available only to professional journalists, when local and even national populations were served by a strictly limited number of newspapers and terrestrial broadcast channels, and when the total space available for newsprint, and total time available for news broadcasts, was subject to significant limitations—news outlets were forced to make difficult choices about what of all available information was worth reporting to their audiences, and indeed performed a crucial public service in selecting “all the news that’s fit to print”, as the famous *New York Times* catch-cry goes. Yet as technological advancements have reduced such scarcity by allowing electronic news channels to multiply beyond count, that rationale for a strict gatekeeping regime has similarly faded: “in a world of ones and zeros, information is no longer scarce, hard to produce, nor difficult to repurpose and share” (Lewis 2012: 838). The justification for news selection is therefore now driven almost entirely by financial and commercial motives: how many news stories can a limited staff of journalists and editors produce in a given period of time, and what stories will attract a loyal audience? It is also, for at least some news organisations, a matter of politics. And the impact of such choices has become much more obvious to audiences that—especially online—are able to access competing news reports about the same event or issue that originate from all over the nation, and from all over the world.

This undermines the “implicit bargain between journalists and the public—an assumption about how society should handle the collection, filtering, and distribution of news information” (Lewis 2012: 838)—which entrusted journalists and news organisations with the role of news gatekeeper on behalf of the wider public. Now, at the turn of the new millennium, that public—and especially those members of the public who felt the calling to position themselves as citizen journalists—were able to take matters into their own

hands, covering especially those stories that they felt professional journalism had ignored, and adding alternative perspectives to those stories that professional journalism had already covered, but in insufficient detail. Where “gatekeeping placed the power over communication flows squarely with information professionals: ... most of all reporters, editors, and other members of the press” (Thorson and Wells 2015: 27), now citizen journalists without such professional domestication sought to claw back some of that power by asserting their own, often very different judgments about what information was newsworthy and deserved coverage.

While the news organisations in the first tier of the media (the mainstream newspapers and broadcasters, and their online offshoots) continued to exercise an in-house gatekeeping regime, then—and increasingly used differences in their gatekeeping choices and overall news judgments as a point of differentiation not only from their established local competitors but also from the increasing national and international competition that the Internet’s growing role as a news medium created—the Websites operated by citizen journalists generally never assumed an overt gatekeeping role. Rather, they selected the news stories that they were interested in and that they believed they could make a meaningful contribution to, and added to the existing mainstream coverage by pulling together, juxtaposing, interpreting, and critiquing various mainstream reports, background information, and source materials. This, then, is a distinctly different approach that I have described as *gatewatching* (Bruns 2005): the continuous observation of material that passes through the output gates of news outlets and other sources, in order to identify relevant such material for publication and discussion in the gatewatcher’s own site.

Indeed, gatewatching may more often result in the further *publicising* of already available material (in full, in excerpt, or in the form of a link to the original source) than in the *publication* of entirely new content authored by the gatewatchers themselves—but such (re)publicising of existing content can nonetheless have a crucial impact on news flows. It aids the visibility of the source material and brings it to the attention of new audiences (much as the republication of wire services reports in print and broadcast news has traditionally done in the mainstream media), while adding further interpretation and contextualisation. In the process, the news becomes more multiperspectival, as multiple bloggers add their own commentary and analysis of the source material. While “the posting of established media source material does raise the question of whether this simply re-legitimises those media as the authentic forum for news” (Meikle 2002: 100), then, the answer to that question

depends crucially on the evaluation added by the gatewatcher in the process of republicising and reposting the material.

By comparison to the challenges facing citizen journalists seeking to engage in original reporting, such secondary reporting and analysis presents considerably lower barriers to access; in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it therefore became a much more widespread practice for online engagement with the news. This was aided also by the fact that online publishing in this period no longer required the creation of a dedicated, stand-alone citizen journalism site (such as *Indymedia*), but became substantially more accessible with the introduction of a number of popular blogging platforms. While the rapid growth of the international blogosphere in this period was driven by a range of interests, from publishing personal diaries to establishing a professional identity, blogs about news and politics therefore accounted for a substantial subset of this emerging phenomenon. From here on it is more appropriate to speak of citizen journalists and news bloggers as elements of a broader first wave of citizen media, then—with citizen journalists representing the more formalised, stand-alone model of sites such as *Indymedia*, and news bloggers representing the decentralised network of news-related sites in the overall blogosphere.

Collaborative Online News Production

Gatewatching was the foundational practice that united both ends of this spectrum from formal citizen journalism to occasional news blogging, augmented where feasible perhaps by some original citizen reporting. But such gatewatching was directed not only at the first-tier news organisations and other ‘official’ sources, but also at the gates of fellow citizen journalists and news bloggers, to observe, publicise, and potentially critique how they are interpreting the news. This engagement and debate between individual news blogs and citizen journalism sites—conducted largely through linking to and commenting on each other’s posts—turned the process of news analysis and evaluation into a collaborative activity: in addition to the (largely one-directional) connection between societal elites and ordinary citizens that is facilitated by the conventional mainstream media, “now the horizontal flow, citizen-to-citizen, is as real and consequential as the vertical one”, as blog evangelist Jay Rosen (2006: n.p.) claimed.

A range of studies have investigated how these processes of interaction and collaboration have unfolded across the network of citizen journalism sites and news blogs (e.g. Adamic and Glance 2005; Bruns and Adams 2009; High-

field 2011; Nuernbergk 2013), and it is no surprise that the mapping of hyperlink networks became a particularly popular research method around the same time that news blogging rose to prominence and influence. What such research has shown is that the collective and collaborative evaluation and acknowledgment of diverse perspectives on the news does not simply result in an equality of voices, however insightful or ill-informed they may be. Rather, time and again a number of especially prominent sites emerge, due variously to their gatewatching skills in sourcing and highlighting valuable information; the quality of their analysis and commentary on current issues in the news; or also to their sheer work ethic as consistent and reliable commentators on events. At the same time, the composition of this leadership group is also changeable and topic-dependent—only few citizen journalist sites and news blogs (usually those operated by a group of authors) ever managed to establish themselves as news generalists, while the majority focussed on specific news beats relating to their interests and expertise (Highfield 2011). This observation points to the fact that such citizen media phenomena generally should not be judged by examining the merits of individual sites and actors, but instead must be evaluated as a broader ecosystem of interdependent elements.

In a further break with the journalistic tradition established up to that point, such citizen journalism sites and news blogs usually also included their audiences as active contributors in the continued process of covering the news. While commentary and discussion features were added to mainstream news sites only reluctantly, and even then remained clearly distinct from the material contributed by professional journalists, equivalent participatory functionality constituted an integral element in this second tier of news-related sites right from their inception. These sites eroded the distinctions between author and audience to a significant degree by extending an invitation if not to contribute new articles themselves, then at least to comment on the articles published by the operators of these sites. Commenters on these sites were therefore positioned as what could be described as internal gatewatchers, observing and evaluating the output of the sites' authors and holding them to account where their coverage and analysis was found wanting; authors, in turn, were thus encouraged to respond to feedback and continue the conversation. This modelled, in many ways, the level of engagement that many contributors would have liked to see from professional journalists on mainstream sites as well. (Notably, though, the extent to which commenters engaged and authors responded on citizen journalism sites and news blogs also varied widely.)

What emerged from this is a form of engagement with the news that is collective, distributed, and participatory—a more detailed evaluation of current news stories might eventually emerge not from reading a single news blogger’s commentary, but only from following the discussion across a number of interlinked pieces on different sites, and from engaging in the commentary threads attached to them. Not only because of their reliance on mainstream news reports and other source materials, but also because of this distributed and decentralised nature of the news discourse that their practices created, citizen journalists and news bloggers can therefore no longer be regarded as producing discrete news stories; neither can their active, commenting audiences be understood as mere users of the news. Rather, what emerged here is a more complex and incremental process that results in the gradual coverage and evaluation of the news—a process which might be best understood as a form of news *produsage*, positioning authors and audiences not simply as producers or users of news but instead enabling them both to become hybrid *producers* (Bruns 2008a).

Unfinished News

A side effect of this shift from discrete production to continuing produsage, then, is also a reconceptualisation of the news as continually unfinished. As Hiler wrote at the time, “the Blogosphere is pioneering a new form of iterative journalism” (Hiler 2002: n.p.); it serves as a news evaluation engine whose inner workings are considerably different from those of the conventional mainstream media:

the order of things in broadcast is ‘filter, then publish.’ The order in communities is ‘publish, then filter.’ ... Writers submit their stories in advance, to be edited or rejected before the public ever sees them. Participants in a community, by contrast, say what they have to say, and the good is sorted from the mediocre after the fact. (Shirky 2002: n.p.)

As this builds on a continuous, collective, uncoordinated gatewatching effort by participating citizen journalists, news bloggers, and their commenters, the result is that “instead of being primarily journalist-centered, the news online appears increasingly to be also user-centered” (Boczkowski 2004: n.p.).

This too constituted a substantial break with established practice in the mainstream journalism industry, where—partly again for organisational and economic reasons—news stories and the formats in which they were packaged

(newspapers and broadcast bulletins) had to be designed as discrete, complete packages that would suit the publication rhythms of print newspapers and broadcast bulletins. Meg Pickard, then Head of Digital Engagement at *The Guardian*, has criticised this traditional perspective as recently as 2011: “journalists all too often create, publish and then go back to the beginning. And when something is out there live in the world, their engagement (interest) may already have moved on, even as users/readers are starting to consume, interact, share” (Pickard 2011: n.p.). By contrast, news engagement in citizen journalism and news blogs is always unfinished, much like the news itself, as incremental news updates on unfolding stories are constantly coming to hand, and are being uncovered through the practice of gatewatching.

Unfolding in a continuous cycle of gatewatching and publication, which becomes input for further gatewatching and publication—what Pickard describes as “a constant, rippling collaboration of skills, insight and activity around a context of mutual interest, for mutual benefit” (Pickard 2011: n.p.)—the engagement of news bloggers and citizen journalists with the outputs of mainstream news outlets and other sources (and increasingly also the incorporation of such citizen journalism content back into the mainstream news) thus turns the news from product to process. This, too, is typical for produsage: news bloggers and citizen journalists continually make small, incremental changes and additions to our understanding of a news story, potentially without ever contributing a major, fully authored news article in their own right. Even the mere linking to or republishing of excerpts from an existing news article can contribute to this process of news produsage, simply by increasing the visibility of a piece of information that otherwise might have been lost amongst a multitude of other items. Beyond the world of the first-tier citizen media platforms that are the focus of this chapter, we will encounter the dynamics of such a republicising of existing information through small, random citizen-journalistic interventions again in the following chapters as we turn our attention to more contemporary forms of news engagement via social media.

Ultimately, this shift from news as product to news as process also served to highlight the constructed nature of the news, and reveals the inner workings of journalistic news selection. Previously, “the gathering and processing stages [were] performed in the backstage area, concealed from the audience. The final product [was] then distributed, moving it to the frontstage area, where the audience consume[d] the news product” (Karlsson 2011: 282). Now, however, the availability of news reports and updates on the same event or issue in a

wide variety of states—from brief newflashes to considered analyses; from original source statements to detailed commentary—implicitly pointed to the choices that various journalists and commentators have made in constructing their own articles. Where “traditionally, journalism has been among the most opaque of industries” and “the media have effectively remained a black box”, now it became possible for readers to retrace “how the sausage is made” (Singer 2005: 179).

The First Wave of Citizen Media

These three key elements—gatewatching as a foundational information-gathering practice; collaborative news evaluation by distributed networks of participants; and the transformation of news from finished product to unfinished process—underpinned the operations of this first wave of citizen journalism and news blogging. Whether perceived as ‘proper’ journalism or not, it is evident from the success of many of the citizen media sites that emerged in the early years of the new millennium that online news audiences—or more accurately, news users—had a strong appetite for these new, alternative, and more or less participatory platforms. Stand-alone platforms such as the *Drudge Report* or the *Huffington Post* in the United States made important contributions as irreverent and opinionated spaces for political debate and gossip, while technology news site *Slashdot* positioned itself as a crucial source of industry news compiled exclusively from the contributions of its users (Chan 2002; Bruns 2005). Elsewhere in the world, sites such as the South Korean *OhmyNews* (Kahney 2003) or the Australian *Crikey* combined journalistic reporting and opinionated analysis with the explicit aim to address a gap for progressive and independent news in domestic markets characterised by a limited diversity of news outlets.

Several such publications emerged to greater prominence at first through the efforts of charismatic, driven individuals; Williams and Delli Carpini give the following character reference for the *Drudge Report*’s founder Matt Drudge, for instance, in the context of his role in breaking the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal: “by combining the sensibilities of a gadfly, a seemingly unquenchable hunger for celebrity, acceptance, and power, and the opportunities for gaining access to a wide public presented by the internet ... Drudge undermined the gatekeeping function of the mainstream press and political elites” (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000: 72). Similar, if perhaps less harsh, descriptions apply

to the *Huffington Post*'s Arianna Huffington, *OhmyNews*' Oh Yeon Ho, or *Crikey* founder Stephen Mayne, as well as to many other first-wave citizen journalists and news bloggers who made significant commitments of time and money in establishing and developing their sites.

These flagships of citizen journalism were further accompanied by a much larger but rather less prominent flotilla of news blogs, initiated by individual and collective operators. This highly active and interconnected news blogosphere discussed the topics of the day from a wide variety of political, specialist, professional, and personal perspectives, in vastly divergent styles and rhythms of publication. These blogs, as well as the leading sites themselves, ultimately also profited from the increasing familiarity of online audiences with the generic and stylistic conventions of the blog format, as *Huffington Post* co-founder Jonah Peretti recalls:

[the *Huffington Post*] had all the things that blogs were supposed to have so that people who knew about blogging would see it and say, "Oh, [comedian] Larry David is blogging [on the site]." Not, "Larry David's doing some weird new thing that Arianna Huffington invented." (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.)

In keeping with the gatewatching approach, the myriad of news blogs, but also those sites that would eventually emerge as leaders of this citizen media movement, predominantly assumed what Bardoel and Deuze (2001) describe as a "guidedog" role: they focussed on the processing and evaluation of available information from a variety of sources. Bowman and Willis describe this as "annotative reporting", and highlight such practices as motivated to a significant extent by a perception of shortcomings in conventional media reporting: "adding to, or supplementing, the information in a given story is the goal of many participants who believe that a particular point of view, angle or piece of information is missing from coverage in the mainstream media" (2003: 34–35).

Crucially, much of this criticism is also focussed on reviewing gatekeeping choices: implicitly or explicitly, citizen journalists and news bloggers followed Herbert Gans's suggestion that "it is proper to ask who should be responsible for story selection and production. The news may be too important to leave to the journalists alone" (1980: 322). For any given event, issue, or topic, by adding to, commenting on, and juxtaposing the coverage by diverse mainstream media outlets this second tier of news blogs and citizen journalism sites also made explicit how professional journalists chose to report and frame the story by selecting and highlighting specific facts over others. Thus, "the internet

has challenged virtually all aspects of [the] journalistic gatekeeping concept” (Singer 2005: 178): even if this emerging set of second-tier news sites was inherently positioned as subordinate to the mainstream news organisations, they were able to generate real influence because the mainstream media were at times forced to acknowledge their shortcomings and introduce the analysis and commentary published in this second tier into their own coverage; indeed, then, “one way to measure the success of many of the projects ... is to ask how effectively they can use the Net to force their cause onto the agenda of the mainstream media” (Meikle 2002: 8).

As a result, several major political scandals of the late 1990s and early 2000s, especially in the United States, have been shaped in significant ways by the interventions of news bloggers and citizen journalists: for instance, the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal began with revelations published in the *Drudge Report*; the news blogosphere combined to keep alive the story that Republican Senate Leader Trent Lott had made statements in support of racial segregation, eventually leading to his resignation from the leadership; blogs also played an important role in the critical evaluation of documents purporting to show inconsistencies in U.S. President George W. Bush’s Air National Guard service record, which eventually led to the resignation of veteran CBS anchorman Dan Rather; and Ettema singles out influential political blog *Talking Points Memo* for its “relentless tracking of the scandal arising from the [George W.] Bush Administration’s improper firing of US attorneys” (Ettema 2009: 320). That these examples are exclusively from the realm of U.S. politics—where news blogs and citizen journalism were first seen to make an impact—should not distract us from the fact that similar, if perhaps less widely known cases have also been observed in many other nations.

Vocal early critics of citizen journalism, such as U.S. columnist John C. Dvorak, are therefore correct in saying that “yes, bloggers have been breaking news stories here and there, but it’s usually because they amplify something that media professionals have already written about but that was ignored by the major media” (Dvorak 2006: n.p.), but this is not inherently a cause for criticism. Rather, it is precisely this function of identifying, evaluating, and amplifying aspects in the available record (from mainstream media, as well as from original sources), eventually also in order to re-insert these aspects into the discourse of the mainstream media, that has become the crucial contribution made by this first wave of news blogs and citizen journalism sites. Using the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal as their example, Williams and Delli Carpini point out that this interplay between first-tier mainstream and second-tier

citizen media, as well as between journalistic reporting and original source materials, provides a key demonstration of the hybrid and complexly interwoven media environment of the early twenty-first century:

the ability of a nation of 250 million people (to say nothing of the world-wide audience) to follow the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal through a host of different media and genres (from straight news to talk shows to satire), and then discuss it and the variety of more fundamental issues it raises with fellow citizens, is a remarkable occurrence. Many aspects of the internet, such as its interactivity, scope, and the ability for all users to become producers as well as consumers of information and opinion, contribute to this deliberative process. (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000: 75–76)

Importantly, too, in this multi-channel, multi-outlet environment the gatekeeping and framing efforts of individual news actors no longer held significant sway over how the issues at hand are perceived by the news audience: “a large majority of the public ... created their own narrative” of the scandal (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000: 76).

Parasites or Para-Journalists? Citizen Journalism and the Mainstream Media

As a result, these new citizen journalism and news blogging sites began to threaten the agenda-setting power of conventional journalism. As Bardoel and Deuze argued at the time, “the balance of power between journalism and its publics is shifting. ... New media technologies and trends in civil society force us to rethink journalism’s role at the start of the new millennium” (2001: 92). Gatewatching as a collaborative and continuous form of engagement with and critique of the mainstream news poses fundamental challenges to conventional, professional journalistic processes and practices, or to what Deuze has described as the “occupational ideology” (Deuze 2005: 444) of professional journalists.

Gatewatching, applied to a broad range of journalistic and non-journalistic gates, removes the ability of journalists and editors to deploy gatekeeping in order to determine on behalf of their audiences what information is or is not newsworthy; the distributed evaluation and interpretation of the news highlights the unattainability of the journalistic ideal of objectivity, and instead points to the fact that news reports are always the product of value judgments, framing choices, and more or less conscious personal and institutional biases; and the processual approach to the news undermines journalists’ claims to

provide “all the news that’s fit to print” even on a single issue or event. In addition, the emergence of credible alternative voices alongside conventional, mainstream journalism—voices that largely fed off yet nonetheless had the tendency to roundly criticise shortcomings in the content produced by professional journalists—necessarily also constituted a significant irritation and in some cases even an existential threat to the journalism industry, itself “a business mainly confined to journalistic elites” (Heinrich 2012b: 61). “All of this”, as Lasica put it at the time, “begs the question: Will forms of participatory journalism and traditional journalism complement each other, or collide head on? It may be a bit of both” (2003b: n.p.). That assessment would turn out to be correct, as the first decade of the new millennium showed.

Embracing the People Formerly Known as the Audience

Several journalists and commentators openly welcomed news blogs and citizen journalism sites as increasing the diversity and reach of journalism: journalist and blogger J.D Lasica himself described blogging as “a random act of journalism. And that’s the real revolution here: In a world of micro-content delivered to niche audiences, more and more of the small tidbits of news that we encounter each day are being conveyed through personal media—chiefly Weblogs” (2003a: 71). This idea of small-scale, occasional contributions that add up to a greater whole again highlights especially the multiperspectivity of citizen journalism activities, which stems from their significantly lowered barriers to entry: as a broader range of users are able to become *producers* of the news, however infrequently and randomly, the net volume and diversity of perspectives on the news rises. Such “multiperspectival news is the bottom-up corrective for the mostly top-down perspectives of the news media” (Gans 2003: 103).

Another early proponent of citizen journalism, Dan Gillmor, reflected on how this affects the professional journalist, realising that

my readers know more than I do. This has become almost a mantra in my work. It is by definition the reality for every journalist, no matter what his or her beat. And it’s a great opportunity, not a threat, because when we ask our readers for their help and knowledge, they are willing to share it—and we can all benefit. If modern American journalism has been a lecture, it’s evolving into something that incorporates a conversation and seminar. (2003: vi)

This perspective, then, repositions journalism as a more inclusive, collaborative encounter between professional and citizen practitioners; in the process, it also redefines the role of the (professional) journalist, who can now no longer merely be a content producer and publisher, but must also demonstrate community engagement and leadership. As *Instapundit* founder Glenn Reynolds put it, “the term ‘correspondent’ is reverting to its original meaning of ‘one who corresponds’” (2003: 82).

Indeed, echoing John Perry Barlow’s famous “Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace” (Barlow 1996) in tone and style some 10 years later, journalism researcher and blogger Jay Rosen reflected on the growing role of users in the production and circulation of the news as a result of the rise of citizen journalism and news blogging by publishing a statement on behalf of what he called “the people formerly known as the audience”:

the people formerly known as the audience are those who *were* on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another—and who *today* are not in a situation like that *at all*. (Rosen 2006: n.p.)

Much as Barlow’s earlier “Declaration” had claimed a fundamental shift in the power balance between the world’s governments and their people, conceiving of those people as free inhabitants of an independent cyberspace, Rosen’s “people formerly known as the audience” similarly asserted greater power than they had had before: in this case, over the means of producing and circulating media texts—alongside, in concert with, and sometimes in opposition to the established mainstream news media.

If realised, this power shift would necessarily also have important implications for the structure of democratic society, given the key role played by journalism in informing the people. “The argument at that time suggested [that] the use of blogs would bring a set of fundamental changes to the media and journalism logic ...; that is, independent blogs would offer data and opinions on topics ... that were not discussed in the mainstream news media” (Bailey and Marques 2012: 398). This was widely seen as heralding a democratisation of news and opinion, and as a crucial shift away from the domination of the news by major political and economic interests: “the democratization of opinion on the net is easily the most important thing to happen to journalism since TV, and the most positive thing to happen to journalism since radio” (Shirky 2001: n.p.).

It should be noted that—particularly in a U.S. context—the need for such a democratisation was felt especially acutely in the early 2000s. In the aftermath of the disputed presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore in 2000, and of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and in the lead-up to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that followed, there was a strong sense that mainstream media in the United States (and, to a lesser extent, in many other western nations) were shying away from overtly critical coverage of the ‘War on Terror’ and related policy decisions for fear of being branded as unpatriotic. “News leadership requires that editorial independence and good editorial judgement must be put in evidence. Most of the leading United States news media comprehensively failed this test during the George W. Bush Presidency” (Tunstall 2009: 387a). This left a vacuum for critical reporting, analysis, and commentary which was readily filled by citizen journalists and news bloggers, to the point that a recognised genre of ‘war blogs’ began to emerge. (It should be noted here that such blogs were not uniformly anti-war or pacifist, however: a significant proportion supported the Iraq and/or Afghanistan wars as such, but not the military strategies pursued by the Bush/Cheney administration and its allies.)

Indeed, a number of mainstream journalists, frustrated with the limitations imposed on their coverage of the wars by self-censoring news outlets, became war bloggers themselves, and such journalists’ blog posts “provided a much broader range of opinions on both the strategies and motivations of all sides in the conflict than were available, particularly to Americans, on broadcast and cable television” (Rushkoff 2003: 17). They were joined by an even larger range of citizen bloggers, in the United States and elsewhere, providing more or less informed commentary from a wide diversity of perspectives—including, most famously, the pseudonymous Iraqi war blogger Salam Pax, whose first-hand reportage from Baghdad during the U.S.-led aerial bombing campaign received world-wide recognition (he was subsequently recruited to write as a columnist for *The Guardian*). In combination, these war bloggers—whatever their attitudes towards the wars themselves—generated a much more in-depth body of reportage and analysis of the wars than the carefully stage-managed and arguably self-censoring coverage in the mainstream media alone could have achieved.

In addition, news bloggers and citizen journalists also played a growing role in the day-to-day coverage of domestic political issues—initially again especially in the United States. Another major breakthrough moment for such news blogging arrived in the subsequent next campaign: “use of digital

technology moved from the periphery toward the center of US politics in the 2004 election cycle” (Singer 2005: 173). Not only did a number of the presidential contenders themselves experiment with campaign blogs for the first time—most notably perhaps the progressive Democrat candidate Howard Dean—, but a handful of political journalists and a much greater number of independent news bloggers also began to cover and analyse the primary campaigns in exhaustive detail in dedicated political blogs (Singer 2005: 176), hosted on mainstream sites or on separate platforms. Eventually, indeed, for the first time a number of bloggers were officially accredited as members of the press at the nominating conventions of both major U.S. parties; such recognition alongside the mainstream media was rightly seen at the time as an acknowledgement that citizen journalism was now a legitimate component of the media system. This meant a considerable blurring between professional journalism on the one hand, and the para-journalism conducted by citizens on the other.

Such developments seem to support Rosen’s elegiac assertion that “the people formerly known as the audience are simply *the public* made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable. You should welcome that, media people. But whether you do or not we want you to know we’re here” (Rosen 2006: n.p.)—and mainstream media did indeed begin to experiment with a range of approaches for including user contributions into their (online) products. This development and deployment of participatory opportunities proceeded unevenly and with widely varying levels of enthusiasm, however: some news outlets merely sought to modernise their letters-to-the-editor functionality by providing more accessible email addresses and feedback functions, but showed no interest in relinquishing any control over the gatekeeping processes by which such write-ins would be vetted and selected for publication; others re-badged their existing opinion and analysis columns as ‘blogs’, but failed to also implement the follow-on user commentary and discussion functionality that had proved to be such a crucial element of blogging in the proper sense of the term.

Gradually, however, many news outlets did implement reader commentary functions that they attached to some or all of the news stories and opinion articles they published online. These used various pre- or post-moderation regimes, ranging from the slow and labour-intensive manual review of all user comments before publication, through the automated vetting of comments at the point of publication by testing against a defined set of swearwords and other unacceptable terms, to the selective moderation of comments after pub-

lication when flagged as inappropriate by other participants; for the most part, they also featured very little post-publication involvement from the original authors of the journalistic content that audiences commented on. Although at times such commentary sections, especially if they are well-managed and also involve journalistic staff as ongoing participants, can attract serious and sustained discussion about the matters covered in the original articles, for the most part these sections have therefore turned out to be disorganised and dysfunctional; they are often dominated by the loudest and most persistent voices, and can be subject to significant chilling effects that drown out opposing perspectives (Blom *et al.* 2014).

Importantly, it must be noted that (as the more engaging comments sections in a number of leading news blogs have demonstrated) such dysfunctionality is not inevitable, but results largely from the specific implementation choices made by mainstream news outlets. “Weblogs are far more animated than the often-stilted forums at news Web sites. They elicit a much broader conversation in which what people have to say about what’s being written is regarded as being of equal importance” (Grabowicz 2003: 74). By contrast, however, as Bowman and Willis have noted,

media companies have viewed the concept of online community no differently than a section of a newspaper (à la Letters to the Editor) or a segment of a newscast. It is something that has been segregated from the news—a closed-off annex where readers can talk and discuss, as long as the media companies don’t have to be too involved. Such an architected virtual space is not a true online community. Real communities have leaders, moderators and involved participants who care about their space. (2003: 55)

Notably, some leading news outlets have at times attempted to advance beyond the deployment of merely tokenistic spaces for user participation that remain segregated from the ‘real’ business of journalism. In 2006, for instance, CNN launched its iReport initiative, “in order to collect user-generated content for breaking news stories. The program invited people to send pictures and mobile footage through the website CNN.com. After being reviewed by CNN’s editors, the best content could be aired on the broadcasting channel” (Bruno 2011: 45); the initiative was gradually expanded to become an online community of citizen reporters that was also prominently featured on the CNN homepage, and has made important contributions especially to the coverage of breaking news stories and other major events by harnessing a greater range of eyewitness perspectives.

Similarly recognising the growing importance of user-generated content (UGC), “in June 2005 a team of BBC journalists started to sow the seeds of

what would soon become their ‘UGC Hub’, a desk at the core of the BBC newsroom in charge of searching, verifying, and distributing material produced directly by citizens” (Bruno 2011: 29). Again, the UGC Hub plays a prominent role especially in the context of breaking news events when the BBC’s own reportorial resources are unable to capture the full picture of unfolding stories:

initially only three journalists were assigned to the Hub, but after the 2009 Iranian revolt the BBC decided to invest more heavily in the project. [In 2011,] about 23 journalists work full-time at the UGC Hub, providing 24/7 coverage of material circulating in the social media environments. According to BBC data, every day they process something like 10,000 user contributions of various types. (Bruno 2011: 31–32)

The BBC’s Matthew Eltringham has charted the gradual learning curve within the organisation that led to the establishment of the UGC Hub, and highlights especially the experience of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, “when the BBC ... received thousands of—largely unsolicited—emails, pictures and videos that were testimony to a dramatic and tragic story” (Eltringham 2010: n.p.), and of the 7 July 2005 terrorist attacks in London, when user-generated eyewitness evidence of the attacks was available well ahead of official statements, but was not yet being efficiently incorporated into journalistic processes:

when I analysed what the audience had told us about the momentous events of that day, I discovered we had credible intelligence of every single one of the four bombs by 9:58am—including one that told us of the Tavistock Square bomb by 9:55am; just ten minutes after it had happened. At that time the BBC, and the rest of the media, were still reporting that there had been some kind of signalling or electrical fault. These erroneous reports moved one eyewitness, Lou Stern, to send in his pictures of the bus bomb because, as he put it, it clearly wasn’t a signalling fault. (Eltringham 2010: n.p.)

The UGC Hub was a response to these shortcomings, then, and sought to harness the BBC’s audience “for news-gathering purposes” (Stray 2010: n.p.) as citizen journalists—Eltringham describes this as “social newsgathering’ or, put another way, ‘finding good stuff on the web’” (Eltringham 2010: n.p.).

Protecting the Journalistic Profession through Boundary Work

Although initiatives such as CNN’s iReport and the BBC UGC Hub clearly recognised the value of citizen reporting in the context of major news events that are—at least at first—inaccessible to journalists, however, they also main-

tained a clear distinction between the role of citizens as (occasional) sources of newsworthy information on the one hand, and the role of the journalist as analyst and author of news reports on the other hand. Even major initiatives like the UGC Hub did not conceive of citizens as journalists in any meaningful sense of the term; they merely made it easier for them to become sources of eyewitness information. The participatory position afforded to ordinary users in such contexts lagged well behind what was available to them in the context of independent news blogs and citizen journalism sites, where they were able to author and publish their own news reports, analyses, and opinion pieces. Even iReport and the UGC Hub, to say nothing of the lesser commentary functions half-heartedly implemented to placate the participatory demands of online audiences-turned-users, therefore represent what Singer has described as “an industry determinedly clinging to the conviction that their gatekeeping role remained essential. At best, many acknowledged a potential shift in emphasis: away from control over the availability of information to control over its quality” (Singer 2015: 86–87).

Such reluctant and limited engagement with the participatory possibilities of ‘Web 2.0’ publishing technologies must be understood as a form of boundary work, and is common across a wide range of domains afflicted by sudden and unpredictable changes to their communicatory and media environments: “traditional elites ... often attempt to reinforce their position by boundary drawing, sealing off aspects of their mediated practices from outside influences. However, as media systems become more hybrid, the power of elite organisational actors has generally weakened” (Chadwick *et al.* 2016: 18). Although journalism is not alone in engaging in such boundary work—Chadwick *et al.* also highlight similar tendencies in politics, for instance—Lewis argues that attempts to draw a clear line between ‘professional’ journalists and ‘amateur’ audiences are especially well developed here, “in part because of journalism’s malleable, evolving character—especially in the digital era—and also in part because journalists tend to talk openly about such things, as in the highly public ‘battle’ over blogging as journalism” (Lewis 2012: 842).

Indeed, one major reason that journalism has been especially forceful—if not necessarily particularly successful—in its attempts to establish clear demarcations between professional practitioners and amateur enthusiasts has been the fact that the factors that distinguish both sides from each other are not particularly well-defined, even in spite of the prevalence of the term ‘professional’ to describe mainstream journalists. Detractors of the citizen journalism concept frequently argue from colourful analogies such as this: “citizen

journalism, to me, is like citizen professional baseball—it's just not practical. You can't play professional baseball just because you think the Seattle Mariners stink. You're not a good enough ballplayer" (Dvorak 2006: n.p.). Yet the analogy (and others have similarly compared citizen journalists with 'citizen surgeons' or 'citizen airline pilots') does not withstand sustained scrutiny: on the one hand, sportspeople *are* frequently recruited from amateur leagues into professional teams, because sporting abilities rely crucially on innate physical attributes that are harnessed and improved by regular training and exercise—self-evidently, one can *not* become the next Usain Bolt simply by training as a professional athlete, unless one meets specific physical requirements beforehand. On the other hand, contrary to the deep disciplinary knowledge required to become a surgeon or pilot, the journalistic profession requires comparatively little inherent specialisation and has no formal requirements of entry: "journalism is *not* science" (Carlson and Lewis 2015: n.p.), and as many scholars have noted should be regarded as a craft rather than as a profession (Lewis 2012: 843). Notably, such disciplinary expertise is required of journalists if they specialise in a particular news beat (such as science or business reporting)—but that expertise is the expertise related to the field of the beat: it is the expertise of scientists or entrepreneurs, rather than of journalists.

It is therefore in fact entirely plausible for a domain expert (in science, in business, or elsewhere) to become a credible journalistic or quasi-journalistic voice in their field, if they can accumulate sufficient practice in the craft of journalism (chiefly, the skills to determine the facts of a matter, and to present a cogent analysis and argument based on those facts), even if they have had no formal training as a journalist; in fact, such experts populate the opinion columns of the mainstream news outlets, too. What was different about the emergence of citizen journalists and news bloggers, however, was that—unlike such domain experts and other pundits who have been domesticated into journalistic practice on the initiative of the news industry itself—these new participants in the news process assumed their positions as analysts and commentators without seeking professional journalism's approval to do so. They therefore also felt free to vocally criticise mainstream journalism, because their access to the media system did not depend on the news industry's continued good will. As a result, "the blogging community is far from shy about going after journalists for offenses real and imagined, shocking thin-skinned journalists unused to being scrutinized [in] the way they scrutinize others" (Singer 2005: 180).

As Wall recalls, there was therefore “a less-than enthusiastic embrace by many traditional news outlets, as a ‘clash of cultures’ erupted in which amateur content, fueled by a growing participatory ethos, conflicted with the perceived needs of professional journalists to maintain their authority” (Wall 2015: 798). Australia’s ‘blog wars’ of 2007 provide a vivid illustration of this clash of cultures (cf. Bruns 2008b Bruns and Highfield 2012). In the lead-up to the 2007 federal election, which pitted the 11-year-old conservative government of Prime Minister John Howard against his new Labor Party challenger Kevin Rudd, national opinion polls had long predicted a substantial shift of votes towards Labor, making the defeat of the incumbent government in a landslide result increasingly likely. However, several conservative newspapers in the country, led by the national daily *The Australian*, continued to publish series of upbeat electoral analyses that predicted that an inevitable ‘narrowing’ of the opinion polls would occur closer to election day and would result in the re-election of the Howard government.

This perspective, in turn, was hotly disputed by a number of independent blogs that provided their own analyses of the polls, based on the publicly available raw polling data. On sites with deliberately self-ironic names such as *Possums Pollytics* or *The Poll Bludger*, these bloggers published detailed long-term studies of polling data, compared against historical polling trends and taking account of the margins of error of available polls, to conclusively debunk the thesis of an impending ‘narrowing’ and a re-election of the government. Notably, they also engaged in additional post-publication discussion with their readers to address further questions and explain their interpretations of the data—features that were largely absent from the mainstream media editorials, which were presented as final and definitive statements on these matters that audiences would do well to accept without question.

The bloggers’ analysis was widely circulated online, and must be seen as substantially undermining *The Australian*’s ability to control the framing of the poll results. Clearly stung by such unaccustomed criticism, in an anonymous editorial it attacked its critics as “sheltered academics and failed journalists who would not get a job on a real newspaper” (*The Australian* 2007: n.p.) and dismissed their efforts as the work of partisan amateurs:

on almost every issue it is difficult not to conclude that most of the electronic offerings that feed off the work of *The Australian* to create their own content are a waste of time. They contribute only defamatory comments and politically coloured analysis. (*The Australian* 2007: n.p.)

Crucial to this episode, however—and reflecting a pattern that has been repeated widely around the world—is the fact that the independent poll analysts whose work so evidently irritated the arch-conservative editors at *The Australian* were precisely not inexperienced amateurs, but professional psephologists: scientists specialising in the quantitative study of public opinion. Although not formally trained in the craft of journalism, their disciplinary expertise in the domain relevant to the matter at hand trumped the professional skills of the journalists reporting on the poll results—and for the first time in an Australian election campaign, they now also had ready access to the means of publishing their analyses of the polls directly to an interested public.

The Australian ‘blog wars’ episode provides a clear illustration, therefore, of the fact that “much of the consternation in journalism today pertains to how the field is ‘constructing itself. After all, what *is* journalism and what *qualifies* one to claim a place in journalism at a time when the means to publish and carry out traditional functions of journalism are so widely distributed among the populace at large” (Lewis 2012: 842), and when the members of that populace no longer just include opinionated but ill-informed followers of news and politics, but genuine experts who stand ready to critique and correct the work of professional journalists in potentially highly public and popular news blogs and citizen journalism sites?

Similar scuffles between ‘professional’ and ‘citizen’ journalists have played out across many other national mediaspheres, shifted forwards or backwards by some years depending on the speed at which alternative citizen media platforms have emerged to prominence in these various media environments. “The best evidence we have that something truly new is going on is our mainstream media’s inability to understand it”, as Rushkoff pointedly put it at the time (2003: 53–54), and the sustained and shrill attacks by mainstream media commentators on their citizen journalist counterparts especially in the early years of the new millennium demonstrate this lack of understanding in compelling detail. Writing in the *New York Times*, no less, columnist Thomas L. Friedman suggested in 2002 that “the Internet, at its ugliest, is just an open sewer: an electronic conduit for untreated, unfiltered information” (2002: n.p.), yet even more moderate voices continued for a very long time to reinforce their claim that some very clear boundaries separated professional from amateur content, in spite of the growing evidence to the contrary. As Alleyne noted as early as 1997, “such defensiveness reveals the extent to which online communication technologies—which give all who own them the chance to be mass communicators—threaten traditional bastions of power” (1997: 33).

Further, the persistent attacks on news bloggers and citizen journalists—many of whom participated in these emerging practices because of a deep interest in the news, and therefore also represented some of the conventional news media’s most committed followers—also resulted in a significant change in attitudes on the side of the citizen journalists, many of whom began to “look upon mainstream media as an arrogant, elitist club that puts its own version of self-interest and economic survival above the societal responsibility of a free press” (Lasica 2003a: 71).

As Mare has pointed out, then, this over-the-top reaction against news blogs and citizen journalism has the hallmarks of a ‘moral panic’, “promoted by journalists and news organisations whose loud and strident voices warn of the growth of slacktivism (the act of participating in obviously pointless activities as an expedient alternative to actually expending effort to fix a problem) and noise within the communication ecosystem” (Mare 2013: 87). Yet few of the criticisms made by professional journalists of their new citizen competitors are entirely convincing, largely because so much citizen journalism practice mimics the behaviour of professional journalists themselves. Even as citizen journalists are criticised for their opinionated, partisan commentary on the news, for instance, we are able to find the same form of commentary in the mainstream media; indeed, as Kovach and Rosenstiel point out, well before the arrival of citizen journalism it was the press that created “a new class of activist pundits: loosely credentialled personalities who often thrive on being provocateurs. These people are treated as authorities, but they actually are neither news sources nor journalists. They lack the expertise to offer informal analysis. They also have no responsibility for impartiality or even accuracy” (1999: 21). We might even argue that citizen journalists are more accountable than the pundits presented in the mainstream media, because they have no media imprint to lend them authority but must instead earn such authority for themselves by establishing a track record as reliable independent commentators.

Indeed, the prevalence of activist commentary over impartial first-hand reporting in citizen journalism content merely harks back to some of the foundational practices of modern journalism: it “mirrors the trend of partisanship embraced by many in the European press and is reminiscent of the journalism practiced at American newspapers from before the nation’s founding through the turn of the 20th century” (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2011: 589; cf. Sivek 2014). By contrast, the strict enforcement of objectivity is a relatively recent and particularly American phenomenon which is not as common elsewhere in the world, where competing mainstream media outlets with clearly articulated po-

litical stances are conducting public debates with each other on behalf of their audiences. “Being impartial is not a core principle of journalism” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001: 95), and fulsome claims to objectivity and impartiality by the mainstream news media could well be seen as inherently dishonest, in comparison with the open acknowledgment of a particular political positioning that many citizen journalists offer.

However unconvincing, then, these attacks against citizen journalism represent a form of boundary work, and point to the significance of the challenge that these new, participatory forms of news engagement presented for the journalism industry. These attacks “serve to police the boundaries of the profession by reiterating accepted definitions of what it is to be a journalist. When these boundaries are transgressed, the paradigm is threatened” (Mare 2013: 87). Ultimately, this can be seen as a fear of innovation and change in professional practices—and this is a fear that has a long tradition in the industry: “most if not all innovations in journalism tend to be met by doubts regarding their perceived impact on editorial autonomy” (Deuze 2005: 449). At the same time, the idealised picture of ‘proper’ journalism against which the new entrants are measured (and found wanting) also reflects a profound nostalgia for some mythical golden age of objective, impartial, and independent professional journalism that in all probability never actually existed in reality.

The circling of the wagons around this ideal picture of professional journalism, in response to the threats from a shifting paradigm of media access and participation, has contributed to the increasingly explicit formulation of what Deuze describes as “a consensual occupational ideology among journalists in different parts of the world” (Deuze 2005: 444), however. Fundamentally built on a positioning of journalists as providing “a public service (as watchdogs or ‘newshounds’, active collectors and disseminators of information)” (447) to their audiences, this inevitably also placed those audiences in a secondary, passive role as information recipients rather than as active users and producers of information in their own right: “the public was distinguished from media elites and policy experts, with the former viewed as generally passive, easily manipulated consumers of information and the latter as information gatekeepers who represented the public’s interest in the construction of political and social reality” (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000: 63). This passive role is inherently incompatible with the more participatory approach pursued by citizen journalism, of course.

“Exploring the boundaries of journalism is not an intellectual exercise relevant only to ... the academy. Definitions matter, because *how* we think

about the issue of boundaries has real consequences”, as Carlson and Lewis point out (2015: n.pag.). Most centrally, they have implications for the legal protections afforded to professional and citizen journalists. Although Rosen recounts optimistically that “blogs have been called little First Amendment machines. They extend freedom of the press to more actors” (2006: n.p.), this is true only to the extent that news bloggers and other citizen journalists are legally recognised *as press*: as operating in a journalistic capacity. Such recognition remains far from universal. Importantly, this is not merely a matter of distinction between democratic and authoritarian regimes: as recently as 2015, for instance, Fulton reports that “Australia’s attorney general, Senator George Brandis, stated that bloggers are not journalists” (Fulton 2015: 362), while in neighbouring New Zealand, a “High Court judgement has stated that bloggers can be legally classified as journalists, and online platforms, such as blogs and websites, can be recognised as a news site” (365). It should not need pointing out that such diverging assessments, sometimes made *ad hoc* and for political rather than principled reasons, can have significant consequences relating to citizen journalists’ freedom of speech and their ability to protect their sources.

The Gradual Normalisation of Citizen Journalism Elements

The prevalent practice of gatewatching—by this or any other name—has repeatedly exposed news bloggers and citizen journalists to attacks for their apparent “parasitical” relationship with mainstream news (Chadwick 2011: 19); blogger-journalist Paul Andrews, for instance, noted in 2003 that “without the daily work of print journalists, one wonders if even the news-conscious blogs would contain any real news” (2003: 63). But with the gradual establishment of citizen journalism outlets as credible voices in the overall news landscape that relationship also began to flow the other way, as especially some of the major scandals we have already encountered demonstrated: “broadcast news often feeds off and incorporates elements of citizen journalism through the use of eyewitness footage ... [or] the reporting of stories originally broken by citizen journalism initiatives on the web” (Mare 2013: 88). Such developments demonstrate that ultimately “this changing environment cannot be held outside journalism. The journalist does not work in ‘splendid isolation,’ partly because of the sheer abundance of information and the fact that publics are perfectly capable of accessing and providing news and information for/by themselves” (Bardoel and Deuze 2001: 98).

Such increasing contact between professional and citizen journalism opens the door to an exploration of the forms of journalism practiced elsewhere, even in spite of continued tendencies to draw clear boundaries between the two camps. “Professions naturally seek to patrol and preserve their familiar jurisdiction, while also colonizing activities occurring at the periphery, such as blogging and UGC” (Lewis 2012: 850); therefore, in spite of professional journalists’ sometimes profound misgivings towards citizen journalism, expressed at both personal and institutional levels, the first decade of the twenty-first century also saw the gradual adoption of at least some of the features that characterised citizen journalism. This applied especially to blogs: as Singer observed in 2005, “journalists are molding this distinctive online format to fit—and in some ways augment—traditional professional norms and practices. Blogs, in other words, are being ‘normalized’ by journalists much as other aspects of the internet have been” (2005: 174).

This normalisation resulted both in the adoption of blogging by some professional journalists, and in the acceptance of some independent news bloggers by the journalistic establishment. As we have seen already, “bloggers now receive press credentials, though they were once considered as trespassers by mainstream journalists” (Hermida 2012: 661), and this recognition as credible voices contributing to public debate is also simply an acknowledgment of the continuing popularity of some of the leading news blogs and citizen journalism sites, even in spite of the sustained criticism and denigration they had been exposed to from some circles in the journalistic establishment. Whatever misgivings about the style and quality of blogs they continued to hold, professional journalists eventually had to accept that “this type of ‘reporting’ seems to be what blog readers expect and blog writers provide” (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2011: 589), had to make their peace with it, and eventually perhaps even had to explore this style of writing for themselves. As Singer reported at the time, “by mid-2004, the American Press Institute listed more than 400 blogs published by journalists (and a handful of journalism professors)” (2005: 176).

Part of this settlement also included a realisation that professional and citizen journalists were not inherently and inevitably pitched against one another—they could also genuinely complement one another. In keeping with the two-tier structure outlined by Herbert Gans, where mainstream media organisations report the news and minor media outlets analyse and critique these reports, it is possible that citizen journalists are “strengthening the role of news media organizations, ... distributing the news media’s story rather than creating their own” (Grafström and Windell 2012: 73). The gatewatch-

ing practices of citizen journalists crucially depend on having gates to watch, after all, and at least some of those gates will continue to be those of the mainstream media. In this emerging structure, then, initial charges of a parasitic exploitation of professional news outlets by citizen journalists and were replaced by the emergence of an “almost symbiotic relationship between mainstream news blogs and the main media platforms” (Bailey and Marques 2012: 398).

Somewhat ironically, in fact, the multiplication of the number of gates through which information might pass to reach an (online) audience has also given rise to a renewed recognition of the contribution that journalistic news selection in its ideal form is able to make: “the rise of the Internet and the coming of broadband ... do not mean, as some have suggested, that the concept of applying judgment to the news—of trying to decide what people need and want to know to self-govern—is obsolete. They make the need all the greater” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001: 24). However, given the inherent uncontrollability of the gates that open onto the public arena in the new environment, this news judgment can no longer be described as *gatekeeping* in the traditional sense of the term, nor is it necessarily able to be performed by professional journalists only: “traditional media gatekeepers ... become just one of many pathways by which we learn about and make sense of new information” (Nahon *et al.* 2013: 480). In other words, professional and citizen journalists *both* provide a valuable service to their users, by highlighting—perhaps in very different ways and for very different reasons—what news they deem to be worthy of further attention.

Such cautious symbiosis has served to soften the institutional boundaries between the two sides. On the one hand, some professional journalists tried their hand at blogging, becoming what Singer (2005) described as “j-bloggers” and confronting the challenge of finding a voice as bloggers without undermining their established personas as professional journalists. “For journalists, the potential conflict of roles—non-partisan fact collectors or commentators on those facts—can create problems” (178), and it therefore remained important to clearly demarcate these roles as distinct from one another, not least also through the design and positioning of their blogs in the context of their news Websites, even if it meant a certain dissonance between the divergent roles played by the same journalist across different sections of a site.

On the other hand, a number of independent news bloggers were brought inside the boundaries of the news industry by being given a space on the Websites of mainstream news outlets, or by being hired formally as columnists. Platon and Deuze described this approach as representing a new form of

“competitor-colleague’ journalism which may yet prove to be the crucible for new ways of reconnecting journalism, news and media professionals with ideals of sharing access and participatory storytelling in journalism” (2003: 352); it provided additional legitimation to those citizen journalists who were thus recognised, and perhaps also enabled them to commit more time to this part of their lives by offering increased financial stability. Ultimately, some of these semi-professional “‘in-betweeners’ of journalistic culture—citizens who are *not professional journalists*, yet play a greater role in the journalistic process than mere receivers” (Ahva 2016: 1)—were able to convert the additional name recognition that the more prominent media platform offered them into an ongoing, full-time career. As a result, they now

act as consultants to campaigns, interest groups, government agencies, and older media. The blog and other interactive Internet genres are no longer the radical departure they ... were in the mid-2000s; they have been appropriated by all elite sectors of public communication in the advanced democracies, from politicians and agency officials to professional journalists to television and radio presenters. (Chadwick *et al.* 2016: 14)

This normalisation and professionalisation of citizen journalism within the confines of conventional news organisations—a very different spin on the call to ‘become the media’ that was *Indymedia*’s catch-cry—was not always without its own pitfalls and challenges, however. “Bloggers might migrate to different competitor news portals when convenient for them. The users of the blog tend to follow the journalist to another portal because of the established relationship of trust” (Bailey and Marques 2012: 407); in the reinvention of professional journalists as ‘j-bloggers’ and the recruiting of prominent citizen journalists to bolster the line-up of commentators available at a given news site we therefore also see a first step towards the personal branding of journalists and commentators that we will encounter again in Chapter 5 of this book. Conversely, the freedom of expression conferred by the independent news blog format may be curtailed by having to operate within the imprint of a news organisation. The prominent independent Australian news blogger Tim Dunlop, for instance, had been recruited in 2006 to write a political blog for the mainstream News Ltd. site *news.com.au*—but when he used that blog during the Australian ‘blog wars’ of 2007 to criticise the harshly worded editorial in *news.com.au*’s sister site *The Australian* that we discussed earlier, Dunlop’s post was removed from *news.com.au*’s site, and Dunlop eventually resigned over this act of corporate censorship

(Flew 2008). Such cases demonstrate a continuing struggle to negotiate between the professional ethos and corporate imperatives of the news industry on the one hand, and the emerging attitudes, styles, and ethics of citizen journalism on the other.

The alternative to such arrangements between the two sides was for major citizen journalism operators to gain financial sustainability in their own right. Such sites—“the elite of the elite” (Nahon and Hemsley 2014: 1303) of citizen journalism—include the *Huffington Post*, *The Drudge Report*, or the Korean *OhmyNews*, but their commercial transformation necessarily also changed them: as Chadwick *et al.* point out, for example, “by the time it was acquired by AOL in 2011 for 315 million dollars, the [*Huffington Post*], with more monthly visitors than the *New York Times* website ..., was a world away from the cliché of the plucky independent blog running on a shoestring budget” (2016: 14). Indeed, such sites are now major media players in their own right, and able to interact as equals with mainstream media outlets: in addition to its own international offshoots, for instance, “the *Huffington Post* has focused on partnerships with traditional news providers such as *Le Monde* in France, *L’Espresso* group in Italy, and *El Pais* in Spain and is increasingly looking to share content across countries” (Newman *et al.* 2016: 91).

In their wake, and with news users now widely accepting citizen journalism at least in principle as a credible alternative to mainstream news, other new and experimental platforms have continued to emerge. Few of these are likely to rise to the level of a *HuffPo* or *Drudge*, and many do not aim to do so; they focus instead on more limited endeavours including thematically specific or (hyper)locally focussed citizen journalism. But many continue to subscribe to the principles of citizen journalism, operating as “participatory news organizations that feature participation to such a degree that their journalistic operations would be nearly impossible without it. They are all maintained by small, professional editorial teams and supported by wide networks of participating citizens” (Ahva 2016: 5). In doing so, they continue to challenge the institutional boundaries of professional journalism.

Some such sites are notable also for their experiments with alternative funding and sustainability models. Some operate as non-profit organisations funded by charitable donations or trusts, and in doing so may reverse what Habermas once lamented as “the transformation from a journalism of conviction to one of commerce” (1974: 53). Unique amongst these models is *The Conversation*, which sources its content exclusively from university scholars

and provides journalistic editing services to its authors in order to make their contributions as accessible as possible for a wide international audience. This journalism-as-a-service model was initially funded by a consortium of Australian universities, and has since expanded to include operations in the U.K., U.S., France, Canada, and southern Africa. Yet other citizen journalism sites have managed to develop affiliations with and attract funding from mainstream media organisations without necessarily being incorporated into these organisations: the German hyperlocal citizen journalism community platform *myHeimat*, for instance, is now part-owned by regional news organisations, but is operated as a separate entity that complements rather than competes with the conventional newspapers and news sites published by those companies (Bruns 2010).

Any such tendencies towards the acceptance and normalisation of citizen journalism within or alongside the conventional news industry must also be seen against the backdrop of a news industry that continues to struggle with the broader digital transformation of its sector. Even if some of the early attacks against citizen journalism forcefully criticised its emphasis on opinion and commentary over original reporting, a substantive shift towards commentary has occurred in mainstream media content as well, to the point that “the vast majority of online ‘news’ is really commentary on news that originates from the declining number of professional journalists” (Bird 2009: 294). This is driven by a number of interlocking factors.

First, the production of commentary is simply considerably cheaper than the production of news reports; this is one of the reasons that commentary was so prevalent in citizen journalism in the first place, of course, since citizen journalists rarely had the funds to travel to the scene of the news event, or the time to spend on in-depth investigative research. Given the continuing (and arguably worsening) financial stresses on the mainstream news industry, in its attempts to cope with this lack of funds by reducing the size of the workforce of correspondents professional journalism has now become more like citizen journalism—and this decline in the staff available to produce original reporting may constitute a profound concern for democratic societies.

Second, partly because this decline in original reporting also results in a greater reliance on wire services as news sources, and because increasing amounts of information are available directly from primary news sources, original commentary now provides an increasingly important point of distinction even between mainstream news outlets. The fundamental facts of the matter

can be ascertained from almost any news outlet, or from the news actors themselves, but it is how they are interpreted by leading analysts and columnists that attracts a readership. “In an era with a growing supply of readily available information and disinformation, as well as competition from the blogosphere and social media, news organisations have upgraded the market value of interpretation and opinion making, and political commentary has been gaining importance as a journalistic genre” (Rogstad 2014: 690–91). This, too, could be regarded as the normalisation of a foundational aspect of citizen journalism across wider journalistic practice.

Third, such interpretation and analysis of the news—as opposed to ‘simple’, straight reporting—may also be especially attractive to audiences, generating a more loyal following and commercially lucrative repeat visits to news sites. This is crucially important in an environment where it remains difficult to make online news pay for itself. However, this drive to provide engaging and attractive commentary may also serve to cheapen and simplify the journalistic analysis: “in their position as interpreters, journalists often explain the political reality in a popularised way with the use of dramatic visuals to capture and sustain the audience’s attention and involvement” (Rogstad 2014: 692). Here, perhaps, we see a significant departure of mainstream journalism practices from citizen journalism, as a result of commercial imperatives: where independent, non-commercial citizen journalism sites generally tend to attract only a small but committed audience, the need to maximise attraction and reach in a commercial context may result in a more populist, less in-depth coverage.

This increased blurring of the boundaries between professional and citizen journalism, between mainstream and alternative media, is one of the hallmarks of a hybrid media system as Chadwick *et al.* (2016) describe it, of course. Although Klinger and Svensson are right to note that this “does not dissolve the different norms and processes—the rules of the game” (2016: 25)—that distinguish the different components of this system, it is nonetheless evident from our discussion here that over time there has been a significant equalisation in practices between professional and citizen journalism—and that, somewhat surprisingly, this equalisation has also seen professional news media take on a growing range of the characteristics that they once criticised in citizen media. Chief amongst these has been the prevalence of opinion and commentary.

Beyond the First Wave of Citizen Media

As a result, then, “journalism no longer dominates the mediascape as *the* source for helping a society learn about itself. Instead, journalism has become part of a holistic mix of media elements that intentionally or unintentionally provide people with varied glimpses of the world around them” (Berkowitz 2009: 290). By the end of the 2000s, the Websites of conventional news outlets had transformed to incorporate a modest amount of the interactive and participatory features that were central to citizen journalism sites and news blogs, while a range of such alternative citizen media sites (and some of the charismatic proprietors operating them) had also been established as continuing fixtures in the wider news media landscape. There was also an increasing overlap between the two sides, with citizen journalists and news bloggers appearing as commentators in the mainstream media on occasion, and professional journalists publishing their own blogs.

And yet, such individual success stories should not obscure the fact that “the history of alternative media is predominantly one of failure: failure to reach any but the most specialist of audiences and a consequent failure to effect the political and social transformations that represent the ambition of so many of its projects” (Atton 2013: 131). For every successful citizen journalism site or news blog, many more faltered and failed, due variously to their inability to attract sufficient users, the difficulties in generating engaging and insightful content on an ongoing basis, or their operators’ struggles to commit the necessary time and energy to keep the sites going for the long term. In short, the early enthusiasm for citizen journalism and news blogging—for ‘becoming the media’—dissipated as the day-to-day routine and tedium of tracking and commenting on the news set in, and only those citizen journalists with the strongest desire for and greatest commitment to making their voices heard in public debate continued their efforts. This also served to relativise some of the grandest claims about the fundamental paradigm shift in journalism that citizen journalism and news blogging were supposed to be driving: “early claims that blogs were a ‘new genre of journalism’ ... gave way to the recognition that some blogs were doing journalism only some of the time” (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2011: 589).

In part this decline in news blogging was driven also by the fact that—in spite of the ready accessibility of hosted blogging platforms—there still remained considerable hurdles to continuing engagement. J.D. Lasica may have been right to state that “to practice random acts of journalism, you don’t need

a big-league publication with a slick Web site behind you” (2003a: 73), but the *regular*, habitual updating of a news blog that was required to establish the blogger as a noted voice in the blogosphere was anything but random; in order to be recognised by their peers, or by professional journalists, such bloggers had to adopt a “Pro-Am” (Leadbeater and Miller 2004) attitude towards their work, and act in a truly para-journalistic capacity: “they move from merely seeing their blog as a form of journalism to actually engag[ing] in journalistic behaviors, such as quoting sources, checking their facts, and posting corrections” (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2011: 599). This is not to claim that all citizen journalists and news bloggers necessarily set out to seek mainstream recognition and impact, of course—as Atton notes, “some alternative media—such as the publications of separatist feminism or the anti-technology writings of primitivist anarchists—will, by their self-determined ideological location, lie beyond the mainstream. Their limited reach and radical content lends them a ‘purity’ that offers ideological protection, but it also weakens their influence” (Atton 2013: 131). However, even to be recognised merely by their fellow ideological travellers as credible and reliable voices for their cause required them to take a quasi-professional attitude to their citizen journalism activities.

As noted, the adoption of interactive and participatory features into mainstream journalism remained similarly haphazard—while the first decade of the new millennium saw the emergence of ‘j-blogging’, many such blogs remained rebadged opinion columns, and “most (but not all) political j-bloggers [were] retaining their traditional journalistic gatekeeping role by incorporating limited or no material from users, despite the inherently conversational and participatory nature of the format” (Singer 2005: 189). This approach is central to what Singer has described as the normalisation of the disruptive blog format into everyday journalistic routine: it represents an adoption of the superficial features of blogging (the presentation of journalistic commentary in the conversational style of blogs, and in the form of a reverse-chronological feed on the journalist’s profile page on a news site) without at the same time making any more than passing gestures towards an engagement of the column’s readership or towards increasing the transparency of the news process by including links to source materials or to other news articles about the current topic that have been published elsewhere on the Web. Further, even if “these blogs indicate a move away from the neutral stance of the traditional journalist”, these new j-bloggers largely represented “columnists already comfortable with incorporating opinion in[to] what they write” (Singer 2005: 192).

Such normalisation—in journalism and in other fields where blogs have provided a new platform for information dissemination—has progressed to such an extent that the very term ‘blog’ may seem somewhat anachronistic today. This confirms Clay Shirky’s 2003 prediction that “the term ‘blog’ will fall into the middle distance, as ‘home page’ and ‘portal’ have, words that used to mean some concrete thing, but which were stretched by use past the point of meaning” (2003: n.p.); indeed, today a blogger may simply point to their ‘Website’, even if that site is supported by one of the blogging platforms that continue to enjoy widespread popularity. Quite appropriately, perhaps, the fact that a site is, technically, a blog is no longer as important as the content it contains—as Katzenbach attests, blogs as a specific form of publishing no longer have “a major distinct function in the emergence and establishment” of a public (2016: 12; my translation).

Even in spite of this decline in the breadth of citizen media after the first wave of enthusiasm, our discussion in this chapter has shown clearly that citizen journalism and news blogging have had an important impact on the overall mediasphere wherever they have been practiced. However, by the end of the 2000s they were practiced largely by a self-selecting elite of what we might describe, following Coleman (2003: 735), as “political junkies” with an especially heightened interest in the news. This further undermines any hopes that the emergence of citizen journalism and news blogging would substantially democratise public debate about news and politics; “the internet pluralizes but does not inherently democratize spheres of social, cultural, political, or economic activity” (Papacharissi 2014: 8). In reality, the “main effect” of the emergence of such new publishing formats “was not to engage more people but rather to provide new venues for existing political actors” (Singer 2005: 175). This is not a negligible contribution in itself: at times, these platforms enabled small-time activists to reach national and global audiences, and allowed domain experts such as the psephologists who played such a crucial role in Australia’s ‘blog wars’ to debunk the self-serving narratives spun by partisan commentators in the national news media. Dahlgren describes this new class of voices in public debate as “civic intellectuals”, as distinct from the public intellectuals legitimised by the conventional mainstream media—“they derive from and are anchored in the citizenry” and contribute “to the expansion (and evolution) of the intellectual character of the public sphere” (Dahlgren 2012: 105).

Nonetheless, citizen journalism and news blogging gradually contracted around a hard core of quasi-professional para-journalists on the one hand,

and professional domain experts engaging in extracurricular activities by contributing their knowledge to public debate on the other. Increasingly, such practitioners tended “to have journalistic motivations and follow professional journalistic norms, in particular when they blog about public affairs” (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2011: 600), and—except for the continuing boundary work performed by journalism professionals—there were therefore few reasons why such Pro-Am citizen journalists could not have cooperated with, or operated within the confines of, mainstream news outlets as well. Indeed, as we have already seen, eventually some leading citizen journalists were indeed recruited to join the other side, leading Atton to ask whether the “professionalized media” are “perhaps a more fruitful location for alternative media practices than we might think” (Atton 2013: 144). Dahlgren similarly notes that his civic intellectuals “are largely an online phenomenon (though in principle they could make use of the older mass media)” (2012: 105). Although arguably their status has changed and diminished with the growing hybridisation of national and global mediaspheres, this recognises that the mainstream media continue to exercise a certain power to keep the gates: not those that determine whether a specific piece of information will reach an audience, but those that determine which actors are afforded greater visibility and reach by being featured in leading print, broadcast, and online news outlets.

Here, Rosen’s grand vision of “the people formerly known as the audience” taking matters into their own hands and establishing “a new balance of power” between media producers and media users (2006: n.p.) meets head-on the *Realpolitik* of the attention economy, where industrial and institutional structures still matter. “The history of alternative media shows us that we cannot expect citizen-journalism projects to provide serious competition to established, corporate media—their resources and reach are insufficient, their ideologies often too specialist to appeal to broad audiences” (Atton 2013: 141). Their emergence highlights a real and critical problem—“that the [mainstream] media are seen as letting us down in every way” (Dvorak 2006: n.p.)—but it became evident as the first wave of citizen media ebbed away that they could not provide a comprehensive solution by themselves. Their major contribution was not to establish an alternative media system that audiences could use to inform themselves without ever having to rely on mainstream media reporting again; rather, in keeping with Gans’s two-tier model, they established themselves as a corrective to mainstream media coverage by critiquing the reporting, framing, and analytical choices made by first-tier journalists and commentators. Discussing this in the context of

the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, Williams and Delli Carpini suggest that their major contribution was therefore to facilitate a decline in the “ability of mainstream journalists and political elites to act as gatekeepers and agenda-setters” (2000: 77).

Even if the wave of citizen journalism and news blogging has itself declined again from its peak in the early 2000s, then, it has had a lasting impact on the mainstream news industry:

projects do not need to be permanent or long-standing to produce important new ways of creating journalism. What are the conditions that lead to innovative practices by citizen journalists? How do the practices and tools they pioneer then spread? At what point does the acceptance of their innovations become an act of domestication that potentially appropriates citizen creativity and originality? (Wall 2015: 806)

We might see this as another way in which citizen journalism has ‘become the media’: though falling short of a complete paradigm shift, it has transformed in a number of subtle ways the forms of journalism that are practiced within the industry, and the range of actors who now regularly get to participate in mediated public debate. By revealing the constructed and unfinished nature of the news, and moving more of the processes of its construction into public, frontstage view, it has positioned transparency as “a new norm (if not *the* new norm) in journalism, promoting accountability” (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013: 370) and thereby also serving to transform the role of journalists—eventually perhaps enabling them “to rejoin civil society, and to start talking to their readers and viewers as one citizen to another, rather than as experts claiming to be above politics”, as Hallin (1992: 20) envisioned it as early as 1992.

Enter Social Media

In historical terms—and keeping in mind that developments proceeded at different pace in different countries and regions—the discussion so far takes us to around 2007 or 2008. While rear-guard battles such as the Australian ‘blog wars’ were still being fought in some territories, for the most part an uneasy truce had been established between professional and citizen journalism: the remaining citizen journalism sites and news blogs were unlikely to disappear any time soon, but they were equally unlikely to effect wholesale change in the news industry beyond the shifts they had already provoked. The next impulses

in the continuing transformation of journalistic practices (on both sides of the pro/am divide) should come from the introduction of new platforms for public communication by “the people formerly known as the audience”: from a new generation of social media platforms including *Facebook* and *Twitter*.

Both these platforms had been launched some years earlier: *TheFacebook*, as it was known at the time, was launched as a campus network at Harvard University in early 2004, while *Twitter* was made available to a small community of early users in San Francisco in March 2006. In both cases, it took several years for these platforms to reach a large, mass user community: *Facebook* was made available globally only in September 2006, while *Twitter* had its breakthrough within the tech community during the 2007 South by Southwest Interactive conference and received a substantial boost in general popularity when TV celebrity Oprah promoted the service on her show in April 2009. But much as blogs and other online publishing technologies had been during the first wave of citizen media, these platforms also became experimental spaces for the development of new forms of news engagement that carried on some of the ethos and ambition of citizen journalism and news blogging; indeed, “a multitude of the functions ... assigned to blogs ... has by now migrated to platforms such as Facebook [and] Twitter” (Katzenbach 2016: 11; my translation).

In the years since they first emerged to public prominence, two key functions of social media in the context of news dissemination, discussion, and evaluation have become especially significant, and are the subject of the following two chapters. On the one hand, social media—and here especially *Twitter*—are now recognised as contributing in crucial ways to the coverage and curation of information relating to breaking news events. Much more so than first-wave citizen media, they enable citizens to contribute original and immediate reporting on the events unfolding around them; additionally, they also facilitate the *ad hoc* gathering of publics and communities that collectively and collaboratively ‘work the story’ to make sense of these events. We will explore these processes in Chapter 3. On the other hand, social media are now also crucial networks for the everyday sharing of and engagement with the news, and have fundamentally changed the way in which many people encounter and access the news. This has profound implications for how individual users and society as a whole inform themselves about the world around them, which Chapter 4 discusses in detail. Finally, in addition to these changes in user practices, the emergence of social media as important news media has also necessitat-

ed further adjustments to professional news sourcing, reporting, publishing, and engagement practices. Much as with the first wave of citizen media, such transformations have proceeded reluctantly and unevenly, but today a number of new models for doing professional journalism are emerging; these are explored in Chapters 5 and 6.

If anything, the challenge to the journalistic mainstream from these new developments is even more profound than that from news blogs and citizen journalism sites, even if some of the key concerns for professional journalism remain the same:

the network logic of social network sites erodes the information monopolies of news companies even more than relatively static publishing platforms such as websites and blogs do. The sharing of news on Twitter and Facebook challenges their role as society's gatekeepers for information on current affairs, which is part and parcel of journalism but also harms their business model. (Broersma and Graham 2016: 91)

This is in part also because social media further lower the barriers of entry to citizen-journalistic practices, by providing even more standardised platforms that crucially also incorporate the network functionality required for connecting with and addressing large, potentially global audiences. As a result, “citizens once running their own blogs as independent editors often dropped these labor-intensive sites for social networking sites such as Twitter, which require fewer skills and commitment than it takes to run a blog” (Wall 2015: 803).

We will return repeatedly to the importance of the fact that social media platforms inherently include social *networking* functions throughout the remainder of this book—arguably, this is one of the most crucial distinctions from the first wave of citizen media, which consisted instead of a multitude of stand-alone citizen journalism sites and news blogs that had to be connected manually, painstakingly, by building networks one hyperlink at a time. By contrast, the emergence of social media with their built-in network logic has had profound implications: it has meant that “journalism is not just in the process of negotiating a shift to a digital media environment, but more significantly to a networked one” (Hermida 2012: 660–61), and that “the information asymmetry between established media organizations vis-à-vis the newcomers” that Grafström and Windell had identified (2012: 75) has been reduced substantially. Taken together, these changes also significantly affect how we might conceptualise the structure of information flows across the public sphere—a question that we return to in Chapter 8.

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