

Acknowledgements

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Abstract

In this paper I explore how participatory journalism is changing organizational structure and production practices at the publicly funded Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Toronto (CBC). Using practical action research I examine two sites of study that offer unique strategies on incorporating everyday citizens into the news production process: the use of citizen bloggers to supplement CBC's coverage of the G20 summit in Toronto shows how diversifying storytelling improves the overall quality of news content; the mandate of *Connect with Mark Kelly* to democratize daily news by using ordinary people as sources and breaking traditional rules of production reveals a survival strategy for daily news shows. Through the lens of media logic, using the theories of convergence culture and the public sphere, I develop strategies to involve more citizens in the newsmaking process, thus invigorating public discourse and subverting news production that is designed to entertain instead of inform.

Key Words: participatory journalism, media logic, public sphere, convergence culture

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Redefining journalism: Convergence in the public sphere

The Internet and social media are changing the underlying infrastructures that define journalism and how it is executed within our society. Where once the audience had little control over content being created and no substitute for mainstream messages being broadcast, online independent journalists now produce their own versions of reality alongside citizens working to reshape the social narrative. However, some of the most effective and enlightening journalism occurs when traditional media and everyday citizens work together: participatory journalism. In this paper I explore how participatory journalism is changing organizational structure and production practices at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Toronto (CBC)—a publicly funded network actively working on enriching its relationship with its audience community. At CBC, participatory journalism subverts what Altheide & Snow (1979) call media logic. Encompassing the practice, epistemology, and consumption of news, media logic is a multi-pronged theory at work in all news production.

In today's newscasts shot selection, camera angles, video edits, the addition of graphics, and the elements that contribute to the way material is presented are more significant than editorial strength (Altheide & Snow, 1991). The focal point of news production shaped by media logic is the systemic use of standardized story formats. These formats generate content that portrays narrowed, socially constructed realities because the goal is to entertain, not inform (Altheide & Snow, 1979). Altheide & Snow (1991) don't see ownership as a primary factor in the prevalence of media logic. However, I agree with Habermas (1991) that when journalism shifted from "private men of letters to the public services of the mass media" (p. 188) news began to shift towards a production model that prioritized corporate interests over public knowledge. This production model, rooted in media logic, limits journalism's ability to act as a

democratic tool of society because it limits the flow of information. Although some might argue this is a moot point as citizen journalists and new technologies will ensure effective public discourse, others couldn't disagree more.

Bradley (2009) sees the “advent of citizen journalists as a sign of the apocalypse,” and is not alone in expressing concerns over the veracity of user-generated content. Many broadcasters want to involve the audience, but worry about liability for posting scurrilous comments or content, which is why most newsrooms minimize audience interaction to mediated remarks and pictures (Thurman, 2008). However, as Carey (2009) notes, “electronics is neither the arrival of apocalypse nor the dispensation of grace” (p. 107). The evolution of the Internet and subsequent upsurge of citizen content are not destroying or salvaging journalism. We are living in an age defined by a dichotomy of information overload and ignorance. In 2007, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, over a third of Americans surveyed believed Saddam Hussein played a significant role in the 9/11 bombings (Gans, 2009). Absorbing information on the Internet is like “drinking from a firehose” (Gillmor, 2009, p. 9), and although the web offers a palpable alternative to mainstream media, whether it meets Habermas's ideal of a public sphere is in question.

The Internet is a macro-platform for debate—compared to the micro platform of 18th century German table societies, French salons, or English coffee houses. These latter spaces are the origin of the modern public sphere (Habermas, 1991): meeting places where ordinary citizens discussed issues, ideas, and important events, opening up social norms and expectations for examination and reform. Long before the Internet, this is where the ideal was first introduced that status could be “disregarded” and the laws of the market “suspended” (Habermas, 1991, p. 36) in the formation of public opinion. Everyone was on equal footing; everyone had a say. As

Rosen (2010) identified, “this has never been a description of how public life in a competitive democracy actually works” (para. 25), but rather an ideal to work towards. Nevertheless, Habermas’s public sphere provides a useful framework to examine the wider view of the effects of participatory journalism on public discourse. A different tool, however, is needed to examine the effects of changing models of audience participation on modern news production practices.

Jenkins’ (2006) convergence culture outlines the unpredictable mash-up of emerging and traditional media and the transformation of media consumers into producers, allowing for refined analysis of contemporary challenges. Convergence is most often defined as the merging of multiple media platforms, often under centralized ownership. But Jenkins (2006) focuses on every person’s ability to be a media producer—a participant—and the effects of that pivotal change on media production and consumption as professionals and amateurs “interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands” (p. 3). The news landscape is so drastically altered that although there are ideas on how to operate within this new converged reality, there are no recognized methodologies. That being said, I agree with Jenkins (2006) that grassroots journalism “diversifies” (p. 268) and broadcast journalism “amplifies.” Citizens and independent media are able to create more diverse content outside of traditional norms and subject matters, while traditional media are more visible and have the ability to amplify diverse stories that are often ignored.

When the audience becomes part of convergence and the everyday news process, the clearly defined language and grammar of news is challenged, more versions of truth are told, more variety of formats in stories seen, and more discussion of issues that affect us all promoted. Through this thesis I examine two sites of study of participatory journalism at CBC: the use of citizen bloggers to cover the G20 summit in Toronto, which allowed for more varied storytelling;

and the democratization of daily news at *Connect with Mark Kelly*, where traditional formats and practices are forsaken in an effort to share alternative versions of truth. Both sites exemplify how collaboration between emerging and mainstream partners could be the best way to ensure journalism that promotes discourse and subverts the use of media logic.

Definition of terms

The terms public journalism, citizen journalist, independent journalist, participatory journalism, and grassroots journalism are intertwined, used within the same or different context in a variety of papers. Paulussen, Heinonen, Domingo, and Quandt (2007) describe them all as “participatory models of journalism” (p. 137), but refer to Nip’s (2006) definition of citizen or grassroots media as content created independently, outside of the influence of traditional journalists; public journalism as aiming to involve citizens while journalists retain the gatekeeper role; and participatory journalism as a collaboration between citizens and journalists. However, the content created by citizen or grassroots journalists is often acquired or used by traditional media. This is illustrated, for example, in pictures and video of the G20 protests in Toronto during the summer of 2010. Independent media, such as documentary producers, work with a variety of news networks and funding agencies, and often work with staff journalists in the process – or not. What some people refer to as a classic example of citizen journalism, *OhmyNews*, is in fact a collaborative effort between 60,000 citizen journalists and 60 professional journalists (Young, 2009). The majority of *Ohmy*’s content is created by the audience. Anyone can submit a story, but it is the professional journalists who vet material and decide what will make it to the web (Kim & Hamilton, 2006). In practice, there are no clearly defined lines.

For the purpose of this research, and to provide a continuum for participation and

collaboration, independent, grassroots and/or citizen journalism refers to all types of journalistic content created and consumed outside mainstream media. Participatory journalism is all journalistic content created collaboratively by journalists, independent media, and citizens, as well as content created independently by citizen/grassroots or independent media that is then acquired or used by mainstream media. That definition of participatory journalism is central to this thesis.

Literature Review

There are two camps of thought regarding the current media evolution—one that sees the combination of the Internet and grassroots journalists as democratic journalism’s saviour, the other as its executioner. Both could be missing the point. Perhaps the real answer is converging the two. Within my sites of study I will examine four areas significantly impacting journalistic production: (i) divided opinion on the merits of a new type of convergence between the audience and mainstream broadcasters; (ii) how participatory journalism can amplify the diverse stories already being told online; (iii) how concentrated ownership impacts all types of convergence; and (iv) in what ways traditional journalism needs to change to remain a relevant contributor to the media landscape and public discourse.

Media Logic

Although often overlooked in media studies, Altheide and Snow’s (1979; 1991) theory of media logic profoundly reflects modern news culture and practice. A journalist’s job is no longer deciding how best to share information, but how best to fit the information into the established format in order to entertain the audience. To meet this end, every major broadcaster packages content using a standardized “rhythm, grammar, and format” (Altheide, 2004, p. 294). A reporter story, for example, has a distinct beginning, middle, and end, is cut to a specific length, contains

clips or soundbites from a designated expert, and is edited at a quick pace to hold the audience's attention (Altheide, 2004). Because of the need to meet established production norms, the context of interviews and events is narrowed and altered (Altheide, 2004; Pikkert, 2007). As Altheide (2004) identified, "various audiences now find it perfectly sensible to 'cover the world in 60 seconds'" (p. 294), despite the fact that not one of the individual stories viewed in that timeframe could be given any real context. News is more entertainment than public service. This results in a distorted version of reality that becomes a "collective consciousness" (Altheide & Snow, 1991, p. 252) as television audiences produce meaning from decontextualized events.

Media logic was first defined under the umbrella of symbolic interactionism more than 30 years ago, but it is still pervasive in modern news culture. For example, recent changes to CBC's flagship show *The National* aimed at improving ratings concentrated primarily on visual modifications within established formats rather than building knowledge; journalism has been replaced by "information mechanics" (Altheide & Snow, 1991, p. 249). Because of its far-reaching analytical framework, media logic provides the perfect lens through which to examine the effects of participatory journalism on current news practice and epistemology.

Apocalypse vs. Pollyanna

Modern technology has shifted the way we communicate making conversations of "many-to-many" (Surratt, 2001, p. 42) the norm. As a result, it is easier for citizens to create their own news stories, or lampoon or support coverage by mainstream networks that used to have complete authority over the dissemination of news (Allan, 2009; Bruns, 2003, 2007; Hartley, 2000; Jones, 2009) and our "collective memory" (Robinson, 2009). The alternative message is important, but so is the way the story is told. In traditional journalism although some links to information may be provided online, the audience is generally not given access to a

journalist's sources. For independent sites, "linking to original materials and references is considered a core characteristic of communication" (Benkler, 2006, p. 218). If a reader is unable to access the original source(s) the author used to form a viewpoint, the content is seen to have less value. This informal protocol promotes transparency. It allows the audience to weigh the relevancy of sources from its own perspective, and comment on the original work from a different standpoint, invigorating public discourse (Friedland, 1996). In theory, with independent Internet sites offering a plethora of alternative information (Bird, 2009), it may seem inconsequential that the quality of conventional journalism is deteriorating. However, socio-economic barriers, the glut of information available on the Internet, and the much wider audience still viewing mainstream news make it appear that traditional media are still critical to the diffusion of information, and will be for the foreseeable future.

As Rosen (2010) points out "it's important to neither under-estimate nor over-estimate what the people formerly known as the audience are up for" (para. 34). Although citizen journalists have the wherewithal to shed light on stories that need to be told, and versions of stories being ignored (Benkler 2006; Shirky, 2008), they generally don't have the time, resources, or money to complete the types of investigations mainstream media can commit to. As well, finding dependable sources on the Internet while sorting through an information surplus (Chy, 2009; Yaros, 2009) takes "significant tenacity and time" (Bird, 2009, p. 45). Online information is affected by a new type of gatekeeping where certain individuals are given the power to promote content in aggregated sites simply because they are popular with other users (Meraz, 2009). Socio-economic barriers prevent much of the population from taking part in the online conversation (Rutigliano, 2009; Alia, 2010), and extremists can easily build social networks that ignore all other viewpoints (Carey, 2005; Dahlberg, 2005).

Regardless of any positives or negatives regarding grassroots information available, mainstream news still attracts the widest audience by far (Curran & Witschge, 2010). The majority of messages received—even on the Internet—are produced to ensure profit, not necessarily build knowledge (Dahlgren, 2009; Lowrey, 2009; Sholle, 2005), and often endorse a specific political or social agenda (Beers, 2006). More research needs to be done on how to balance news for profit by amplifying diverse messages, and how to make certain that valuable content buried on the web is made more accessible. This helps ensure the Internet is an integral part of promoting discourse, as opposed to a divisive tool fragmenting society.

Centralized Ownership

Centralized ownership is a key area of discussion regarding the new information infrastructure and the public sphere. One study found media mogul Rupert Murdoch had a significant influence on decision-making (Deuze, 2007, p. 145) at his media outlets, but there was some measure of autonomy in everyday decisions. That may be the case, but from the perspective of media logic the structure of news programs themselves “define all other journalistic practices” (Altheide & Snow, 1991, p. 76). From this vantage, if you’re hiring Bill O’Reilly and Sarah Palin you can be fairly certain of the political viewpoint their stories will project. Deuze (2007) posits that freelancing opportunities give media workers more freedom and, as a result, individual news organizations can’t influence and control the dispersal of a specific agenda. However, numerous studies, and my own experience in the industry, show lack of job security, the push to continually provide more stories, and the need to build profit counteract any freedom to create original content in a freelance culture controlled by concentrated ownership (Davis, 2010; Phillips, Couldry, & Freedman, 2010). As Deuze (2009) himself acknowledges, further study is required “to recognize the limits of frameworks that

document the presumed collective or group behaviours and attitudes in news organizations or professions” (pp. 90-91) before any conclusions can be made about the true impact of this unstable, or, what Deuze would term, “liquid” environment.

Profit consistently took precedence over quality the ten years I worked in a privately owned newsroom—and the “factory-like” (Carey, 2009) production of news is most obvious in the 24-hour news cycle. To facilitate quick turn-around of content, many journalists today operate in a sedentary format, reporting on stories in locations they never visit (Basinee & Marchetti, 2006), or report live on location but know very little about what is going on around them. They’re simply being fed information from the newsroom. As a result, reporters are disconnected from their subjects, often relying on public relations handouts instead of research (Phillips, 2010). Quinn (2004) proposes that convergence of multiple media platforms under one owner “offers opportunities to do better and more socially useful journalism” (p. 121); my personal observation of this type of convergence in a corporate news environment is that it leads to less time for more work, negatively impacts the quality of mainstream news programming and, as a result, restricts public discourse. As Innis (2004) outlined, “it is difficult to overestimate the significance of technological change in communication or the position of monopolies built up by those who systematically take advantage of it” (p. 94). More investigation needs to be done on how independent content could be incorporated into mainstream news, diversifying storytelling and counteracting socially constructed versions of events created with a primary goal of profit.

The Future of Journalism

The Internet isn’t the first wave of technology with far-reaching effects on society (Carey, 2009), or that was purported to be the death of another form of media (Jenkins, 2006).

Freedman (2010) writes that, “it is clear that news business will have to rethink its approach if it is to remain relevant and prosperous in a digital future” (p. 239). Abernathy and Foster (2009) say media outlets “will need to form networked ‘communities’ with other organizations—a sort of news version of Hulu, the portal that aggregates online video content from Disney, News Corp. and NBCU” (p. 13); that might work, but it wouldn’t address issues surrounding reliance on advertisers. Altheide and Snow (1991) say “journalism will not be reborn until information formats are recognized, evaluated, and altered” (p. xi); Gurevitch, Coleman, and Blumer (2009) call for the creation of an online “civic commons” that would “reconfigure access to the institutions, events, and debates that once took place exclusively on the other side of the screen” (p. 179); Paulussen, Heinoen, Domingo, & Quandt (2007) believe we should “turn journalism from a lecture into a conversation with citizens” (p. 137). Numerous academics have weighed in on the Internet as the ideal public sphere (Beers, 2006; Benkler, 2006; Dahlberg, 2005; de Zuniga, 2009; Papacharissi, 2009), but more research needs to be done on practical changes that can be implemented to amplify diverse storytelling in traditional broadcast media.

Methodology

In order to develop workable strategies for implementing participatory journalism, for this project I used practical action research (Hinchey, 2008) to examine existing practices and perceptions surrounding participatory journalism in the newsroom at CBC Toronto. Action research is most appropriate for this study due to its focus on participatory, collaborative methods that allow for multiple viewpoints (O’Brien, 1998). In keeping with this method I created a blog where I engaged with my own online audience in a discussion of the existing practices and future of journalism, and to get input on my data gathering and analysis. Where appropriate, comments curated on my blogsite were included as part of my empirical research. I

must also acknowledge the influence of Singhal's (2011) work on positive deviance in selecting my sites of study. I was purposely looking for positive examples of participatory journalism based on the premise that the answers for a problem, in this case the eroding quality and reputation of mainstream journalism, often exist within a community but aren't being put into practice by the majority.

Data Gathering & Procedure

I work with journalists from CBC almost every day, and through informal and exploratory discussions was able to identify key players in CBC's push to create more interactivity with its audience and rejuvenate its news department. Fourteen subjects were selected from a variety of departments and interviews were "designed not to gather concrete evidence or objective data but to reveal the reality that makes up people's day-to-day experience, bringing their assumptions, views and beliefs out in the open and making them available for reflection" (Stringer, 2007, p. 66). Interviews were conducted over a period spanning seven months, from August 2010 to February 2011, and were on average 45 minutes to an hour in length. Most interviews took place in the participant's office or workspace, but some were also conducted at more informal settings including a coffee shop, cottage, and park benches. Some participants were interviewed on multiple occasions in order to update information on ongoing projects, or to clarify quotations.

Due to my own history working as a journalist and the proven success of using conversation as a way of constituting (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2002, p. 106) meaning out of shared practices, interviews were open-ended and framed around a discussion of the current state of broadcast journalism and each subject's particular job. However, three topics were always discussed: how, or should, the work of independent media and citizen journalists be incorporated into mainstream broadcast news more often? How does the incorporation of

independent media/citizen journalists' work impact the quality of broadcast content and, as a result, public discourse? How is the new information infrastructure (i.e., the Internet, web 2.0 technology) influencing broadcast journalism?

On my website/blog I reflected on my findings throughout the research process. Traffic to my research site was promoted through social media and e-mail. The website started rather bare bones, but grew congruently with my data collection—a fluid form of emic research reflecting rapid changes in the industry and the collaborative method of action research. The open-ended format of the website allowed me to subvert media logic in my own work because, as Altheide & Snow (1991) wrote, “it is the communication order that is partly responsible—and holds the key to opening fresh perspectives” (p. 11). Participants in my research were given links to my blog posts and their transcripts posted on the blog to ensure I had captured the essence of their viewpoints. In some cases, I also showed them draft copies of my findings sections in order to ensure I was not inadvertently identifying them. By opening the door to organic debate with no hierarchy and few limitations regarding format on my website, I was able to invite discussion on my research topic with complete strangers and with my own research participants. It was up to each participant to determine their level of activity in the research process; some contributed comments on my blog post, shared links to the posts with their own online audience through social media like Twitter, or sent me links to articles that were relevant to my study.

Ethical Concerns and Limitations

Ethical concerns included dealing with subjects who wished to remain anonymous, and ensuring my former or current students didn't feel compelled to participate. Due to the transparent nature of my research process, participants were cautioned that if they decided to withdraw from the study, without prejudice, there would be no guarantee information already

posted on my website hadn't been copied or cited elsewhere. The wide net used to gather material made qualitative analysis a difficult task; however, the breadth of knowledge gained and increased insight through interaction with an online community and several departments at CBC provided critical data and multiple perspectives in my subject area.

Practices at grassroots and privately owned media outlets were conceptually analysed; however, my thesis focuses on uniquely Canadian publicly funded broadcast television. This research aims to identify best practices for CBC, but the strategies suggested could be used in, or modified for, a variety of other environments.

Analysis

Using analysis with an ethnographic sensibility I combined the three prongs of my data: interviews, participant observation, and information gathered from comments on my blog, and with this data then conducted a thematic analysis. Typical of action research, quotes from participants were coded and categorized (Stringer, 2007; Seidman, 2006), but specific to this project emerging themes were analysed through the lens of media logic and convergence culture. Front and centre in this analysis was Seidman's (2006) position that "we interview in order to come to know the experience of the participants through their stories. We learn from hearing and studying what the participants say" (Seidman, 2006, p. 119). One of my primary goals was to ensure that participant viewpoints guided the development of themes, not my deduction of how their comments could be interpreted. Several categories emerged: resistance to change, audience interaction, centralized ownership, quality of journalism content, and the future of journalism. However, through further analysis it became clear that each site of study had its own themes in relation to these categories and offered unique lessons on incorporating citizens into the fabric of mainstream news production. The incorporation of citizen bloggers into CBC's G20 coverage

demonstrated how diversifying storytelling and building a partnership with the audience improves the overall quality of news content. The mandate of *Connect with Mark Kelly*, which is to democratize daily news by eschewing standard formats and experts and showing transparency in the news production process, revealed a survival strategy for daily news shows trying to remain relevant in a volatile and competitive broadcast market.

Findings

Although there is much discussion about incorporating participatory journalism into mainstream news production, there is no concrete methodology. However, coverage of G20 protests that included citizen bloggers and *Connect with Mark Kelly* showcase different forms of participatory action that offer unique, tested strategies to build new relationships with the audience community. Besides the obvious connection of engaging citizens in the newsmaking process, there is another common thread in these sites of study: strategies used to involve more people in the newsmaking process also work to subvert media logic and improve public discourse.

Citizen Blogger G20 Coverage

Of all the departments I visited at CBC, the one that encompassed the community team, the group of people responsible for direct audience communication through the CBC website, least met my expectation of a newsroom. Missing was the wall of monitors, a studio, or the constant buzz of people creating news content. Instead, a small area of desks was clustered together with a group of almost silent workers huddled over their computers, scanning content, and interacting with the audience online. On the day of my visit, my participant interview was delayed by approximately seven hours because the uprising in Egypt was underway, and most of the information on what was happening was being surfaced through social media. The person I

was set to interview was repeatedly called away to talk on-air about why social media was playing such a large role in the communication process and share some of the stories the community team was garnering from citizens it had connected with online who were on the ground in Egypt. Many of the policies and practices of this department, which was doubled in size to a team of six after the G20, were created or realigned as a result of the experience of using citizen journalists to help cover the summit.

The partnership between CBC and citizen bloggers during the G20 summit in Toronto could be the best participatory journalism model available, and offers a road map for others interested in forming new relationships with the audience and improving the quality of news coverage. Reporting on volatile protests side-by-side, ordinary citizens and CBC staffers exemplified Jenkins' (2006) convergence culture "where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (p. 2). EMPLOYEE F described it as a "watershed moment for CBC News": for the first time in the network's history "an army of citizen journalists" (EMPLOYEE L) was recruited to tell its own version of events alongside network employees.

Organic quality control.

EMPLOYEE F: We put out a call for people who were interested in telling us their point of view through Twitter and facebook. We just said you can blog as much or as little, you can send photos, you can send video or no video. Everything is voluntary; do not put yourself in any danger.

During the G20, newsgathering at the CBC turned into an organic process where the professionals in charge of relaying information to the public had only basic information about what the citizens they were working with would submit to be aired, and no firm schedule of when it would be submitted. Citizens with no formal knowledge of expected formulae and

standards were not assigned stories, but “bumped” (EMPLOYEE F) into them. They contributed their original content to the mainstream news machine in the form of blogs, pictures, videos, and live reports on television—changing the media landscape for everyone.

Although their stories were screened by CBC staff, special attention was paid to keep citizen content created during the G20 as close to the original product submitted as possible—ensuring it was the voice of the citizen being heard, not that of the network. This wasn’t a case of “ghettoizing” (EMPLOYEE F) the citizens, but treating them as equals to reporters and even acknowledging that, in some cases, they were better able to tell parts of the story. Rather than hampering journalistic integrity, using citizens who were in their own way specialists in the subject matter provided insight. As many of the G20 protestors worked off the grid, the television reporters “didn’t know the players” (EMPLOYEE D). The citizens did. There were many examples of how such organic coverage allowed the network to access original points of view and material, and amplify versions of truth not socially constructed by the traditional media process:

EMPLOYEE F: One guy ... he lives at the corner where the big part of the fence was set up and he set up a camera so you could go online during the event and watch this camera that was pointed at where the RCMP and police were. I had no idea he was going to do that. It was fantastic! The writing wasn’t as strong but he was doing all these little interesting innovative things. And he had this interview where his friend was performing in one of the big theatre productions that was right here on King Street and his buddy was losing money because it was being shut down. _____ went out and had a beer with the guy and a one-on-one interview. It was fascinating! It was a great story. I didn’t assign that to him. He was a real wild card. Then other times he’d rant about a police state.

This is not the type of content one would expect to see aired, without being cut to fit a specific format or mediated by a reporter, on a mainstream platform. What Bruns (2010) calls “multiperspectival news” (p. 5)—stories open for public commentary that contain unformatted and unfinished points of view, images, and interviews—surfaced throughout CBC’s coverage of

the G20 summit. Use of material created outside the box of traditional broadcasting formats subverts media logic because the focus shifts from using standardized formats designed to entertain the audience, to sharing a particular viewpoint using the best means and timeframe as determined by ordinary citizens who were once part of the audience.

There were stumbling blocks in this organic process. Staffers worked outlandish hours before, during, and after the G20 weekend to manage far more citizen content than was expected. At the other end of the spectrum, some citizen bloggers disappeared part way through the process, and because there were no deadlines it was difficult to determine if and when to expect content from anyone involved. From my own experience working in a newsroom, I know that reliance on everyone in the newsmaking process to come up with work that is formatted to expectation and delivered on time is the crux of production. Media logic is so prevalent in the broadcast industry because it provides a methodology that makes production easier. Content is geared to the lowest common denominator and visuals determined based on immediate impact, not editorial context (Altheide & Snow, 1979). Work is streamlined by following designated formats and formulae; everyone knows the system and that their job depends on meeting deadlines. Breaking that model to accommodate participatory journalism could be a significant deterrent to many professionals. As well, giving citizens a national platform was a leap of faith for CBC—one many traditional journalists would question because no matter who submits the content, CBC bears the responsibility for the veracity of material. Many professionals, including some who work at CBC, don't consider the work of citizens balanced enough to meet perceived industry standards:

EMPLOYEE I: People who are bloggers who are taking pictures and have a strong point of view are calling themselves journalists. People are responding to what they're doing and they have an audience. For traditional journalists everyone says this is awful, but on the other hand, the information is getting out there more quickly; it's getting out in

different forms. So is that good or bad? As a journalist it's bad because they probably don't think about it as much. Arrogantly you would say they're not as smart about the stories; they don't care about sharing two sides; none of that I think is good for journalism.

Although EMPLOYEE I raises a valid concern regarding knowledge base and objectivity, these issues are also a concern in professional news-work.

Truth, smoke, and mirrors.

Citizens may not have the same training as professionals, but staff reporters are often fed information by a producer or editor from the newsroom—asked to report on an event with no time to research in a 24/7, minimally staffed breaking news environment where the primary goal is to have as many people live at the scene as often as possible, filing for as many platforms as possible. This pressure-cooker environment leads to mistakes, and an erosion of journalistic practice. As well, in many cases the only knowledge of events people presenting the story have comes from a phone-call or text from the newsroom. Reporters often aren't acting as journalists, but presenters. For example, while a colleague was working in Israel, a reporter asked to share his cab so the reporter could rush to the scene of a bus bombing:

SM: Atlanta wanted him on the air immediately. As we pulled out of the hotel driveway, BW called his desk saying he knew nothing. His editor quickly briefed BW on what the news wires were reporting. Within a minute BW was live on air feeding back that information to a worldwide audience.

That scenario is common. I myself often wrote and packaged reporter stories for on-air talent when I was working in the newsroom—the talent was truly just the face of the story. This disconnect between what viewers think they're seeing, a well-informed reporter sharing information they've researched, and the reality of the journalist as presenter erodes trust. As does using what is referred to in the industry as “look lives.”

“Look lives” are the common term for the anchor in the newsroom introducing the reporter who appears to be live at the scene, when the anchor is actually introducing a taped segment. EMPLOYEE C explained that research shows viewers like watching live news. Whether they like watching news that uses production tricks, such as having the reporter nod his or her head as though the reporter can hear the anchor’s introduction when he or she is actually just looking at a cameraperson and pretending there is interaction, is another question entirely. “Look lives” are common practice in many newsrooms, including CBC, and leave news agencies open to widespread criticism about authenticity. As a commentator on my blog wrote:

AS: If it is taken as live, and someone later finds out it is not, I think there is a danger people will start to question everything. Maybe this is a good thing, but it makes life harder for journalists, and perhaps ultimately for the rest of us as well.

Bruns (2010) identified that one of main factors in the explosion of citizens creating content is “the shortcomings of mainstream media” (p. 2). The more mainstream media assume they can fool the audience by creating scenarios to add drama but no editorial improvement, the more frustrated the audience becomes with the authenticity and quality of news content. When people can’t distinguish between what is real and what is edited or performed for effect journalists can’t argue they are better able to uphold the truth:

FP: I stopped watching and reading the news when I was a teenager because I didn’t get the sense that it was real. It always felt like a show; or someone’s idea about what I should be concerned about. It’s all part of the same problem — news as entertainment and propaganda.

This comment parallels Altheide & Snow’s (1991) assertion that “journalism is dead” (p. 51) because not only are news organizations packaging content in formats designed to entertain the audience, but all social organizations mimic these formats to get coverage. Public relations offices hold press conferences designed to look good on television that result in journalists interpreting events from their own “frames of relevance” instead of communicating the

“complexities and ambiguities of ‘real world’ conditions” (Altheide & Snow, 1991, p. 51).

However, when citizens are brought into the process, as they were at CBC during the G20 protests, these media logic models are broken as information is garnered outside regular channels and the formats regularly used to share that information are shattered.

Many journalists I have spoken with think authenticity in production doesn't matter to the audience. Whether the reporter really knows the story or not, or whether they're really live or not, isn't the issue. What really matters is that journalistic checks and balances are still in place—someone in the professional process knows the information and has researched and verified the material. But recent events, such as the widespread erroneous reporting of the death of Gordon Lightfoot (Rayner, 2010) prove that the checks and balances are falling victim to the pressure of breaking news:

EMPLOYEE K: A 24-hour cycle leaves more room for error and in the attempt to be competitive and get there first I think some people make mistakes. Getting two sources to confirm something takes a long time and the whole rush of 24 hour and tweet and all of that stuff is getting it out there—and then you can verify later.

Also a factor in the verification and quality of information is that many reporters, especially at private broadcasters, are hired as freelance or contract workers and have little or no editorial clout. Their positions are precarious, more so than journalists who work behind the scenes:

SK: As a reporter or on-air person I can't freelance in five places. I have to put all my eggs in one basket. Why hire me instead of someone who does what you say?

That type of job insecurity makes it difficult to question the requests of senior newsroom staff, or the validity or verification of material, which often originates from public relations departments and is cycled through several layers of newsroom staff before the presenter reveals it on air.

News falls victim to social construction because it is easier to create content when the goal is not to dig deeper, but to work within a system designed to expedite the flow of content through

whatever means are available. Although thrusting citizens into the newsmaking process may have seemed to some journalists at CBC the equivalent to inserting a cog in a wheel during G20 coverage, it disrupted the standard practices and procedures that support media logic.

Diversifying the messages being broadcast and forcing everyone to accept alternative ways of doing and thinking resulted in better quality journalism.

To be clear, I am in no way suggesting citizens can replace the work of professional journalists. Shirky (2008) posits that “if everyone can do something, it is no longer rare enough to pay for, even if it is vital” (p. 77), but everyone can’t bring to the table all of the skills, time, and resources of a professional journalist to any given story. As another commentator on my blog posted:

CA: Context alone is not journalism. Point of view alone is not journalism. Facts are not journalism. Artful writing alone is not journalism. Balance alone is not journalism. But facts, organized properly, with point of view, in context, balanced and artfully written, that’s journalism. And it takes a lifetime, or at least a long time, to learn how to do.

This is assuming, of course, that professional journalists are given the time and space to ply their craft. Again, comparing my own newsroom experience to what I saw at CBC, journalists in this publicly funded environment seemed far less likely to have experienced interference from the sales department, were given more time and resources to complete comparable tasks in a privately run newsroom, and seemed extremely conscious of their responsibility to serve Canadians—the perfect environment to incorporate the content of citizens in an effort to improve public discourse.

Shirky’s (2008) idea that a change in the definition of news “from news as an institutional prerogative to news as part of a communications ecosystem, occupied by a mix of formal organizations, informal collectives, and individuals” (p. 66) portrays more accurately how participatory journalism could improve journalism itself. That is, it can use everyone’s strengths

to work towards the best end result as opposed to eliminating the journalistic profession or berating the validity of citizen content. Using ordinary citizens despite the fact they may also be stakeholders—for example community members in the area the G20 protests were taking place—doesn't erode reputations, but raises an organization's profile and reputation in the community it serves (Bruns, 2010). As EMPLOYEE I acknowledged, the use of citizen journalists improves the flow of information "because there's so many different sources." It subverts media logic because the organic process involved to create content makes it next to impossible to control format and subject matter. The end result is a partnership that improves standards on both sides of the equation.

Counter-acting corporate control.

In an ideal participatory relationship, citizens can break the mold of media logic by offering original, unstructured material, and professionals can add to that coverage by curating the best material and balancing it with their own content. The idea of using community content isn't new. For years it's been a standard tool of radio shows and call-in programs and can actually be traced back to debate in coffee houses beginning in the 17th century and letters to the editor in 18th century periodicals. Social issues were deliberated and discussed from a communal standpoint (Habermas, 1991)—something replicated as citizen and mainstream journalists reported on the same platforms during the G20. The unrefined nature of coverage required everyone involved to filter events through multiple perspectives. Who was presenting the information became less important—authentic reporting became more apparent:

EMPLOYEE F: So the journalists started to follow the citizens, and the citizens started to follow the journalists in what they were updating and the stories they were telling. It was just this organic thing where everybody was coming up with new ideas of how they could build on the last thing and people were inspired by each other.

Giving citizens a voice equal to reporters helps counteract what Habermas (1991) pinpoints as

the reason for the decline of the public sphere: 20th century corporate control of public opinion. In fact, the term public opinion, according to Habermas, is a misrepresentation because it is not actually the public—or citizens—negotiating the meaning of events and societal norms, but corporations shaping communications that are then delivered to the audience in the guise of public opinion. These communications are aimed at the lowest common denominator because “it is easier to lose an audience by offending its members than by being only mildly interesting” (Benkler, 2006, p. 205). Avoiding controversy to keep advertisers limits the breadth of stories available in the public sphere. This corporate control of messages was something I experienced myself while working in a newsroom.

On several occasions when I was a producer the sales department prescribed what content I could air. Once, I was told not to run audience comments on a reporter story that was critical of a major advertiser; another time I was told not to cover an event because organizers hadn't bought any advertising; and in another incident I was assigned to produce a week-long series, modeled on an American reality show being aired on the station, as a means of cross promotion. Those are blatant examples. As a commentator on my blog pointed out, sometimes the influence is subtle:

DG: The old “boardroom phoning the newsroom” fear is not the case as often as a vague sense of “with us or against us” that comes into a competitive corporate environment. Everybody knows who advertises with a given media outlet. Do we quietly self-edit ... leave those corporations lower down our list of entities to investigate?

Citizen-contributors do not work within that type of organized corporate control. For G20, the CBC offered them a high-profile platform to share their stories and unique points of view. The CBC may not be completely reliant on advertisers but it is a massive corporation with an equally massive bureaucracy that is reliant on government funding and primarily bases its success on ratings. This was something acknowledged by EMPLOYEE F, who addressed the CBC's own

constraints and explained why diverse storytelling is essential if promoting public discourse is the goal:

EMPLOYEE F: With grassroots you don't have the same limits and challenges that you do in any job. Any job you have in the world you have rules, you have people who influence the content. Grassroot—they don't have that. It's interesting to work together and sometimes they can have a perspective that maybe we wouldn't deliver but we can highlight.

And as one commentator on my blog outlined:

AS: I think some journalists have become too much of the “system” and sometimes it takes citizens to expand the bounds and bring grassroots points of view back into production.

Participatory journalism promotes transparency and raw, authentic street-level storytelling by people who actually live in the communities being affected. It doesn't lessen the value of content from the audience viewpoint but, done well, legitimizes it further.

A symbiotic relationship.

One of the key components to the successful partnership between citizen journalists and CBC was a vetting process. As Newton (2009) identified, “rather than feel threatened by citizen participation, journalism can benefit from inviting further participation” and “setting standards for amateur contributions” (p. 78) —which is exactly what happened during G20 coverage. Before citizen bloggers were selected to take part in the coverage they completed a survey and interview. Expectations on both sides were discussed, and certain parameters that had to be adhered to, such as libel laws, were outlined. EMPLOYEE M described it as “curated citizen contributions ... curated before they've actually given it [content].” The idea is that more freedom can be given to citizens to create unique content if the journalists responsible for airing it are confident the citizens are well informed about the subject matter and will produce material that is suitable to air.

It could be argued this in itself is a form of gatekeeping. However, the breadth and variety of subjects selected, including one citizen who solely wanted to cover G20 parties, suggests it wasn't so much a screening process to eliminate certain viewpoints or topics, as one aimed at ensuring the citizens involved weren't just interested in being in the spotlight or looking for a platform to opionate on a specific agenda. Only those deemed to have a true interest in the effects and impact of the G20 on their community were selected to contribute. In an interview with Beckett (2010), Gillmor predicts that "as we are flooded with more and more information, much of which is garbage, we'll see a strong move toward trusted sources." The key to ensuring critical public discourse, as demonstrated by G20 coverage, is ensuring that citizen content is included in a "trusted" mainstream platform like CBC, but remains distinctly unique.

Multiple sources and broken story patterns as a result of citizen involvement subverted media logic and improved news coverage. From a business perspective, it also gave CBC an edge:

EMPLOYEE M: If it's commodity news, then everybody's got it. What are we going to do that's going to differentiate us? If we don't find ways of differentiating ourselves then we're not really giving people a reason to come to us. So G20 is a good example; that was a key differentiator.

Although free content may seem like an obvious benefit for broadcasters, the best type of collaboration doesn't come cheap and requires a major investment of money and resources. In a postmortem of the G20 experience, the community team at CBC was able to come up with an equation of one employee for every four citizens in terms of managing, vetting, and assisting participants in the creation of content. Time and resources have also been spent developing policies and standards for citizen interaction, including the appropriate use of citizen journalists and social media (CBC/Radio-Canada, n.d.a; EMPLOYEE N, personal communication, January

31, 2011). Citizen bloggers weren't chosen as a means of replacing journalists but in fact supplementing their work and telling more sides of the story:

EMPLOYEE M: That's what was so powerful about the G20 coverage. You would never, ever have gotten the stories we got, or had a real sense of what was happening on the street unless we had done it the way we did it. There was no way we could have been in all those places at those points. I think we told that story much more fully because we engaged with citizens.

Citizen journalists were given a mainstream platform to share unique points of view and CBC's coverage of the G20 was improved because of their input. Unparalleled participatory journalism was realized when the two worlds converged and were able to acknowledge their unique assets weren't conflicting but symbiotic. Citizens need journalists to amplify their stories, and journalists need citizens to push boundaries and widen viewpoints.

Mainstream mash-up.

WD: What has become clear, among all the "noise" in our industry, is that good stories through credible reporting and newsgathering will last and be of value. For what my opinion is worth, with social networking it seems foolish not to include the general public to help gather and share that content.

Although there are an endless amount of stories in alternative media, "it requires the juice of the mainstream media for something to really become part of the national debate" (EMPLOYEE D). Jenkins (2006) argues that it is only by allowing more people to participate in mainstream media, by mashing it up with grassroots coverage, that cultural fragmentation can be avoided. He writes (2006) "the power of participation comes not from destroying commercial culture but from writing over it, modding it, amending it, expanding it, adding greater diversity of perspective, and then recirculating it, feeding it back into the mainstream media" (p. 268). The citizen bloggers working for CBC could easily have provided the same coverage on their own independent websites or blogs, but their messages may never have become part of public

discourse, easily lost in the quagmire of Internet content. The benefits of such collaboration were clear to an interviewee:

EMPLOYEE F: Unique points of view and thoughts are getting out there. I don't assume that some of these conversations wouldn't be happening if we're not there, but I do think we have the ability to profile it with a big audience. We have a platform. We have the privilege of highlighting their conversations, challenging, hopefully getting a discourse together and challenging ourselves, feeding the content to the network.

Not only were citizens given an opportunity to be heard by participating in G20 coverage, the rest of the country was given an opportunity to listen. When CBC staff outside of the community team realized what the citizens had to offer they began to use the bloggers on the national television news network. Although there was no expectation that the bloggers' work would appear anywhere but the website, they were all asked about the possibility of working on multiple platforms as part of the screening process:

EMPLOYEE F: The moment I was like "wow" was when they were putting them on air. I had nothing to do with that. I set it up if they were willing to, but suddenly you've got this person, and the woman was fantastic. We were all sitting around the newsroom going look at her—she's amazing. We said, "she should be on air all the time."

Getting these interesting viewpoints shared on a wider platform is crucial to improving information flow in the public sphere. However, the danger is that this new content could be swallowed in the media logic trap where the "recognition of talent and authoritativeness is enhanced by appearing on television" (Altheide & Snow, 1979, p. 52), or that citizens will be forced to comply with standardized rules of television storytelling. It must be understood that appearing on a newscast doesn't make the citizen viewpoint any more legitimate than when it was only showcased on the Internet. Television is just another tool, or place within the overall public sphere, to distribute information to a mass audience in the current media environment.

Rosen (2010) suggests that journalists should refer to the audience as "users" (para. 27) because it is "a more active identity." In Coupland (2010), McLuhan posits that "the user is the

content” (p. 184). Although McLuhan’s work reaches far beyond the idea of citizens volunteering to be part of the media process, these two different turns of phrase have the same underlying theme: the audience is a crucial component in the journalistic process. If you want to tell compelling stories you need to involve the users on the other side of whatever screen they consume media from—a lesson every organization can learn from CBC’s G20 coverage which won a Canadian Online Publishing Award for Best Community Feature, and was a finalist in the Community Collaboration category at the Online News Association’s 2010 Journalism Awards (Fox, 2010). CBC’s G20 participatory model treats citizen reporters with the same respect as staff, works to amplify diverse stories, and augments existing organizational structures to facilitate the exposure of citizen content. This results in quality journalistic practices and products that promote public discourse and subvert media logic.

Connect with Mark Kelly

Mainstream news is still crucial for the dissemination of information critical to public discourse and maintaining democratic systems, and television is still a primary platform when important stories break. But in an age where information is available from multiple sources, whenever one desires, drawing in viewers for appointment news watching is a struggle. Many of the participants in my study queried what could be done to garner interest in the daily newscast in an age where most people have already heard the major stories of the day by the time shows go to air. CBC’s *Connect with Mark Kelly* could provide some answers.

Connect takes the same events other daily news shows cover and humanizes them by talking to people who are directly impacted, giving them more time than a traditional newscast to tell their stories, working outside traditional news formats, uncovering interesting content buried on the web, and relating to the audience with a level of authenticity and familiarity rarely seen in

daily news. The host doesn't stand on a podium delivering a sermon from the mountaintop, but makes an effort to transparently relate with the audience. Guests aren't experts but, more often than not, real people who can speak to the events at hand through their own experience. The goal is to "democratize" (EMPLOYEE E) the way news is covered, and that mandate carries through to the organizational structure of the show itself.

While witnessing several story meetings I was struck by the cordial, casual conversation in regards to what would go in the line-up and how stories might be treated. Writers, producers, the host, and technical crew sat around on couches and chairs, throwing out story ideas amidst frequent bursts of laughter. Every employee took an active part, and although I was able to determine which roles some people played due to my own newsroom experience, to someone unfamiliar with newsroom culture it would be difficult to determine who was actually in charge. EMPLOYEE N told me the fact they hold their story meetings in the "living room" instead of a "boardroom" is by design—to encourage a sense of equality and the idea that everyone's opinion counts.

Extraordinary use of ordinary people.

A good example of how *Connect* differs from other mainstream daily news shows in its treatment of stories is its coverage of Ted Williams, the homeless man who was thrown into the spotlight because of his made-for-broadcast voice. From the moment the story broke *Connect* did not take the good-news, entertainment angle most other stations reverted to, but questioned whether the aid that was being given to Williams would truly improve his life. This stance was taken in part because of the input of a homeless man living in Toronto. Although living on the street, the source is a well-spoken poet whom *Connect* staffers have previously used to glean information on homelessness:

EMPLOYEE E: We tend to minimize the participation of people despite the fact that it is the most democratic of all acts. So I can ask a columnist for *Slate* magazine what he thinks about Ted Williams, or you can ask a guy who's lived on the street for years about this whole notion that if someone just gave you a job and plucked you off the street, would that turn your life around?

The homeless man was able to describe why it is next to impossible to just start living in a house and working regularly after years spent on the streets, and foreshadowed some of the issues that surfaced within weeks of Williams' discovery. By using a homeless man as a source, *Connect* challenged the socially-constructed fairy tale-ending being broadcast by most other networks. However, even though it was proved *Connect* was ahead of the curve from a journalistic standpoint, EMPLOYEE C said the show was accused of being contrarian when it didn't project the good news angle being promoted by other outlets when the story first broke. Media logic is so pervasive in news, in this specific instance the idea of entertaining the audience, that breaking the mold creates controversy. This is also true when using ordinary people in the role of source.

In a world where the usual first choice in terms of a source is an expert—someone who's studied the subject—turning to someone with real-life experience, whose story can't always be told within the box of traditional formats, isn't always considered the best editorial choice:

EMPLOYEE E: I would do stories when I worked at _____ that were full of real people, and I would be criticized as these stories did not carry enough weight. They were feature or light stories. I'd say "why?" They'd say "you've just got people in them." The only thing that gave them some sort of editorial heft would be to have an expert in it But the viewer would say, "I love that person in your story. That cowboy who said this about federal politics, that's the smartest thing I ever heard."

Although many journalists use people as characters in stories, or as news pegs whose experiences are then conceptualized and/or analysed by a third party, it's not often that citizens are given the same credence as experts. *Connect* continually subverts media logic by making room for unique sources, and using them in unique ways.

In one instance, a 13-year-old boy with Asperger's was allowed to describe his life in his own words, while playing with his basketball. EMPLOYEE H described it as a "really simple treatment, so powerful." Another example of this methodology can be seen in the way *Connect* treats what are commonly known as streeters—the person on the street interviews you often see on the news—where your average citizen is asked his or her opinion on a current issue. Instead of just sending out a camera and hoping to run into someone with an informed opinion, and running the risk of having to air content with no real editorial value, *Connect* staff work the phones to find a diverse mix of people who can speak to a particular story. Then they send out a crew to interview them:

EMPLOYEE C: When there was the whole debate about teaching sex-ed in the classroom we went out and asked the question, "Who told you?" And tell me the memory of when you first found out about sex. It was our way of dealing with that issue because there were all sorts of people who said, "I didn't know till I was 16 and it was the most embarrassing thing, or my mother told me and you won't believe"... and at the end of the story you were left thinking well maybe they should be teaching it in the classroom. Instead of getting the head of the school board we go out and ask what you think.

Papacharissi (2009) says "it is Habermas' argument that the commercialized mass media have turned the public sphere into a space where the rhetoric and objectives of public relations and advertising are prioritized" (p. 31). In this ongoing controversy concerning what children should be taught in school about sex, by sharing their stories ordinary citizens circumvented the control institutions can wield over public opinion and were given a high profile platform on which to contribute to the dissemination of information.

The idea of using commentary from ordinary citizens isn't new. Many news organizations supplement the work of professional journalists with viewer opinion, but on *Connect* the comments of ordinary citizens aren't necessarily qualified with a follow-up or input of an expert. This methodology provides a participatory model that sets *Connect* apart from most

mainstream programs. It's not just about allowing for alternative voices and viewpoints, but changing the traditional format that encapsulates stories.

Breaking the rules.

On a traditional daily news show any source, expert or otherwise, can likely expect to receive about two minutes of time in a live or taped interview or, more likely, a 20-second soundbite in a reporter package. *Connect's* producers have flexibility in regards to show formatting that is unheard of in a daily news format. When a young woman who watched her father get murdered on a boat in Honduras agreed to share her story, decisions on how to treat the interview weren't based on whether it would fit the show's usual format, but how the format could be changed to best accommodate her story:

EMPLOYEE C: I watched it and I just walked out and said throw the whole show out, we'll just do a full edition of it, 20 minutes of it. Then *The National* did one clip—they did a minute and a half—maybe they took two clips ... but we gave her 20 minutes because we just figured it was worth it.

As Altheide (1987) identified, when shows follow the rules of media logic and create content to fit existing formats, as opposed to developing formats that best support sharing information, audiences are not given appropriate context to reflect on and interpret the material they are viewing. In most daily news shows stories fit formatted time frames. The look of the show, and the ease of producing it by following established routines, takes precedence over the weight of the content. In stark contrast, *Connect* breaks accepted media logic norms thus enriching public discourse.

Bruns (2010) and Shirky (2008) are among many who believe that since everyone has the ability to tell their own story on the Internet, television formats, and in fact mainstream newscasts, are becoming irrelevant. This is true whether you give someone two minutes or 20. It doesn't really matter when they can tell as much of their story online as they want any time they

choose. However, as EMPLOYEE D points out:

EMPLOYEE D: All this talk about the web giving voice to the voiceless, the person who cleans the hotel rooms – well no. Because the person who cleans the hotel rooms doesn't have time to go back and write the blog for free.

Rutigliano (2009) argues that the same socio-economic disparities exist online as they do offline; middle or upper-class citizens have the time and resources to create content and the content they create is geared to their interests; lower-class citizens and their issues are often excluded. By giving unique sources more time to tell their stories, *Connect* is performing an essential role of a public broadcaster, giving that voice to the voiceless.

As well, for those who have the resources to engage with online media, it is up to individual users to verify sources (Bruns, 2010)—something that takes time and skill. Here's an example of how misinformation can be spread on the web. While recently researching a paper on the controversy over HPV vaccines in the Halton Catholic School Board, I found that when I searched "HPV deaths" on the Internet I kept coming across articles referencing a Judicial Watch special report that claimed 18 girls and women had died as a result of receiving the vaccine. When I accessed the original document, I discovered it actually said,

As many as 18 young girls and women have died after receiving the vaccine. While the deaths are quite possibly not linked to the vaccine, there is a report of a perfectly healthy 17-year-old girl dying suddenly and alone, two days after receiving her third dose of the vaccine. (Millspaw, 2008, p. 15)

There is no proof of a connection between these deaths and the vaccine. Erroneous information was being used in articles on multiple websites, and has probably been quoted since the time of my research. *Connect* helps improve public discourse not only by giving more time to talk about important issues, but verifying sources for citizens consuming media.

Even if independent online content found in sources like blogs is accurate, whether it is that much different from mainstream offerings is also up for debate. Kenix (2009) found independent blogs were most likely to link with mainstream sites or sites that shared similar viewpoints rather than diverse sources. Blogs were no better than mainstream institutions at encouraging two-way communication, and there was little original content. Her conclusion: the fact a site is independent holds little relevance in terms of relying “upon corporate models of communication, mainstream ideologies and corporate content” (Kenix, 2009, p. 815). Despite the perceived variety of information available on the web, many blogs and independent sites aren’t really an alternative to the mainstream and offer limited scope of information:

EMPLOYEE H: At CBC we have documents that outline our commitment to Canadians and our commitment to Canadian stories from coast, to coast, to coast. A blog doesn’t have to do that; a Youtube channel doesn’t have to do that. They can do whatever they want we have a mandate and many mission statements that we need to live up to because it’s our job. And I just have yet to see any site that comes close to that.

This idea reflects Rutigliano’s (2009) suggestion that “journalists and journalism’s traditional role as a bridge between communities is perhaps in greater demand in the age of online media” (p. 203). *Connect* recognizes it has a responsibility to serve as a conduit of accurate and diversified information, and that its commitment to Canadians includes involving Canadian citizens in the journalism process—allowing stories to be told in a format that provides as much context as possible. This is a role that is more crucial in the age of online media because the glut of available information, much of it controlled by corporations, is expanding the public sphere to the point it is dysfunctional (Habermas, 1991). No one can consume, reflect on, and discuss all the ideas being shared through various types of communications. Most discourse is contained within small communities of people who already share the same viewpoint, as opposed to any type of true public entity where meaning is negotiated. A widespread online audience is a rarity.

I had no expectation of garnering a mass audience for the website I created as part of the research for this project (<http://redefiningjournalism.wordpress.com/>). However, as a means of comparison to other bloggers, I'm a connected member of the journalism and academic worlds and my blog was linked to from several well-recognized sites. I averaged approximately 212 visits for every blog I posted, receiving nowhere near the attention of, for example, a baby making faces at his mother's sneezing on Youtube (Mandkyeo, 2011) that received 4 million hits during the timeframe of one of my postings. Obviously, the baby video had a wider target audience, while my blog was specific to a community. I thought my blog hits were quite low in comparison to other blogs until I started researching the norms. As Shirky (2008) says, "dozens of weblogs have an audience of a million or more, and millions have an audience of a dozen or less" (p. 34). Well-known blogger Darren Rowse (2007) runs an ongoing online survey on the number of hits individual bloggers receive. As of March 22, 2011 a total of 3211 participants completed the survey and the majority receives less than a hundred visits on their best day in a month.

Table 1:

Average Visits to Independent Blogs

Most Blog Visits Per Day	Percentage of Bloggers
0-100	36%
101-250	17%
251-500	12%
501-1000	10%
1001-2500	9%
2501-5000	5%
5001-10000	3%
10001-20000	2%
20001 +	6%

Although hits to my blog spiked on days I posted, the most being 195, on average over a period between November 17th and March 22nd I received 20 visits per day, putting me in line with the

majority of bloggers who responded to the survey. In order to make a comparison on an academic level, I turned to Hopkins (2009) ethnographic study of bloggers in Malaysia. His research blog received 1700 visits in 14 months, or approximately four per day. The specific nature of his work, and the fact I used social media and email to solicit comments, could easily account for the higher traffic to my site.

As Hopkins (2009) also identified, the number of visits to a website does not necessarily reflect the quality of comments, offline conversations, and connections that result from each post. Just like the social impact of a news show can't be measured by ratings, it's hard to determine the impact of an individual blog on public discourse or the individual who writes it. For example, I was invited to speak at several conferences, found researchers working on similar topics, and was given links to valuable information, news sites, and resources because of interaction with visitors to my site. Traffic to my website, and all others, is relevant in relation to participatory journalism because it highlights the need to surface material and conversations that aren't already being accessed in the mainstream—where the majority of people get their information.

Gillmor (2004) is right when he says “we are hearing new voices—not necessarily the voices of people who want to make a living by speaking out, but who want to say what they think and be heard, even if only by relatively few people” (p. 139). However, to promote public discourse it is crucial that a variety of voices and truths are amplified on mainstream media. *Connect* surfaces authentic and interesting stories that are happening online, and gives them a wider platform for discussion. It succeeds in making connections with citizens on the web primarily because its organizational structure includes a cross-platform producer:

EMPLOYEE C: I think that she's able to reach out to that community even if they end up being used in a very traditional way. Even if we end up putting them in a studio or sending

somebody else out to do a traditional news story with them, I think it's because they feel like there's a kinship there that exists because of the way she communicates and talks to them because of her online presence.

Part of the cross-platform producer's routine includes compiling a list of stories "trending" on the web that is sent to all of the show's staff. EMPLOYEE H says it helps the show's producers understand the "disconnect between what we think is relevant in a newsroom versus what people actually care about." Every e-mail, tweet, and facebook status that is directed to the show is read, forwarded on, and, in some cases, used as material for story ideas. Opening up mainstream channels to unique content gives more people the opportunity to learn about, discuss, and include differing viewpoints and experiences that eventually may become part of the fabric of existing social norms and practices—something Jenkins (2006) describes as the normalizing of "fringe activities" (p. 276). EMPLOYEE C said this "inside" information, frequently ignored by other journalists, also allows them to break stories well in advance of other news programs.

Not only does a show like *Connect* help to change social norms of what qualifies as a story by turning to alternative messages on the web and giving them a mainstream spotlight, it uses social media to look for new sources of information. At the time I was writing this thesis, *Connect*, through Twitter and other social media, was actively looking for independent bloggers to come on-air as commentators for the federal election (cbconnect, 2011). Offering people a chance to have their say is not out of the ordinary for broadcasters during an election period, but it's usually just a 10-second comment regarding who someone will vote for, opinion on a specific issue, or a viewer's question for a political candidate mediated by a reporter or host. *Connect* is actually replacing the usual cast of political pundits, often used repeatedly for every election, with a different group of voices and giving them a traditional platform to share their viewpoints. By diversifying the messages on the airwaves, *Connect* gives more credence to

alternative ideas and ways of doing than traditionally expressed during an election period. It confirms these points of view have a space in the mainstream and improves discourse overall simply by acknowledging their relevance. The convergence of emerging and traditional media, one breaking through, the other making room for discussion, is the ideal Jenkins imagines. *Connect* is breaking new ground by allowing the voices of ordinary citizens to be heard, as opposed to presuming to be the voice of ordinary citizens—a much more common practice for mainstream media.

Surfacing unique viewpoints and format flexibility aren't the only things that make *Connect* atypical to daily news: there is its uncharacteristic transparency during show production.

Producing transparency.

During the airing of a traditional daily news shows there is little or no communication with the audience about what is happening behind the scenes, why technical errors occur, or an explanation of any of the events that take place during a production other than the typical apology for “technical difficulties.” *Connect* uses a much more open style of communication:

EMPLOYEE H: We were covering the G20 and there this was viral video of the “Oh Canada” moment at Queen and Spadina ... basically the protestors finish “Oh Canada” and the police storm them. So we air it—and it gets cut off at that point where the police storm. So a couple of viewers write in and say “How dare you cut out?” And they're all up in arms—CBC not telling the full story. What had happened was it was just a mistake the switcher had made. It was a mistake in the control room. So the next night _____ comes on: “Hi we got a couple of emails. You guys were wondering why we didn't play the full clip—it actually was just we're a live show, sometimes mistakes happen. Here's the full clip.” We played the full clip. Old news would never do that. Not like that.

EMPLOYEE C: Or sometimes we'll change our lead at 6 o'clock because something happened and the whole show goes into turmoil but I always encourage them to do it. And sometimes _____ comes out there and says, “I'll tell you what, at 5 o'clock today we were leading the show with this story, but then we got word of [another story] ... we decided that we would go with it so bear with us.” He just comes right out and tells people and that's when we always, always get the most response. You become so much more approachable. I make mistakes and I have technical problems, or I forget my line, or in case you're wondering how we made this happen let me tell you.

Rather than making journalists appear unprofessional, this acknowledgement that mistakes happen, and an explanation of how, promotes trust. EMPLOYEE C said whenever this type of interaction occurs they “always get the most response” from the audience. As Shirky (2008) wrote, “it’s not enough to find some way to increase the successful ideas. Some way needs to be found to tolerate the failures too” (p. 232). The issue of transparency and how to handle mistakes or corrections is the focus of a huge debate in the online world. Correcting mistakes, but linking to the original version so readers can be sure there is no intent to hide the error, is considered best practice (Silverman, 2010); erasing mistakes leads to public shaming and accusations of cover-ups. *Connect*’s honesty, and up-front explanation of events counteracts any distrust commentators on my blog alluded to about authenticity of programming in newscasts, and makes everyone involved seem more approachable and *real*.

It’s important that mainstream daily news shows like *Connect* are willing to break the mold of the traditional newscast because “old media still defines which forms of cultural expression are mainstream through its ability to amplify the impact of some user-generated content while other submissions are out of bounds” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 278). A feel-good Youtube story like Ted Williams is aired by everyone, while the world argues over whether Wikileaks is a valid source of information because it breaks all the traditional rules of reporting, sourcing, and deciding what information should be shared. Wikileaks has been called everything from a terrorist organization to a democratic saviour because of debate over the controversial content it is releasing to the public. However, there is one major difference in Wikileaks compared to most online sites: there is no transparency—its content is by design untraceable. Wikileaks acts as a distributor for whistleblowing video and documents but is often viewed suspiciously by mainstream media. Lynch (2010) says one of the reasons Wikileaks is mistrusted by journalists

is that many journalists remain cautious about the technology used by Wikileaks to gather and air information. Even for less controversial sources, the prevalent attitude is that some forms of information are less worthy of airtime than those that meet traditional standards. This is a viewpoint reflected on shows outside of *Connect* at CBC.

While discussing alternative voices and citizen involvement in stories, a CBC producer told me about a project for local Toronto news where 15-year-old residents from a variety of communities and backgrounds were given some training and a camera and asked to do a report on their lives. “They came back with really interesting stories” (EMPLOYEE K) that were only aired on the website because producers felt their stories didn’t fit with the format of a traditional newscast:

EMPLOYEE E: So many people are convinced that there’s only one way to skin this cat and they’re going to continue doing it. And if you look at television it’s hilarious. One thing I love that we do on this show is we tend to dig out old tape and we use it for breakdowns or whatever it might be, and when we’re running these old clips from the ‘50s, ‘60s, ‘70s, it hasn’t changed a whole hell of a lot.

Altheide & Snow (1979) recognized that what was needed to break the format norms of traditional news was specialized media that catered to the interests of the audience, which in turn would allow the audience to be seen as individuals, as opposed to one entity. That change in perspective reorients newsmaking—switching the focus from creating media best suited to the production process, to creating media best suited to the viewer. Especially at CBC, where the mandate exists to tell Canadian stories, those in control of sharing content need to accept that stories don’t have to fall into the parameters of media logic’s prescribed format to be considered journalism. In fact, moving outside of that format may be the best way to engage viewers and promote public discourse—something made clearly evident on *Connect*.

The hierarchy of news.

“Hierarchy has huge implications for communication patterns and the flow of information” (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, & Ganesh, 2004, p. 21) and *The National*'s perceived position at the top of the ladder is clearly impacting change at CBC. All cameras, talent, and resources for all CBC news programs are booked through a centralized assignment desk called “the hub.” The protocol at this assignment desk came up many times as a point of frustration. EMPLOYEE N described it as “Wonder Woman’s field of deflection,” unless you want something for *The National*. EMPLOYEE J said there was a definite news hierarchy—*The National* sat on top leaving “whatever resources are left to be picked over by everyone else.” EMPLOYEE G went so far as to say that CBC News Network is an “institutionalized second class citizen.” Although EMPLOYEE L said, “our goal is to make CBC News the brand, not *The National*,” feeling and practice on the newsroom floor hasn’t quite caught up to that sentiment.

The current status quo of cutting out of News Network programming, including extended broadcasts of *Connect*, to run *The National* on the News Network at 9pm was also questioned. For example, when United States President Barack Obama’s speech about the Arizona shootings went on late:

EMPLOYEE C: We had to bail on the Obama speech to go to *The National*, and as a news network I think that’s a serious problem. Because it’s the one time that people would tune in for something that’s happening right now, and it’s not happening any other time. If you want to see it live and real you’ve got to watch it now and if we’re not, as a news network, on it, then they’re not going to come to us for it.

This isn’t just an issue of viewer expectation, but withholding information critical to contextualizing current events. Not allowing viewers to watch the full speech, and instead selecting clips for them that are deemed most important, feeds into media logic. A broadcaster cannot enforce what meaning will be interpreted by the information received, but in choosing the

information to share journalists “provide the discourse and frameworks to interpret and reflect on events” (Altheide & Snow, 1991, p. 245). An obvious example of this is showcased in a new study that found a “significant correlation between trust in FOX News and negative attitudes about Muslims” (Public Religion Research Institute, 2011). Viewers may produce their own meaning from stories, but can only extrapolate meaning from the images and information they receive. FOX may not be alone in its social construction of the image of Muslims through media, what Altheide (2006) defines as a “discourse of fear” (p. 417), but it certainly sets the bar. The majority of images seen of American Muslims in the United States portray them as outsiders and threats to both national and personal safety (Altheide, 2007)—stories told with little context that use inflammatory pictures and soundbites. CBC may not project the same narrow viewpoint, but the overriding issue remains.

Anyone can pick out 20 seconds of a speech and argue why it is the most important point made during the body of that speech, but someone else might be able to make a clear case of why a different portion of the speech is equally important. The more opportunity allowed to viewers to experience completely contextualized information, as opposed to snippets of knowledge, the more opportunities there are to encourage discourse that involves differing viewpoints. Ensuring a broadcast schedule is based on the best way to inform viewers, not institutional norms, is crucial to change.

Although it’s commonly expressed that television is an outdated format with no future because of the Internet, as Jenkins (2006) says, “printed words did not kill spoken words. Cinema did not kill theater. Television did not kill radio. Each old medium was forced to coexist with the emerging media” (p. 14). It’s not time to write-off television just yet, if ever. A recent surge in TV watching across the globe had one report suggesting that an additional 140 billion

hours of television will be watched in 2011 compared to 2010 (Cross, 2011). However, it is time for television news executives and producers to acknowledge that just as each medium needs to adjust to co-exist with another, journalists need to make room for participating citizens who have already changed perceived norms of communication in our society and are adding a new layer to news coverage. *Connect's* struggle isn't just to have real people accepted as sources, or, in this case, the centre-point of a show, but also getting this new style of daily news program to gain the same type of recognition and therefore resources as more traditional programming at CBC.

Discussion

CBC is already working towards greater interaction and engagement with its audience by implementing strategies to incorporate the work of citizen journalists. There is a formal policy on the use of citizen journalists and social media in the creation of content on all platforms: radio, television, and the web. Reflective of the industry itself, however, attitudes and comfort levels with the use of such material vary widely throughout the corporation and so does the practice of participatory journalism. Adding to the problem, individual departments that are incorporating the work of citizens often work in silos; original material with a variety of voices and messages that could be profiled, linked to, or repurposed on multiple platforms exists in its own solitude. In CBC's newly unveiled five-year plan of action (CBC/Radio-Canada, n.d.b) the mandate of "everyone, every way" is touted, but no clear-cut practical strategies are offered to encourage participatory journalism. Such strategies can, however, be found in an examination of G20 coverage that included citizen bloggers and *Connect with Mark Kelly*.

Storytelling Diversified

The ideal goal of journalism is to tell every side of a story possible, in as balanced a manner as possible, in order to promote public discourse and democracy. The saturation of media

logic in modern news production continually erodes traditional media's ability to meet this ideal, but the incorporation of citizen content makes it easier. Despite concerns that citizens take away from journalistic standards of production and truth telling, CBC's coverage of the G20 summit that included citizen bloggers proved this type of partnership allows for organic storytelling and better journalism. Everyone's frame of reference, including CBC staff, was broadened by introducing alternative material. These new frames of reference forced professionals to work outside prescribed formats and procedures as they adjusted to working with colleagues not paid to follow institutionalized norms. More authentic information was shared as citizen bloggers gained access to a variety of sources precisely because they were not journalists. Corporate control was stifled because the opportunity to disseminate information on a high-profile platform was given to the citizens. In the end, this mash-up of mainstream and emerging content improved the quality of news coverage, and public discourse—channeling Habermas's ideal public sphere.

Jenkins' convergence culture was put to the test and proved to be a functional theory. The success of CBC's G20 coverage is so significant because no longer can any mainstream institution argue that incorporating the work of citizens negatively impacts news production, or that citizens don't have the skills and resources to assist in the news production process. What can be argued is that by curating citizen material and spending the time to interview and screen citizens before their content is gathered and used for broadcast, mainstream networks can be more confident that content will be suitable for air, and can give citizens the appropriate freedom to showcase different versions of truth. Journalism is not a matter of "us versus them," citizens versus professionals. It is a symbiotic relationship between counterparts who achieve the best end result when they feed off of each other's strengths, thereby balancing each other's weaknesses.

Using ordinary citizens to report on extraordinary events improved the end product of G20 coverage because media logic was subverted. Citizen bloggers weren't assigned to any particular story, or required to file their stories in any particular format, diversifying the stories told and creating a domino effect that positively impacted the work of the professional journalists. Participatory journalism does not hinge on allowing viewers to comment or upload pictures on a website; it requires a genuinely respectful relationship with the audience.

Democratizing Daily News

The use of citizens as sources on *Connect*, for example the homeless man in the coverage of the Ted Williams story, exposes differing viewpoints than ones usually heard on traditional newscasts. The use of a cross-platform producer to build relationships with the online community and uncover stories and sources that don't often make it offline, also adds to the rich layering of voices heard on *Connect*. The amount of time given for people to tell their stories allows for viewers to create their own meaning from a larger picture, not a narrowed version of events redefined by a third party. Socially constructed versions of truth that are usually generated by media logic don't surface as often on *Connect* because stories aren't packaged in traditional ways. This allows for more critical thinking and opportunities for discourse in the public sphere.

Connect's understanding that daily news is not a one-way form of communication builds trust and encourages audience interaction and engagement. Concerns over authenticity and transparency become *non sequitur* when the show's host is willing to say "Hey, we made a mistake; do you want to see what happened?" or is up front about the challenges the crew experienced while putting the show together. Acknowledging errors, and being comfortable doing so, does not make journalists more susceptible to accusations of creating content that is not journalistically sound: it makes them trustworthy. If the goal of news is to inform for the sake of

improving discourse, methods of production have to change to become more transparent.

Acknowledging the reality journalists are working within and inviting others to share the space is how mainstream daily news shows will survive.

Just as there is a digital divide between some news watchers and producers, or citizens and journalists, there is a clear divide in the old and new guard at CBC. Although there is an acknowledgment that things need to change, it seems many people are waiting for half of the staff to retire for things to move forward. By that time it could be too late. A new narrative needs to be built that includes using alternative sources, a variety of formats, and getting rid of the attitude that “this is the way we’ve always done it,” or that established shows deserve more respect and resources. It’s not about expensive flashy new sets and video walls, but a true change in editorial direction. Although there is room for more traditional shows at this place in time, their production shouldn’t interfere with allowing more forward-thinking programs to reach their fullest potential. Democratizing daily news, what Jenkins would define as convergence culture, isn’t just a noble idea: it holds promise as a good business model.

Ensuring there is content on the air in traditional daily news programs that uses everyday citizens as sources, uncovers relevant debate taking place amongst citizens online, breaks unrealistic socially constructed versions of truth, and offers transparent communication with the audience is crucial to ensure the flow of information in our society. As it is a publicly funded network, the quality of CBC’s content is even more critical to promoting important topics of discussion that affect Canadian citizens. Strategies being used on *Connect* could ensure daily news continues to hold an audience and promote discourse in a competitive television environment.

Limitations

The staff of cbc.ca made a great effort to identify that commenting wasn't the best way to engage the audience. However, nowhere in CBC's five-year plan does it identify other types of strategies. Despite the fact they said it wasn't of great importance website employees spent a lot of time talking about comments and the controversy over the new commenting system that was launched in the process of collecting data for this thesis. Exploring this dichotomy further, and the debate over how best to moderate and manage viewer comments would be a good site of future study.

As I was looking at the effect of participatory journalism on staff and practices at CBC, I did not explore the effect participatory journalism practices at CBC had on individual citizens, like the G20 bloggers. Future research could explore the impact, if any, of CBC's influence on citizen content that was aired; if citizens involved in the newsmaking process felt their work was in fact treated with respect and not ghettoized by CBC staff; and if sharing their work on a mainstream platform had any adverse affects, for example lessening their credentials in the eyes of other citizen bloggers because of the perceived notion of selling out to mainstream media.

Conclusion/Recommendations

CBC is making great headway in building participatory relationships with its audience but much work needs to be done. The idea of curating citizens, not just their content, is an excellent way of ensuring that both broadcasters and citizens know what they are getting into with regards to any newsgathering project. Being flexible about the type and format of content submitted is essential to engaging more citizens in the newsmaking process, and to ensure stories that are geared to inform, not cater to media logic norms. Supporting a symbiotic relationship where both professionals and amateurs are balanced by each other's strengths and weaknesses

will improve the quality of news coverage overall. However, this relationship needs to exist on all platforms, not just the web. CBC needs to change the internal narrative from an ongoing schism between those who think citizen participation and social media are useful tools and those who see them as journalistically irrelevant—an added burden of the job.

Just as it is essential that citizens aren't ghettoized when working with journalists, departments that are experimenting with new ideas involving citizens shouldn't be marginalized by more traditional operations at CBC. There is a clear divide between shows like *The National*, and shows like *Connect with Mark Kelly* in terms of available resources and editorial clout. Instead of wasting time judging the journalistic viability of alternative ways of incorporating citizens into mainstream production, other daily news shows, both local and national, should be using some of the strategies proven to be successful. Finding ways to allow more traditional programs to do this, through methods like organizational restructuring and a change in the internal narrative of what qualifies as journalism, would be an excellent site of future study.

Ratings as a measure of success are an albatross that CBC needs to remove from its neck. Future research could look for more concrete ways to measure social impact as a means of proving, or disproving, that the number of viewers doesn't necessarily equate to the value of content being broadcast on publicly funded television. CBC's primary goal should not be counting viewers, and the advertisers that come with them, but focusing on ways to get more people involved in debate, discussion, and critical thinking about events that have long-term consequences.

Every person I came into contact with at CBC seemed genuinely concerned with informing Canadians over making advertising dollars—the emphasis on quality of content was paramount. More research is needed to explore if/how publicly funded television is critical to

public discourse, how money and resources could be managed more effectively, and how more permanent funding can be established to ensure a public broadcaster doesn't revert to private methods of putting profit first to ensure survival.

End Notes

The day I completed my work on this thesis I received a message from the cross-platform producer at *Connect* informing me her position had been eliminated. As her ability to communicate with the online audience led to a richer relationship with the audience community and increased opportunities for participatory journalism this was disheartening news; it also supports the fact that more research needs to be done on making participatory models viable from a fiscal perspective, and/or on how newsrooms can readjust budgets to make room for this type of crucial position.

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