

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

### Day 2, Panel 3: Citizen Journalism: Possibilities and Pitfalls

---

**Moderator: Steve Reese,** Jesse H. Jones Professor and Associate Dean, College of Communication, UT Austin

**Panelists:**

**Sharon Meraz,** UT Austin

**Neil Thurman,** City University-London

**Lou Rutigliano,** UT Austin

**Julie Neumann,** UT Austin

---

**ROSENAL CALMON ALVES:** We are ready to start it again. I want to again send my greetings to the millions of people who are watching us all over the world.. in the middle of the night in Asia, people in Africa, in Latin America - all over. I don't have a counter, so I cannot tell you the exact number of the millions, but my guess is very benevolent.

I want to introduce - I'm losing my voice. Have you noticed? - Dr. Steven Reese, who is the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs here, and my esteemed colleague and buddy here in the Journalism School. And he's going to moderate this research panel.

**STEVE REESE:** All right. Welcome back. We're happy to have several high-quality papers for our panel this afternoon. I've enjoyed hearing some of the presentations on the web cast - actually, I'm not all over the world, I'm just down in my office, down one floor below [laughter], but the nice thing is, I can monitor it on my desk, and when I see that everyone's breaking for lunch, I can hurry down here, and be ready to eat with everyone. So it has a good benefit [laughter], even though I'm not out of town.

Well, welcome back to our afternoon panel, "Citizen Journalism: Possibilities and Pitfalls," which is one of the hottest areas in this area of new media. And we will have our presenters take about twelve minutes or so, and that will give us time for discussion afterwards. So, as we go along, I may have some reflections myself at the end. First of all, we have Sharon Meraz, from the University of Texas, here in Austin. She's one of our doctoral students. And her paper will be on "Citizen Journalism, Citizen Activism, and Technology: Positioning Technology as a Second Superpower' in Times of Disasters and Terrorism." Sharon.

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

**SHARON MERAZ:** Good afternoon, everyone. That's the title of my paper; it's titled, "Citizen Journalism, Citizen Activism, and Technology: Positioning Technology as a Second Superpower' in Times of Disasters and Terrorism."

For this paper, I sort of wanted to avoid the entire debate of "what is citizen journalism," so I'm kind of taking the easier route out here. And I'm basically looking at how citizens can use the Internet in times of disasters and terrorism, to both - to shape responses to things like disaster response management, citizen journalism, global web initiatives; to do self-help, self-organizing, or emergent networks in times of disasters and terrorism. And the idea of this paper, and actually saying the word "second superpower" came from an article written by James F. Moore, in the Harvard Berkman Center, titled "The Second Superpower Raises its Beautiful Head." And it's really about the Internet, and how the Internet can be used to connect people in an emergent fashion in times of disasters.

Now, the idea of people using the Internet in a social way is not a new phenomenon. There's an article by Christopher Allen, who traces the idea of social computing back to the 1940s. And we know that book by Howard Rheingold called *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electric Front*, where he talks about BBSes, USENETs, or IRC. But we're seeing a lot of current enthusiasm surrounding social computing because of the concept "Web 2.0." I'm not going to go into a lot of it, because I know another one of my panel members is going to be talking about the term Web 2.0. But basically, the enthusiasm is surrounding the idea that the Internet is now in its new wave, because it allows collaboration sharing. And it's everything from the development of new tools, like blogs and wikis, to the actual programming languages used to create these new software applications; they're everything from asynchronous JavaScript and XML to open application-providing interfaces - that's what APIs is - to things like really simple syndication, RSS but all of these things have created a mounting interest in social computing. And that's everything from blogs and wikis to social software and mobile technologies.

Now, social computing has this we can think of this as BYOC, "Bring Your Own Content," essentially, to the web. And a lot of this has been really facilitated by this new resurgence in collaboration and generosity on the web. Terms like "the gift economy," peer-to-peer development, bazaar design, the hacker ethic What it is, is it's bringing people together ah, media to buy technologies in a sort of cooperation or sharing manner. So, you can think of these things like technologies of cooperation. There's an excellent paper written by Saveri and Howard Rheingold on this, called "Technologies of Cooperation." But what I'm essentially looking at is how networks can be spontaneous, emergent, citizen-led and citizen-shaped in times of disaster and terrorism.

Now, I just wanted to show you all this cute little diagram that I didn't make. It was created by a guy called Dion Hinchcliffe; he's the actual editor of a Web 2.0 journal right now, and what he's basically showing is that, with the development of technologies as it's being created every day, we're seeing that there's a greater attention being placed on the users right now in what we're calling "social

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

computing." With users now being the center of the universe. Now that's very utopian, but that's the actual idea: that these technologies will empower average citizens to be able to create community online. Now, for this paper I use a series of interdisciplinary theories. A lot of my theories came out of [science studies] theories. But also from theories surrounding the concepts of networks and emergence. And looking at how networks can be built, distributed, decentralized, bottom-up, and there are also a series of books that talk about networks like these, and about collective wisdom in the crowd - one being *The Wisdom of Crowds*, the *Power of Many*; there's also a book called *Small Pieces, Loosely Joined*, and the actual book that talks a lot about networks, called *The Science of Networks*. Now, the events I looked at were the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake - the tsunami, as we all know it as - the 2005 London bombings - that's just been dubbed 7/7 right now - and the August 2005 Hurricane Katrina incident. My methodology was interesting, because, as we know, there is no census of blogs out there. So it's very, very difficult to be able to gather content on how the Internet was used during these times. So what I did was I used a three-pronged approach, which also included a snowball sampling, essentially. I went to Technorati, which is a blog search engine aggregator. I typed in tags related to these disasters, and to just let you know how difficult it is to be able to get a universe of material on it for example, the London bombings, I had to search three or four different tags to be able to get articles and posts on London bombings. I also monitored the A-list blogs, and I also searched Lexis Nexis for "big media" reports. In addition, because I was interested in doing this study when Hurricane Katrina occurred, I was able to actually monitor the situation live through basically, placing feeds and all that in my RSS aggregators, and just being able to track what was going on. Now, as I mentioned, I'm actually very interested in how citizen journalism functioned during these times. So it is, essentially, a qualitative study. It's kind of difficult to do quantitative work in something like this right now at least, it was difficult for me to think of how to do it. So I wanted to get a general sense of how the Internet was used during these times. And one is, I looked at how mainstream media reported on citizen journalism. For the Indian Ocean earthquake, they actually called it - they said that blogs provided the most vivid, immediate reporting, out of everything. They called a lot of these people that did journalism at this time as accidental, unintentional, or incidental journalists. A lot of these would - these journalism reports that came out were actually tourists being stranded in that region. A lot of them had Camcorders, they had digital equipment. So we're not talking about the actual people that were living there at the time; we're talking about a lot of tourists that were able to actually create video and, basically, transmit video online.

For the London bombings, Helen Boaden of the BBC actually described it as the gap between the amateur and the professional shrinking - seeing a democratization of news, and actually sea changes in journalism practice, in the way news is collected, gathered, disseminated. For Hurricane Katrina, it was a little different, because the media was more prepared for that one than the other two incidents. So they actually created their own blogs. So what you saw was citizen journalism providing an inside perspective, mainstream media providing an outside. So it was more complementary.

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

Now, how were technologies used? Mobile technologies were used to send SMS messages. In the tsunami region in particular, text messages were used for relief, aid for fundraising, coordination to find the missing. We found phone cameras were used very, very - ah, because they're so ubiquitous, particularly in Europe. For the 7/7 incident, BBC reported receiving 20,000 emails, 1,000 photos, and 20 videos from cell phones. And actually, a lot of the story was already covered before a lot of mainstream media journalists got there, on the scene. And it was used less in Hurricane Katrina - though mainly because, probably, the infrastructure was wiped out, so people couldn't really use their mobile communications as much.

This is actually a picture by Adam Stacey that was taken with his cell phone. It was actually chosen by Time magazine as one of the twenty most popular photos for the year 2004. But it actually made its way all the way to the front pages of many newspapers, in the UK as well as in the US.

Now, blogs were also used to chronicle the disaster. Now, I'm just going to show you a couple of really quick ones. This one is the South-East Asia blog/Wiki that was used. And this one actually became one of the most popular sites the tenth-most popular visited humanitarian site for this disaster. There's also photoblogging, that was really popular during that time. A lot of people used Flickr for storing their photos online. In terms of first-hand reporting blogs, we have a lot of stuff occurring in Katrina. This is done by Brian Oberkirch, called the Slidell Hurricane Damage Blog, and this one actually also got a lot of hits, because he was providing hyper-local news about what was going on in Slidell, which wasn't really on mainstream media's radar at the time; a lot of them were covering New Orleans. And also Michael Barnett, the Interdictor, which was another very popular blog - so popular, he actually had to create several different cam feeds for it. He works for DirectNIC, and he actually stayed in the New Orleans area to cover the disaster.

We saw some interesting relief coordination, the right blogosphere raising over 1,000,000 dollars in relief, the left blogosphere raising about 200,000.

Another big phenomenon that occurred here is the idea of Wiki journalism. Can news be dissected like a sausage? And constantly updated, and be put up on the web? Now, you look at the Wikipedia entry for the London bombings; it was edited over 5,000 times. And it's a huge entry. It's probably going to take a while to load, so but at least I can get to show you exactly how long this entry is. And it's just been constantly - being re-edited and re-edited. Can this be a tenable model in times of disaster? Wikis also allow global connections between people of different nation-states, essentially allowing the use of Internet telephony. People could call numbers, and their messages would appear on the Wiki, as help signals. There's also something called Recovery 2.0, which we'll talk about in a couple of seconds.

One big phenomenon that occurred in looking at how citizens used the Internet, in times of disaster, was actually how technology was developed and shaped. There's one scenario - a blogger in Trinidad, called Taran Rampersad, puts the call out for

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

the need to develop some sort of Internet telephony system, where people can call in and leave messages. In one night's time, another respondent, called Dan Lane from Britain, responded to the request, and they built this system called the Alert Retrieval Cache in one night. Which would take much longer for government - were they put in charge of doing something like this.

There's also an interesting site, it's called the housing damage mapping site, which actually plugged into Google Maps and its application program interface, to actually develop hurricane information for people. They could go in there and interactively put in little icons as to where damage was occurring on their - in their area.

The biggest project was really something called the Katrina People Finder Project, which was an amazing project. It involved all those four players that I put up there, plus several people. What they found was that, in trying to develop technology for this, everyone was creating databases online. So there were over 25 different databases with missing peoples' information. So which database do you go to? So, one strength of the Internet is that it's decentralized and distributive. but that's its very weakness in times of disaster. Which database do you go to? So this project created one centralized database, where all of the other databases could feed into this one database. And what was amazing about it was they allowed over 3,000 volunteers to enter in data of up to 25 records at a time, populating the database with over 620,000 records of missing people.

So, just to conclude, really quickly, social software is significant in times of disasters and terrorism, because - with the technology being what it is - it allows networks to emerge spontaneously. But there are also some dangers of it. One being the idea of citizen paparazzi or sousveillance, which is the idea of having little brothers and sisters walking around, ok? It's not just big brother watching you, but everyone is now capable of taking photos, taking pictures, posting it, and - you know, the idea of wearable computing, right now, is maybe a strange idea, but I mean, there are devices like this [referring to the visual aid] coming out right now, that allow you to capture, 24/7, in an always-on fashion, other people's activities. But the idea of citizens being able to see, snap and send photos there's a site called SpyMedia - "It pays to spy" is their tagline. There's a site called "Scoop" [she's referring to Scoopt] or maybe it's "Scoop." I don't really know how to pronounce it. But I'll put this up here to show you the actual pictures. "Sell your photos to the press. Who will take tomorrow's front page photograph? A professional press photographer, or a passerby armed with a camera phone?" And they're cell-journalists. So, the idea of public and private space boundaries are sort of falling apart. So these things need to be redefined in this new environment.

And then, the final idea of the accessibility of the technology; not everyone has this technology. So I think one of the big things in times of disaster and terrorism is to make the networks smart. Which means that, if you can create focal news, where people can be opinion leaders and information carriers, then all you may need to do in these times - like, for example, in the tsunami region- is tell one person, who is the king of the village, and then they can spread the information to everyone else.

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

So, the idea is, you need to begin to build networks that are much more smarter in the future. That's it!

[applause]

**STEVE REESE:** The next paper is by Neil Thurman, and he's from City University, London. And "Participatory Journalism in the Mainstream" is the title; "Attitudes and Implementation at British News Websites."

**NEIL THURMAN:** Thanks, Steve. OK, good afternoon, everybody. I'm delighted to be here. What I'd like to do in this talk is take a look at how readers are contributing to mainstream online news sites in the UK. And I'd like to thank the British Academy for helping support my travel to Austin this week.

So, my study is based on a series of qualitative research interviews conducted with editors and managing editors of most of the main British news sites, and also a survey of the user-generated content initiatives that those sites offer. My survey found that there were seven main types of user-generated content initiatives. So polls; have-your-says in which a question is posed and comments are published; chat rooms; questions and answers with newsworthy figures and journalists; blogs with comments enabled; and message boards, both pre- and post-moderated. So, seven main types of initiatives for readers to contribute.

What I found was that - was a great deal of variation in what was offered. And also the popularity of those services. So this slide shows the use and popularity of message boards at ten UK news websites. So, as you can see, only half of the sites studied had implemented message boards, and two of those were pre-moderated. And the use that readers were making of these messages boards varied hugely, with over a million posts at the Guardian or the Daily Mail, but just over a hundred at the Telegraph. The FT, which was also pre-moderated, had barely ten thousand posts, even though it had been running for several years.

In other areas, there were also stark variations. So, although a number of sites published what they called blogs, such as the Daily Mail and the Telegraph, only one - the Guardian - regularly allowed readers to post comments. And while the BBC publishes lengthy, or sometimes publishes lengthy diary stories, photo essays from readers, most other sites made do with short comments.

So when I explored, with editors and managing editors, the conditions and constraints that played a part in their inclusion of reader contributions, I found that there were six issues that slowed or prevented innovation. So there were worries about spelling, punctuation, editorial selection, accuracy and balance; a worry that blogs, that introducing blogs would result in a style of journalism more inclined towards personality and opinion. There was a question of how do we make these things pay; the uncertain legal environment; the management of journalists involved in user-generated content initiatives; and also the technology that was used to support those services.

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

So, I'll go through these one by one. So, journalists like - editors like Pete Picton of the Sun, believed that it was their responsibility to select and sub users' contributions so that they met the standards readers were used to offline. At the BBC, the founding editor believed that editorial intervention was important because it prevents duplication. And, having worked in newspaper and broadcast environments, where the amount of space is limited - the amount of space for content is limited - journalists like the Sun's Pete Picton had a strong belief in the value of editing, selecting content that would be of interest to readers of their publication. And this desire to sort of sift out material that's not newsworthy helped explain why blogs were seen as extremely dull or mediocre or of very marginal interest by a number of editors that I spoke to.

Although "balance" could be said to be a rather anachronistic concept to some of the British press, the lack of balance in the submissions to unmoderated forums was an issue. And the reason that the Independent newspaper stopped hosting message boards for readers was, its editor told me, because the contributors were what he called "a bunch of bigots shouting from one side of the room to another, failing to give a balanced view." And in the Financial Times, some racist comments and the general tone of submissions to their unmoderated message boards prompted them to reclaim editorial control. And they now select and edit submissions before publication.

The second factor that constrained the introduction of sort of reader-generated content initiatives was a worry that blogs would result in a style of journalism that was more inclined towards personality and opinion. So, blogs and other forms of participatory journalism strongly challenge established tradition that reporting is written anonymously. So, for the editor of the Daily Telegraph, all that he felt that the reader wanted was information. The journalist should be a fly on the wall; the readers don't know them, they don't care about them. And at the BBC News website, bylines were only used on special occasions, and not for "straight" news stories. And the editor believed they would become meaningless if they were.

The third factor is finding the resources required to read and edit user's submissions. When I went into this research, I rather naively believed that getting readers to contribute might save publications time or money, as they wouldn't have to pay professional journalists to write copy. But what became clear was that reading, selecting and editing what readers send in was an expensive process. And the editor of the Financial Times told me that they had to cut down their discussions because of the costs involved, and at the Independent, although the editor thought that readers could add another dimension to stories - for example, about postwar life in Baghdad - he said he doesn't have the money to do it. So it's editorial intervention, rather than paying contributors, that costs money. And most contributors, most readers contribute without the expectation of any financial reward, although sites like the BBC are prepared to pay, in the right circumstances.

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

So, moving from costs to income and benefits. How easy is it for the mainstream commercial news media to make money from user-generated content initiatives? Well, editors like Avra Williams believe that users of these services can be very loyal, and - in fact - between 40 and 50% of the traffic to the Daily Mail was generated just simply in their message boards. And although the audience might be loyal, they're not always present in large numbers, and so the Independent found that when they were running message boards, they had just 220 users who could generate between twenty and thirty thousand page impressions. So it's understandable, then, why some editors I spoke to believed it would be difficult to get that kind of user to participate in any kind of commercial opportunities provided. And finding ways of getting users out of message boards was an important preoccupation of the Daily Mail. And the editorial director told me that, told me that to help to do this, they're using overlays in message areas, sponsorship and integrated advertising. So, for example, if somebody in a post to their message board mentioned a brand - like Weller - in a post, that would become a link to the brand's website. And it was the price that the publication believed users would have to pay in order to use message boards on their site.

So, an undoubted benefit of user-generated content is that it provides a source of exclusive content, not just for the website but for the broadcast or print parent. So this helps ameliorate the costs of running these initiatives. And, last year - late last year, when there was a major oil fire - oh sorry, an oil depot explosion in England, the BBC website received 6,000 emails and three to four thousand video clip stills and eyewitness accounts. And, although this was a lot of material, there was even more that they couldn't get their hands on, because on the ground their outside broadcast units couldn't receive the images that people were queuing up to give them from their camera phones, their digital cameras and so forth. So, as a result of that, they're re-equipping their outside broadcast units in order to make sure this doesn't happen again.

The fourth factor was the uncertain legal environment that editors found themselves in when it came to integrating reader contributions. And so, the fear of consequences if users are able to publish free-to-wear was an important factor, explaining why editors were reluctant to give citizen journalism, or citizen journalists, more freedom. And so the - the libel laws gave the editor of the Scotsman cause for concern, and, he believed, were holding publishers back. And one case that played on editors' minds involved a post on a message board hosted by the Sunday Herald, the Scottish Sunday Herald, and it cost the newspaper about \$50,000 in an out-of-court settlement, even though only a maximum of 37 people saw the comment.

The management and professional development of journalists involved in user-generated content issues was the next factor. Dan Gillmor talks about journalism evolving away from its lecture mode to include a conversation, and for that conversation to start in the mainstream media, perhaps in the form of a blog, requires the input of professional journalists. And although many blogs hosted in the mainstream media in the UK have been initiated by journalists, some editors had reservations about getting their staff involved in blogging. The editor of the Financial



## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

Times told me that blogs were too time-consuming for her busy journalists. And the editor of the Telegraph worried that blogs might not suit journalists professionally, because they're trained in certain ways to look for certain things, and to work for certain deadlines.

And so finally, the information systems used to process and publish user-generated content are an important factor in how sites are proceeding. At most sites, journalists did little more than cut readers' contributions from email, and post them into a content management system, usually making a selection and subbing on the run. But this practice didn't necessarily mean that more sophisticated systems hadn't been considered. And the Daily Telegraph, for example, had looked at an externally-provided bulletin board system, but felt that the standard of monitoring was insufficient. And the editor is much more comfortable to have his professional journalists manually cutting and pasting reader comments into their publishing system. The relatively laborious manner in which readers' contributions are dealt with wasn't a result of a lack of imagination or money, but really a result of a desire to retain control over editorial content.

One of the most interesting developments - and I'll finish with this - has been at the BBC, and they've been overwhelmed by user-generated content, and this has become, in their own words, unmanageable. For example, a British radio presenter called John Peel died, and the BBC news website had 35,000 emails in the first day, and 100,000 emails in the week following the death of this celebrity. And they just couldn't cope with that level of submissions. And so, since October, they're now, for the first time, allowing unmoderated contributions. They're using some software that's also used by EBay. How popular has their initiative been, the initiative of allowing unmoderated contributions? Well, the have-you-says, which look like this [referring to the visual aid] - you can't see the comments, but they would be underneath, organized either chronologically or rated by users. They're actually less popular than popular stories. So popular have-your-says get about 10,000 page views; popular stories get about five times as many. And the number of people who contribute only about half of one percent of the total number of readers that the BBC get on any given day.

They're also quite surprised with that the BBC, is in some cases, with the character of the comments. And so, when some riots happened in France a few months ago, the editor was surprised by the balance of opinion. This question referred to tough measures brought by the French government against rioters, and actually many readers supported the French interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, who said that crime-ridden neighborhoods should be "cleaned with a power hose," and that the rioters were a rabble. So that now comments are not selected and edited by journalists, it's proving difficult for the BBC to maintain the balance that traditionally they've sought, and this is disturbing some journalists.

So, just to conclude, in their exceptions of user-generated content, the news organizations that I studied showed a wide difference in practices, and local conditions had a considerable influence. Cost was an important factor, and high costs

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

of moderation haven't been offset yet by the revenues generated. Journalists had some concerns about reader contributions that I've mentioned, having to do with spelling, grammar, selection, decency, and so forth. But I didn't feel there was any fundamental prejudices against the form, and publications are expanding their provision in this area. Legal worries were considerable, and explained why some sites have dropped bulletin boards. And IT systems also played a part. And, to accommodate the increasing amount of reader contributions, changes are taking place. For example, as we've seen at the BBC, which was once a bastion of editorial control, users are now allowed to post comments without pre-moderation. And the popularity of this and other developments, and the reaction of journalists, is something really, at this early stage, that remains to be seen.

So, that's all from me, and thanks very much for listening.

[applause]

**STEVE REESE:** For our third paper, we have another one of our doctoral students here at the School of Journalism. Lou Rutigliano will give a paper entitled "Web 2.0, Society 1.0: Online Citizens Media, But for Which Citizens?"

**LOU RUTIGLIANO:** I study technology, but I'm totally PowerPoint illiterate. So, just bear with me here. Well, hi, everybody. I'm gonna be talking about a section of the public that's been left out, so far, of a lot of these great new tools and innovations that we've been talking about for the last couple of days which are very inspiring, but are - they have a lot of potential for the poor. They could help them in a lot of ways. But that's not being done yet. I'm gonna talk a bit about how they could help, and a local effort here in Austin that is trying to improve that.

So, we heard from Sharon about Web 2.0 , and that was a great description. I'm just gonna go with that, in the interests of time. Just a couple things: it is becoming very pervasive, and, as you can see by the quote here at the bottom, the venture capitalist very subtly shows us that there's more coming because of the success of MySpace, and Craigslist, and all the other different applications that are out there.

And what Web 2.0 is, to me, is a way for people to really share information in ways that expand what journalism is. We talked a little bit yesterday about how journalism, through these new tools, is allowing comments to become journalism, and other types of activities beyond writing: sharing photos, and just sharing simple pieces of information, now, qualify in some ways.

An example that sort of shows this wide-to-narrow idea would be for community media: say, allowing residents of apartments to all submit reviews and photos of where they live, so that you could have information about every apartment in a city, and then have the ability to go search by apartment. And you could have something like SlumLord.com, and use that to search. That is another type of community journalism that's available through this media. And we're seeing some local websites

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

- IBrattleboro's a great example of using the software to allow people to cover their own neighborhood.

But there are some communities that are not involved in this at all, when they could be helped by it. And it's not something that's really foreign to the poor. In some ways, it's been done by the poor for a hundred years. I don't know if people have heard of hobo codes, but this was a way that the homeless could leave little graffiti tags on streets and buildings around the turn of the century - the last century - where they would say, you know, two lines means "you can get a meal here." And it was peer-to-peer journalism. And it came very naturally to this community, because they didn't have anyone doing it for them. And it was critical to get this sort of information.

Now we saw this happening during Katrina. The evacuees in Austin were forced to learn, on the fly, how to use these sorts of tools. And for many of them, they didn't even have email. They were signing up for their first email account in the shelter. Then they would use it to find their relatives, to find their pets, on photo sharing sites. These were websites that were going up instantaneously. I don't know if you can read this [austinhelppingneworleans](#), [austinhelppskatrina](#). People would go on there and say "I want to volunteer. What do you guys need?" And someone would respond immediately, "We need toothbrushes." And someone else would say, "Now we need hairbrushes over at this shelter." It was stuff that was being done really quickly, real simple bits of information. People weren't writing articles, but they were doing this to help with, in this case, disaster management.

One example of this - this is a website I run. [laughter] This is usually a travel guide for people with no money, but during the time the evacuees were here, we were using it to do things like, say, "Hey, there's a sale on clothes, if you have a license from one of these states." So then, someone would say, "Well, what bus do you take?" And then someone would respond, "Take this bus." So it would just work in that way. But this is something that's not really available this whole approach in some of the local low-income neighborhoods.

EastAustinOnline. Someone said to me, "You know, we already have a community website." And this is what we got. I don't know if anyone from EastAustinOnline is in the crowd, I don't know if they're being invited to any panels, but this is what they have for interactivity: "We want to hear from you!" And you click on that, and you just get an email. It's very heavy on the ads This is Web .05. [laughter]

So why is this the way it is? Because there's the digital divide comes in so many forms now that go beyond this whole idea of access. You hear or see reports from the government, "A Nation Online" as if, you know, that's it, we've got everybody on there, and we're set. But there still remain so many obstacles to that. Not just access, but skills and the mindset to even realize why you should bother to set up a website, or learn these skills. You know? "What could it mean for my community?" A lot of people are just resistant to the idea of even getting online. So, there's this local nonprofit, Austin Free-Net, that I've been researching. And they are this is not

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

Free-Net's headquarters [referring to the visual aid], this is the homeless shelter. And I just like this building. But what they do is provide the computers and service. This is what they've done for about ten years. This is in another community center. Very simple, but, you know, these two computers mean a lot to this community, because this is all that they really have. This is a low-income senior center, senior housing... Free-Net has a computer lab in there, with about six computers.

So, what Free-Net's interested in doing now is trying to see what they can do with the access, what sort of training classes they can have, and get into more of this Web 2.0 community media development. So, I've visited their sites, talked to the people who run the sites, observed some of the people in the sites, and I'm just going to show you a couple here, as an example.

Casa Marianella. This is the immigrant shelter in Austin. Temporary residence. They have dorms for men and women. People come into town, they work, they just stay here. It's an emergency shelter. So, you'll see right here, you go through this front door, and inside - you know - there's a couple couches, there's people hanging out, there's clothes that have been donated - they're sorting through that.

And then you have this. This is the most popular computer in the whole Free-net network of computers. It's totally open to the public. People come in off the street, go to the computer, look for a bus schedule, and they leave. It's very informal. And the whole design, the whole atmosphere of this lab It's not even a lab. I mean, most labs look like the Department of Motor Vehicles, you know? [laughter]

This is very, very fitting to the informal nature of the shelter. People come and go, they use it in a way it's not intimidating, you know? It's like a payphone. So, what happens here is that there's a small staff. They are busy doing a hundred other things. Someone will come in and talk to the staff and say "I need a Band-Aid," and then the next person will come in and say "Can you show me how to set up email?" So this is the sort of environment that people are trying to learn how to use these tools in.

How am I doing on time? Another minute?

**STEVE REESE:** You've got at least five minutes.

Great. So, it's very popular. And because of the fact that it's also open to the public. Garden Terrace is a low-income housing community. You have people living here who were formerly homeless, they get their veteran's benefits, and then there are people who are more working poor. There's about a hundred people who live here. And they have a small lab, and you'll see that - you know - although they have all of these facilities, there's a you know, I didn't force everybody to leave before I took a photo. The lab was empty because it was the middle of the day. A lot of people are out there, trying to get work or working, and they're limited in the hours they can stay open, because the staff works 9 to 5. So they leave at 5, and people are coming back. It's not really working in that way.

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

But when people are here, they prefer to use it, because the libraries are down the road but libraries, and you hear this from the people at Casa Marianella, too. There's a very, like, authoritarian feeling there. They're not comfortable. Here, people can go, they can talk. They ask each other how to use different programs. And it's a more social scene. Whereas, in the library, you have to produce a drivers' license, you can't talk and the libraries are very important, and they're great; I don't mean to take anything away from them. But for some communities, it doesn't work.

So, what we find is that, although there is some access out there, there are still many obstacles. But, if the have-nots of society are going to be involved in some of these community media efforts, these sites not only are going to play a very important role, but they could almost be preferable as a way to get people online, because of these links between offline habits and online behavior. I mean, people are going to go to these computers because it's involved in their daily lives. And when they're there, when they're in these places that are home to them, it's a good place to introduce them to some of these ideas.

Also, the fact that they're nonprofits one of the Free-Net sites is a food pantry. And three times a week, they have people line up for two hours to get food. And getting people to go to the food pantry requires a flyer. "We have free food." And you can't put, "Come here and learn how to do a Web 2.0 application" on a flier. You know? So you get people in there, and they're waiting in line. And the director of the place - of course, there's this one guy who works at the food pantry, he's usually getting the donations. He says, "I would like to have classes for people, while they're waiting." You know? So it's matching up offline/online behaviors. That's how you're gonna get people in there. We talked about having kiosks in bus stations, or in laundromats. That's how you can catch them. Then, you know, when they go for the access at some of these places that aren't public, they're also exposed to some of the nonprofit's goals. One place does public health education. So people come in, they find out that there's free Internet, and then they get free condoms.

So it helps both. But, since the nonprofits are very low-staffed, there's a very big need for - a need and an opportunity for universities to step in and help them, by getting students to do research projects built around this, journalism students that need to learn how to run these sorts of websites, can play a part. So this is what's going on now. We've applied for a grant to set up some of these partnerships, and we're waiting to hear on that. It's going to be interdisciplinary, and - you know - if any of the millions of viewers out there want to get involved, here's how you can get me [referring to his email address, on the visual aid].

And that's it. Thanks a lot.

**STEVE REESE:** Thank you, Lou. Our final paper is by Julie Neumann, who is a Master's student here in the School of Journalism, and her paper's entitled "The Impact of the Internet on Journalism: An Examination of Blogging, Citizen Journalism, and a Dot.Com Solution for the Online Edition."

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

[inaudible conversation]

**JULIE NEUMANN:** [referring to the computer] I'll see if I can even get it to come on. [laughs]

OK. My paper was kind of a case study. I am a professional master's student; I'm not in the research program here. And so this fall, I was working - I was taking Professor Rosental Alves's multimedia class, and I was also working for Pluck, who served everybody lunch yesterday. And they've been working on doing a lot of citizen journalism programs, and doing web applications for journalism.

And so I got involved in a project they were doing called BlogBurst, which essentially - they debuted it in December of last year, but it really had its big - kind of rolling out at South by Southwest interactive this year. And it's a wire service of blogs that can be run to newspapers and publishers, essentially giving them content and some different opportunities to utilize citizen journalism. So I kind of did a case study of that program, since I kind of got in when they were just starting to work on it as an editorial intern. And we were essentially figuring out everything from the ground up; no one really knew what we were doing. [laughs] So they decided to bring in the journalism graduate student, and I tried to help out a little bit. But this is what I was looking at.

The first issue that I wanted to look at was if bloggers can be journalists. I came from a print journalist background, and I know that coming into this, I had a really big bias against electronic media and bloggers, and whether or not that was journalism. And, you know, for me journalism was ink and paper, and it was having editors, and it was having a newsroom, and putting out a product. But when you look at - what the basic definition of a journalist is, writing for a mass audience, and writing about current events, and culture for public consumption, bloggers are fitting into this. And they're becoming a huge part of the mainstream media. So I don't even know if it's a question any more, of whether or not bloggers are journalists. They're in journalism and they're affecting journalism, and they're becoming part of that, they're being included on these websites. So I think to embrace them is definitely the most beneficial outcome for traditional publishers. I think that they're going to get a lot more out of it; they're going to be able to benefit from stuff that's already going on, in the online world, as well as get readers for traditional publications.

So, looking at what a blog is Michael Conniff has defined a blog as posts that are unfiltered, in reverse chronological order; they include commentary, external links, appropriated texts, and they have a largely informal attitude. I think a lot of these elements, especially the commentary, appropriated text, and this informal attitude, are brought to issue with traditional publishers. Of course, there's a ton of blogs out there that contradict this definition. L. A. Observed, AndrewSullivan, Gawker and Gothamist this idea of blogs as these strictly personal sites, and as informal sites, is really becoming outdated. And I think, as we see that, a more practical way to view

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

blogs, especially from the point of view of journalism, is that it's a format. It's not so much the content, but kind of the publishing platform and how they're presenting it, and the huge components that are of really great use to publishers is the ease and immediacy of publication and the possibility of linkage interaction.

As Jeff Jarvis said on Buzz Machine, it's merely a tool and he resists calling it a medium. It's a means of sharing information and interaction. And, just by that definition alone, I think there should be a huge appeal to publishers, as far as running blogs onto their websites. Pluck, especially, has been looking at bloggers as citizen journalists. They're not looking at them as blogs, as web logs, as personal journals, but looking at them as citizen journalists, who are collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news.

And because of their independence, they can be - they're spread out as far as what they cover, geographically where they are, the kinds of information they can get ahold of. It's really opening up journalism to a whole new cadre of reporters that are in the communities, and that can get a different perspective than the journalists that are in the newsroom and have other responsibilities. I know that's been a huge contention, is where do we get the time to go through these blogs and look at them and keep them filtered. Well, citizen journalists, I think part of the definition of that is that they're not filtered. They're not going through a gatekeeper. And that's an incredibly terrifying concept for a lot of traditional publishers, but that's also the nature of the beast, as far as getting these blogs online and onto their websites.

So this is what Pluck was looking at, as far as the blogosphere really has it's this huge resource that traditional publishers can use on their websites. With Yahoo and Google getting a lot of the news - a lot of people go there for their news nowadays - a lot of traditional publishers are losing site traffic. And that's been a huge problem, keeping their online editions economically viable, but also popular, and getting readers to them, when people are going to Yahoo and Google. And even places like Yahoo are starting to include blogs in their searches; traditional publishers need to start including them.

So Pluck's solution for that was to do BlogBurst, which mirrors an AP wire/Reuters enterprise. It wires blogs. They have a gatekeeper effect in there by giving - editors are selecting these blogs based on their quality, and the consistency of output, and they're carefully monitoring them to keep - to make sure that they're keeping these standards up to par. And then, on the newspapers' side, they have a choice of sorting through posts or allowing for a constant feed. So it's it really is similar to taking in an AP wire. You can kind of do with it what you want. You're being given content, but you don't have to use this content in this unfiltered, unfettered way, if you don't feel comfortable with that. If you want to get the content on your page, you can. And it's really similar I saw it a lot working in college newsrooms, and the way that we would just slap AP and Reuters stories onto the page, cause we just needed content. And to get content on, blogs work great, but you can also - if you have editors in the newsroom, that really wanted to spend the time to sort through these, and to really get some good content on, you can get some really high-quality

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

content - a lot of different voices coming from the blogosphere, and get a lot of diversity on your publication's website, and for your readers.

So essentially, I looked at this as a prime example of what mediamorphosis is. As I was saying earlier, it's kind of - I don't really think it's really a point anymore about whether or not bloggers are journalists, or if they're gonna have a place in journalism. They're already there. And that's part of the concept of mediamorphosis. Just like television, and offering video online, and some of these different things that publishers have been doing, blogs are just one more aspect of how journalism is evolving and how media is evolving, and to incorporate that into traditional newspapers and magazines I think it's kind of necessary. As Yahoo search said, traditional media don't have time or resources to cover all the stories, so we want to offer an alternative perspective on the news. It's happening; it's already out there. So not to be taking advantage of it is kind of turning their back on, I think, were a lot of media is headed.

So, this is what BlogBurst has been doing. And I think Richard Fidler, who had done a lot of work with mediamorphosis, is looking at this, and seeing these newer forms of communications, as they emerge the older forms don't die. That's been this huge fear of newspapers - this cry that everyone's dying, that pretty soon we won't have anything on paper, it's all going to be online. I think we've seen that in the whole tradition of mediamorphosis, that these outlets are not going to just disappear, and just because you accept this online community doesn't mean that you're killing yourself off. I think it's a way to strengthen them and to get diversity online. Since online editions are going to be extremely important, that doesn't mean that a paper edition has to go away. And I don't think, necessarily, that having online options makes the paper edition any less of a viable outlet. It's just, kind of, I guess, getting with the times. So that is the end of my presentation, and I think that pretty much wraps it up for what I have to say.

[applause]

**STEVE REESE:** All right. Thank you. Very good papers. I was struck by the different kinds of methods that people were using, and how important it is from looking at looking at new media and, in particular, citizen journalism; how useful it is to approach it from a variety of perspectives including Sharon's content perspective, looking at what's available out there on the web, as people react to these disasters. It's interesting to see these high-crisis moments, like the tsunamis and the London bombing and Katrina, because that just drives everything to the Nth degree, and shows you what is really happening by looking at the extremes. So I thought that was a useful review.

Neil's perspectives of the editors - it's helpful to see what gatekeepers are making of some of these developments. I was kind of curious about the - about their concern that, somehow, these blogs would drive the news to personality and opinion, which is how I often - I think, a lot of people characterize the British print media anyways.



## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

And I'm wondering how much more they think it can go in that direction. At least the "red tops" and the tabloid press, not the - maybe - the Financial Times.

Also, I was struck by Lou's review of using these media in East Austin, from the ethnographic perspective. because it's not enough just to demonstrate that these technologies are available for people, and just look at the network itself, but there's a lot of interesting things going on behind the scenes at the location where people are actually coming into contact with the technology in their communities, where they live, and integrating - it doesn't replace the community where they live, it just becomes embedded in that community, in interesting ways.

And then Julie's case-study perspective, I think, is also interesting: to see how people are trying to make sense of some of these developments.

We've been interested, as I mentioned facetiously, about the students. But we're certainly interested in these issues of citizen journalism here in the School of Journalism at UT, because there's been a tendency to pit professional journalists against citizen journalists, as though those are two discrete and radically different categories. But of course, they are complementary, and they interact with each other in new ways, and - to the extent that professional journalists can take advantage of citizens and vice versa, so much the better.

Lou and I did a paper last year on looking at the extent to which, really the blogosphere is really predicated, and based on, and complementary with, professional news media, to the extent that they link. It's not replacing, it's complementary, And that seems to be the key concept as we think about the future of journalism. There is a role for professional journalism, and that is to link together all these other outlets and manifestations of citizen creativity.

So, we have some time to have some questions, or other items of discussion from the audience. So feel free to raise your hand, and - ah - Tania? Could you come to the mic? For the millions of viewers.

**TANIA CANTRELL:** I have a lot of questions. But this first one is to Lou Rutigliano concerning the - the nonprofit organization. You featured Casa Marianella, is that right? And I'm just wondering, if with your digital divide experience, if you're noticing, perhaps, a difference also between those who have English as their first language and Spanish as their second language what are some of the differences there? Can you speak a little to that?

**LOU RUTIGLIANO:** Well, I think, definitely, there's a need for online tutorials and software that's translated into different languages. And I think you also have to - you have to realize that the staff the reason why the staff of the nonprofit can play a role in this is because they have the language skills too. And not just language skills, but they also understand other cultural realities of the population they're working with. So that they can translate the software into - translate beyond just language

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

translation, but translate into terms that are familiar to their reality. I think there's a lot of translating that needs to go on. And that they are very suited to do it.

**VINCENT MAHER:** I have a question for Julie But, maybe it's actually a question for Jeff Jarvis. [laughter] Because I have to challenge this assumption that the blog format is neutral, right? That's like saying that the same stuff happens in a magazine than in a newspaper it's just the fact that it's a different size paper and quality of paper, for instance. Or that a novel, which is also made out of paper, is similar to journalism because, you know, there's subtle differences. I mean, it's like saying, essentially, that the genre does not actually affect the methods and practice of creating that content. And it is true that, while blogs do - like, we could say that they fall broadly within the category of journalism, I think, what we have to admit is that we're extending a definition of journalism to incorporate a broader sphere or type of content. Because, you know, the classic journalists would say that's what happens in NYT or FT. And now what we're saying is that tabloids are journalism, blogs are journalism and there is some point at which we need to start saying, "Well, this is going beyond the boundary of journalism, into fiction, or personal narrative, and so on." So it's more a comment than a question, but I'm just wondering, from the other panelists, what they think about this issue.

**JULIE NEUMANN:** Well, I guess I can speak, real quickly, to that. I was kind of rushing through my paper, and there was a section I didn't get to, that will be available online, where I kind of looked at blogs and applied elements of journalism to them and applying some of these, I guess they would be, "best practice" theories to them.

And I would say the majority of blogs, a huge, huge, majority of blogs, don't fall into the category of journalism. It's more looking at this elite cadre of bloggers that are at the very top end, that are writing very seriously, that are trying to, kind of, adhere to these best practices. And one thing that Pluck had found they did this program called "In Sight" for the Austin-American Statesman, bringing in blogging onto their site. That when these bloggers have legitimate outlet, when they think that they are being considered journalists, and they are being included in these websites, the writing improves; they start to take themselves more seriously; they become much more professional in how they're approaching their blogging. Which isn't to say, I mean, there is no gate keeping, really, in blogs.

And that's a huge problem. I don't know if there's the same amount of responsibility and the same amount of, I guess, adherence to the truth and to fact-checking that journalism is used to. But a lot of these journalists, especially when you look at some of the really high-end A-listers, that are doing some of the Gawker sites, and some of the stuff that - it seems very tabloidish, and it does have that personal voice to it, but they really are being held accountable, by a lot of different people, and as soon as you make a mistake in the blogosphere, you have 900 comments telling you about how wrong you are. Which you don't get in mainstream media, I don't think. No one's - the gate keeping quality is being done by the editors, not so much the readers. And that's a really interesting aspect of blogs. So I think they're different,

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

but there's definitely this "top layer" of bloggers that are starting to fit into what a journalist, kind of, is. They're doing the same kinds of things. Maybe the voice is a little bit different, and the format's a little bit different, but the concept of what they're doing is really similar. More so than, I would say, like a novel to a newspaper. You're looking at something that's a lot closer, and can be a lot closer, if the practitioners are doing it correctly. SHARON MERAZ: I could just add a couple of things to that, that - I always get the question asked to me, how a blog is different from web publishing, how a blog is different from websites.

Actually, the format is very, very different. To say that the form doesn't matter is the wrong thing to say, because it enables syndication, quick posting, archiving; every post has a permanent URL, that's a perma-link. So it's actually structured to enable an ecosystem and a social network to arise, so it's a very, very different format, so that's one thing.

And the second thing is the whole debate of blogging versus journalism. I think what Julie said is right, not all blogs are journalism. And in fact, most bloggers don't really want to be journalists. What you do find is that there are some that like journalists. For example, in my disaster paper, there's a blogger called Joshua Micah Marshall, who created a Katrina timeline. And it was almost like investigative journalism. And he had all of his readers contribute to when actual events took place.

A lot of the successful bloggers, actually, were journalists before. So you're finding that those who tend to be better writers in the blogosphere also tended to have had a prior connection to mainstream media. So to say that they're disconnected or not inter-related is the wrong thing to say.

You're also finding a lot of bloggers are moving into mainstream media positions: like Andrew Sullivan, or Ana Marie Cox, from Wonkette, they're now blogging for Time magazine. So it's really a very strong relationship, and you're finding that the blogging form is - I mean, I would disagree in saying that it's not different. I think that the blogging form, and the format, has enabled it to create a lot more conversations and community and social networks online.

**ROSENAL CALMON ALVES:** This thing of talking, that blog is a tool I think that's a very important concept, to say "Blog is just a tool." You do what a blog - like paper, and ink and paper, is a tool. And it can be journalism, and it can be pamphlet, and it can be anything. So I think to start understanding blog, you can not consider blog just a genre. It is a genre, as well. But subgenres also.

And that's why people when Neil was showing what the British editors were talking about blogs, they were just generalizing blogs. You cannot generalize a blog, the same way that you cannot generalize ink and paper. So I think the fundamental consideration to put blog as a new tool that, because of its unique characteristics, determines different genres, including journalism.

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

**LOU RUTGLIANO:** Yeah, I think that distinction is really important, because the word "blog" has these connotations, and almost baggage, that is becoming problematic. People are like, "Why will we need a blog?" No one's going to just start writing about their lives; they're too busy for that. But it's not that. It's the format, and the interactivity, and what you can do with it. And then you figure out how to fit that into what people's needs are.

For instance, just real quick, like at Casa Marianella, no one's going to blog. But they can use the blog to keep track of, maybe, contractors people have worked for and then compare, so that migrants can come in and say, "Oh yeah, I might work with this guy." And they find out from other workers, by accessing the database, that that contractor's ripped them off before. So, you know, it's blog as tool. Not blog as journal, or journalism.

**STEVE REESE:** I just had one more thought, too; if we think, conceptually, about the extent to which journalism is a conversation that democracy has with itself or facilitating that conversation necessary to democracy. The fact that blogs are very dynamic and encourage a horizontal conversation by their structure and network ability, it helps to push the conversation to that present moment, where everybody is connected at that particular point in time about the issues of the day. So it's uniquely capable of facilitating a democratic conversation, which is what, I suppose, journalism is supposed to do anyway.

**JULIE NEUMANN:** That was one thing that I did see in my research, was that when you look at the elements of journalism, in some ways, blogs are much more suited to do what, you know, Bill Kovac is saying journalists should do. A lot of - having - providing a form for public criticism and compromise, independent monitor of power, independence from those they cover on a lot of different levels, I think, blogs are better suited in some ways than newspapers are to perform journalism, so I think this idea of looking at it as a tool, and how you could apply the tool to journalism I think that really is, probably, the most useful way to look at a blog when you're a traditional publisher, trying to figure out how fit it in to your newspaper or website.

**STEVE REESE:** Especially the forum function. The forum.

**RICHARD CUTLER:** I want to introduce myself. My name's Richard Cutler, and I come from a neighboring field, communication technology and policy. And we did - many years ago, we did research right out of the center that was right next door. And I find that the field that I ended up in intersects this one very much, and I found many of the issues that you brought up really, really invigorating.

And one of them, that I haven't heard yet, is the re-opening of a public forum. Because, ten years ago, we were all decrying the loss of the public forum. And I was wondering, in particular, Neil, if any of the editors that you spoke with - because I think that the data that you got was probably incredibly valuable for formulating new research questions - if any of them happened to mention that they assumed that the role of newspapers was to be the public forum, given that they perceived that there

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

was a lack of public forum, or that it could go on, that people could have community information-sharing that was apart from journalists?

**NEIL THURMAN:** Not really I mean, I think there was just really one comment by the editor of the Scotsman, that was along the lines of: blogs could be a good meeting point for journalists and readers. But that was really as far as they went. They didn't really get it. I mean, there was a large element that was annoyed, at least initially, by blogs, because they didn't feel that blogs were different from, you know, what they'd been doing in print. One said, you know, "it's nothing different from when we did 24 hours in the life of a nurse in print." And so the idea of an interaction, of a conversation, wasn't really on the radar. And when a lot of the mainstream sites launched what they called blogs around the time of the last general election in the UK, I mean, hardly any had comments enabled. So there are really only now one or two that have enabled comments, and are starting to get it, really, so..

**RICHARD CUTLER:** And also - thank you - I wanted to ask Lou, did the issue of literacy come up, in terms of that whole divide and access to information sharing and whether or not that was, in any way, a really controlling issue for becoming part of that information sharing?

**LOU RUTIGLIANO:** Well, I definitely - yeah, language and literacy, these things are still issues and will always be issues. But I think, if the use of the tool is done in such a way where the information is more simple to provide, rather than having to write a long piece, write a long story, where it's more, like, just enter some information you know, names and dates and simple facts, then you can get around some of that. Make it less of a hurdle.

**RICHARD CUTLER:** My last question, just for the panel at large; if there was, out of this sort of dialogue between those who are part of the news gathering and the publishing industries and institutions and those who are, sort of, ad hoc, let's say whether there was any issue about ownership of news? Like, who owns the news? And is there this notion of, maybe, a community new sphere? Spelled n-o-u? [presumably, punning on the French: nousphere]. Does that resonate with anybody? Thank you.

**JULIE NEUMANN:** Well, I know, I personally, I've had a lot of experience with that. I write for Austinist.com, which is part of the Gothamist blogging network; I'd say, as far as blogs go, we're pretty professional we're a liability corporation, and we do it on a really professional level, and this idea of who has access to the news, and who owns the news I felt that a lot of PR people and a lot of the flaks that we're going to to get information are treating us just like traditional news sources. And I was in print journalism for two years, plus all the time I was doing it as a student. And I feel like I'm treated the same, if not maybe even a little bit better, when I go and say that I'm writing for Austinist, because they know that it's instantaneous, they know that we're going to maybe be a little snarkier, and they're like, giving us an attitude. There's - I think a lot of bloggers think they have a right to say that, and

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

to say, the newsmakers and the PR people and whoever it is out there, they'll really rip into you. I think that bloggers kind of have that reputation.

But as far as ownership and access to it, I mean, I personally found, as someone who writes for a legitimate blog, that I get the same access, if not more. And I'm their music editor, so when we did South by Southwest I found I got a lot of access through that. And when I approach bands and PR people and I'm trying to do some of this cultural journalism type stuff, they're really eager to get us in and get us included. We get about three to four thousand hits a day, so there's a lot of people reading what we put on there. And that's for an Austin-based blog. You get someone like Gothamist, and they're getting fifteen thousand hits a day. And they're one of the smaller New York blogs. So I think that - I definitely think that you have bloggers are definitely getting their foot in the door. They're definitely establishing a reputation as a worthy place to get your news out.

**MIKE HOWELL:** My name is Mike Howell; I'm the senior news editor for MySanAntonio.com. Just to add a little bit to the discussion about using blogs as a deployment for news. We've had several successes recently. We've gotten to the point where, if a reporter or one of our San Antonio bloggers breaks news through their blog, that we've been treating that as a news story and putting it out up on the top of the page, just as it were a regular news story. Have you, through your travels through the Internet, seen newspapers looking at blogs as just another deployment for news?

**NEIL THURMAN:** Actually at the BBC news site, they now have something called News Tracker, which is a box they put onto their stories, which link out to other news organizations, and that's partly because of a concern that, because they're publicly funded, they're sort of constraining the commercial news market in the UK. And so they're pushing a little traffic out of their site, to other sites, not just in the UK, but worldwide. And those links come from Moreover.com, but they're thinking about adding blogs to that box, to that News Tracker box. So they'll soon be pushing some traffic out, I expect, in the not-too-distant future, to blogs as well as to other news sources.

**SHARON MERAZ:** You can see it in a couple of the publications, like the Washington Post -- and even now the New York Times - there's a section that runs along the side of all their stories that has who's blogging about their stories right now. SoM

**MIKE HOWELL:** But it seems like a lot of times, you see in journal newspaper websites, that blogs are kind of relegated to this little sidebar, andS

**SHARON MERAZ:** They're separate, yes. They're very separate, still.

**MIKE HOWELL:** and it's not like we're posting, you know, someone else's theory about something; it's generally either our reporters blogging breaking news stories,

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

or [layman's] blogs But again, we've been trying to not necessarily relegate them to this little link and sidebar

**STEVE REESE:** it's like BlogBursts, when you've got your AP wire it's just another stream on your page.

**JULIE NEUMANN:** Well, I think we've seen a lot with giving track backs. I mean, we've - I know, at Austinist, we get a lot of track backs from legitimate media. Austin-American Statesman's track backed to us; a lot of the radio and television stations link to us, and we're treated like any other newspaper, as far as, they don't say, like "the blog," they'll just give the track back link for us. And especially with smaller newspapers - I mean, if you're the New York Times or the Washington Post, and you have endless resources, you don't necessarily have to be pulling in blogs and putting those into your headlines, because you have hundreds of reporters running around that can do the reporting themselves. But for a lot of these smaller newspapers, probably anything, I'd say, from a mid-size down, you have limited resources. And you're going to have to figure out ways to get the news out there. And it's just too hard, and you don't have the resources to send a reporter out to do everything. So as long as you - I mean, I've seen a lot of those sites giving blogs legitimate links and treating them like any other, especially these professional blogs that are set up like group blogs, and the ones that belong to a network, and belong to services like BlogBurst, they're definitely getting linked-up there just like any other news source.

**STEVE REESE:** I think we're about out of time for our session[

Professor Alves solicits one more question.]

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** I was going to ask the panelists Do you think that, by now, we could possibly refer to blogs with a modifier? By saying, right now we're talking about "journalism blogs?" Or we're talking about "political blogs?" Or, what we haven't talked about here, really, is "diary blogs" -- which are a whole another thing. Or "technology blogs," right? Because if we're aren't talking about "diary blogs," then we don't have to say all those things about "personal," "trivial," yada yada, we can just ignore that, because obviously, if we're not talking about "diary blogs" I mean, can we now modify the word "blog," and just talk about them that way? Or is it not time to do that yet?

**STEVE REESE:** Someone else's trivial item may be another person's

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Well, not trivial blogs; I mean, I wouldn't use that as a modifier. I'd say "diary blogs." Because they're really personal, and really random, and very far-ranging. Whereas there might be, now, such a thing I mean, we've already had three academic articles that refer to "J-Blogs" or "J-Bloggers." Right? So that's a "journalism blog." I mean, can we define Not that we have to define that right now. But can we say we know what that is now?

## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

**SHARON MERAZ:** I'd like to respond to that, because I think that, for quite a while, the de facto standard has been that blogs are political blogs. And you find that, for example in my work that I'm doing right now in gender and the blogosphere, you find that females are getting left out. Because there's first an association that women write a lot of diary blogs and personal blogs and journals online, and they're not political, and so the actual discourse of construction of the blog as being a political blog has left out people who blog in other topics. I think that we should move, in academic discourse, and start talking about blogs by identifying them with a topical focus - like saying, "I'm gonna do a study on the political bloggers." Or "I'm gonna do a study on tech bloggers." And we're finding a lot - now there are feminist bloggers, and feminist networks. I guess you're familiar, a lot, with that area

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Because even the A-list is not all one kind. I mean, there's a lot of political blogs on the A-list, which everybody always says. But not so many pure J-bloggers on the A-list yet but perhaps more in that, what's now called "the magic middle," you find a lot of J-bloggers in there.

**SHARON MERAZ:** Right. So I think, certainly, academic discourse needs to take up the discourse of construction of the web log, and to start, sort of, making some corrections. Because the way it's been constructed, in the past, is sort of biased, academic discussion towards a certain definition of what a blog is, and then to studying a particular type of blog. So I think that ought to be encouraged, actually.

**JULIE NEUMANN:** Well, I definitely think adding some of those terms and tags onto the front of blogging would be really helpful. When I started working at Pluck, and my job was to start going through and finding blogs that would be appropriate for BlogBurst - I mean, there's millions and millions of blogs to sort through. And a lot of it is personal, diary-like, kind of - just junk out there on the web. But, you know, I definitely think that there's this there's kind of a cut-off line, above which even if it's not necessarily political, but it can be, like, there's some really high-quality cooking blogs. You know, stuff like that where they're just as good as a food writer, they're doing it really professionally

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Then it's focused on that particular thing. Generally, a cooking blog is only about food.

**JULIE NEUMANN:** and so giving it a tag is good. So I think tagging it, and giving it - not just referring to it as a blog, but a cooking blog, a political blog, or if you're talking about a personal blog, then that's a whole separate beast. But these blogs where you can kind of start tagging them, and they fit into these categories - I mean, they're all the categories that newspapers cover. They're newspaper sections, essentially, when you start labeling them like that. It's exactly what you see

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** There's not very many sports blogs. We found very few sports blogs. Very few.



## 2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

**SHARON MERAZ:** I think the problem would be: What about blogs that fit into several categories?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** That would make it harder.

**SHARON MERAZ:** That would make it harder, right. [laughter] We'd have to make up a new name for them. I know, in looking at the gender issue, a lot of women don't want to be associated with one topic. They don't want to be labeled a political blog, or they want to be

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** But then we fall into that trap, and somebody has already done this, they've categorized them as "blogs by women." And I don't want to be in that group. [laughs]

**SHARON MERAZ:** Right. Neither do I. [laughs]

**JULIE NEUMANN:** One organization that's doing really interesting work with that is BlogHer. And all of their - they have their roll of bloggers that are really high-quality bloggers. And they're all blogging about different things, and they're all pulled together, being on BlogHer because they're women. But I think almost every single one of those blogs you can separate out There are a few that are really high-quality personal, you know, like decent stuff like that. But you can get I mean a lot of those women are Web 2.0 bloggers, they're political bloggers, and they just have this affiliation with a network, but it's a great way to pull them together and show that women are writing blogs that are not diary, personal blogs, and to really get those out there, I think, is important. Because it is a different type of voice - just like you need women in a traditional newsroom. I know that's been a problem for a long time. It's the same kind of issue. But there's better ways to organize it, I think, in the blogosphere.

**STEVE REESE:** I've been authorized by my colleague, Rosental, to have one more question.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Thank you. I am [inaudible]. Actually, I want to say something more than ask a question. And I want to say it by starting with a story, of my brother, who went to the University of [inaudible] to study journalism, and he began dwelling deeply in questions like the ones we are discussion. And they were so deep, he ended up switching to the School of Philosophy. [laughter]. And the reflection, I think, is valid because - hearing all of us, I mean hearing myself think about these issues, we have to be careful where the line of study on anthropology begins, and the study of the social phenomenon of blogs takes over reflections on journalism. And I think the blogosphere is reflecting a profound social phenomenon, as to how a society interacts with itself. And we have to be careful not to get bogged down by the issue. At the end of the day, we are studying journalism, and journalism issues, and we have to be careful not to let a tide of academic study - which is absolutely valid, and profoundly important - but not to let us be run over, and journalism be run over. Thank you.