

## 12<sup>th</sup> Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

**Day 2, April 2, 2011**

**Research Panel:**

***Beyond the Conversation, Beyond Engagement***

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### **Panelists:**

- **Chair: Chris Kabwato**, School of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University, South Africa
  - **C. W. Anderson**, College of Staten Island, CUNY
  - **Alfred Hermida**, University of British Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, Canada, and others
  - **Seth Lewis**, University of Minnesota
  - **Kang Hui Baek and Mark Coddington**, University of Texas at Austin, and others
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**Chris Kabwato:** Okay. I will start. Thank you, Rosental. Welcome back. Dumela! When I say "dumela," just say "dumela" back to me. Dumela.

**Audience:** Dumela!

**Chris Kabwato:** Okay. Now, South Africa has got very few languages—only 14 official languages, and that's one of them called Setswana. Now, when I was given this opportunity by Rosental to come in and share the final session, I wondered whether this was the graveyard shift. [laughter] And I said, "Well, if you're a DJ on a graveyard shift, you're gonna make sure that it is exciting." But it is not, because I read the papers that we will present to you in this session. [laughter] After all, I had 24 hours to travel from South Africa to this place. So, you know, they were entertaining enough for me. If you know your literature, you know one poem by T.S. Elliott. It has got just these few lines. It just says, "This is the way the world ends. This is the way the world ends. *This* is the way the world ends—not with a bang but with a whimper." But I can tell you that this last session will not end with a whimper. Rosental's conference never ends with a whimper. It's gonna end with a bang.

But anyway, I'm glad to be here. And like many of you, I'm a repeat offender. I always love coming to Austin. So *muito obrigado* [thank you very much] comrade Rosental.

**Man:** Didn't happen.

**Chris Kabwato:** [Laughter.] And thanks so much to Amy and the rest of the team, you know, for all the preparations. Now you have had so many speakers today. The coffee might not help the cobwebs or, you know, clear it all in your mind as to what is happening out here. But the one thread that

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you could hold onto or handle in this session is the argument that there is growing tension between professional control and open participation. Our last sessions were really the media professionals telling us about how they really engage with their various communities. Now, the academics that are coming up here are skeptics. They want to interrogate all those, as it were.

So you'll find four presentations. The first one that really looks at original reporting versus aggregation. Is there really that battle that is being fought there? What are the ambiguities around these? Of course, the second paper is around participatory journalism. Again, an interrogation of the attitudes of journalists towards this concept, as it were. Then the third paper looks at the Knight News Challenge and its claims, of course, as contributing to innovative journalism. And the authors of that, of course, analyzed the various 5,000 or so applications that have come through to date and what they do represent. Then the final one is really the link, exploring the link between credibility of news sources and political polarization.

Again, the format remains the same. 10 minutes to each speaker. I've got a stopwatch, so they cannot fudge or do anything funny. And then after that, we get onto the next speaker. And then at the end, we have our panel discussion.

I would like to call upon C.W. Anderson to come make his presentation called *What Aggregators Do: Rhetoric, Practice, and Cultures of Digital and Analog Evidence in Web Era Journalism*. Might also have to give him a pompom because he got the prize for the best research paper this morning.

[Applause.]

**C.W. Anderson:** Okay. Yeah, so, no pressure. [laughter] I had a couple of early slides—oh, and I need this, yeah—I had a couple of early slides that I was going to show talking about how this kind of fit into my bigger research, how, you know, this question of, what is aggregation, what is reporting, relates to earlier things that I had studied. But I'm going to kind of skip those slides and instead tell a story. So, you all know that a couple of weeks ago Bill Keller, who has now been grated a column to sort of say his thoughts about whatever he seems to feel like saying that week, decided to sort of lambast Arianna Huffington and *The Huffington Post* on a variety of grounds. But the primary ground that Bill Keller used in this inaugural column from the Executive Editor of *The New York Times* was to trash *The Huffington Post* for being an aggregator and to claim that *The New York Times* is unique and original and better than *The Huffington Post* because it did old-fashioned, on-the-ground, boots-on-the-ground journalism. That was the subject of Bill Keller's first column. And Arianna Huffington in her way responded, and she gave a very good response. But the most interesting thing about her response was she didn't say, "Look, we do aggregation sometimes and aggregation is good. Aggregation is interesting. Aggregation serves a social purpose." What Arianna Huffington said was, "Well, no, we do reporting too."

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That was her response. Her response was not to talk about aggregation at all. Her response was to say, "Look, we have 100-some-odd reporters, and we have this investigative journalism program, and we do boots-on-the-ground, old-fashioned journalism ourselves." Right?

And if you've been following this debate, you know that this tension between -- there's been this rhetorical raising of the stakes between aggregators and so-called on-the-ground, boots-on-the-ground reporters. So, why? What is the reason for this? What purpose does this rhetorical battle serve? So, I wanted to answer that question. Like I said, I'm just skipping here. Okay. I wanted to explore that tension by talking about what aggregators do, by studying what people who actually... If you work for a human power news aggregator—and I can get into the distinction of what a human power news aggregator is in a little bit—but if you work for a news aggregator that is primarily controlled and run by human beings, what do you do? Right?

We know a lot about what reporters do. We've had decades worth of ethnographic research about what people do when they do reporting. So, what do these people in this other world that supposedly exists called "news aggregation," what do they do?

Some caveats. I'm kind of beta testing this paper. So despite any claims of it winning anything, it's actually not really a fully completed paper yet. It's kind of two papers jammed into one. So I'm kind of, you know, I call it beta testing the paper. There's very little ethnographic research here to speak of. My primary mode of research is ethnography. I've had a very hard time getting access to some of the places in the news aggregation world that I really wish I'd been able to get to, and I'm still working on this. And probably this paper will eventually be split into two. So these are sort of the caveats there.

But what I'm interested in is this sort of tense dynamic between the rhetoric of there being a very sharp distinction between reporting and aggregation. Right? This sort of continually invoked rhetoric like the example of which was the Keller column. This tension between aggregation and reporting that exists in discourse versus the fact that, in practice, aggregation and reporting seem to be all mixed up, tangled up, hard to pull apart, very similar, right? When you actually go in and look at the practices of what these things are, there are incredible tensions. They seem to be very similar. There doesn't seem to be much of a ground on which to distinguish one from the other. Right? So if that's true, why does this discourse exist that there is such a difference?

And I want to end by talking about--maybe the difference comes from the different universes, basically--the different universes of evidence that reporters and aggregators inhabit. That they live in worlds where one of them sees a certain kind of evidence as being really important and really meaningful, and another universe where they see another kind of evidence,

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what I call journalistic things. They each valorize different journalistic things. And journalistic things is an ugly word. The word “thing” is an ugly word, but it has a long sort of history and philosophy. So what I’m really interested in getting at in this paper or getting to—I’m in the process of getting to, through this paper—is this idea of, what is a journalistic thing? What are the things that journalism sees as being uniquely journalistic? So, that’s sort of where I’m going with this.

Okay. So, I did this, this way. The first part of the paper talks about the rhetoric, right? It talks about the rhetoric of this fight between journalists and aggregators. And it comes from—the research comes from a content analysis of an FCC Hearing in March 2010. I think I have now made Jeff Jarvis’s life. He is now himself featured in a slide at a journalism panel, so he’s probably very happy about this. [laughter] But Jeff was at this hearing, and Jeff was one of the people weighing in with this rhetoric of reporting and aggregation. So, the first part of the paper deals with examining what is the rhetoric about aggregators and about reporting that was deployed at this hearing? What did people say? How did they try to draw lines between reporting and aggregation?

It was a 340-page transcript. In there, I coded 63 statements that were relevant to questions of aggregation or reporting. And it was not a quantitative content analysis. I should be clear. I’m planning on doing some of those later, but at this point it was a very sort of high bird’s eye view. You know, what are sort of the overall...? You know, what are some of the dynamics of this conversation? What are people saying? What I would like to do down the line is analyze the entire corpus of public hearings that occurred in all of 2009 and all of 2010, which is going to be thousands of pages. What is the rhetoric that was sort of deployed this year?

Okay. So, here’s what I found. There were actually....there were three parts of the hearing. And in the first part of the hearing there was this claim that this thing called original reporting served democracy, right? People couldn’t stop talking about how original reporting was the best thing ever for democracy, and democracy would not exist without original reporting. This was usually made by academics or journalism executives, right? This was the claim they were making. But what original reporting was, was never actually defined. Nobody ever said, “This is what original reporting is, and this is why it’s good for democracy.” There was simply a claim made [that] this thing called original reporting is good for democracy. No one ever actually bothered to take it one step further and say, “And this is what this thing is that I’m actually talking about.”

Also, in the first third of the hearing, the people speaking never mentioned technology. Technology was never mentioned a single time. The sort of claims about how aggregation was good for democracy—or I’m sorry—how reporting was good for democracy could have been made at any point in the last 20 years of public discourse about journalism. It could have been

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brought up when satellite TV was emerging on cable. It could have been taken when, you know, at various other periods of journalistic decline, right? It was sort of like, you know, the people knew the script and they got up in front of the FCC and all they talked about was, "Original reporting was the solid rock of democracy," right? There was no actual mention of any technology at all.

Then you got to the last third of the hearing. And in the last third of the hearing, people actually started talking about democracy. And in the last third of the hearing—I'm sorry—in the last of the hearing they actually started talking about technology, not democracy. In the last of the hearing they were talking about technology. And they all talked about that technology was changing, there was this new enemy that was destroying journalism, and the enemy was aggregation, and the real enemy here was Google. Google was invoked over and over again as an enemy aggregator that was destroying the business models of journalism. So that was the rhetoric.

I then wanted to say, "Okay, that's the rhetoric. What are people actually doing in practice?" I conducted observations at [Philly.com](http://Philly.com) and a site in New York that I like to call Journo Blab. That is actually a pseudonym. There is no such thing as Journo Blab. It's a pseudonym for a small New York based media aggregation website. And I did a bunch of in-depth semi-structured interviews in D.C. and New York. Again, much more is needed.

What did I learn about what aggregation was from my conversations with people? And I'm going to get to this slide and then wrap it up and then we can have questions. So, what did I learn? What were people saying they did when I asked them what their job was like every day? What did I see them doing when I observed what they were doing? What were aggregators actually doing? So, that was the rhetoric, right? What was the practice? What were aggregators doing?

First of all, aggregators are concerned with coordinating the content flow of non-employees. What does that mean? That means that unlike a traditional newsroom where you are the boss of a reporter and you can more or less tell them, "Go here. Go there. Don't do this. Have your story in by five p.m. That's the deadline," right? The content that aggregators are aggregating comes from people who they are not the boss of. There's just people out there doing whatever they want and they are producing massive amounts of information. So somebody has got to be there to manage that flow which comes in all the time from all sorts of different places and is really derationalized. Right? So that is the first thing that aggregators do.

The second thing that aggregators do is they get up every morning. Usually a lot of them get up at about six a.m. They immediately check 150 RSS feeds, get on Twitter, turn on the TV news, and just sort of take a bath in digital content. The minute they get out of bed, they just sort of bathe in this

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tsunami of digital content that is coming at them from the internet. They kind of immerse themselves in the digital flood. They experience moments of creative happiness, where they are able to actually come up with story ideas and headlines that they see as being uniquely creative and sort of fulfilling for them. Those moments are immediately overwhelmed by work and drudgery. Their primary skill is news judgment, where they are deciding what stories are actually relevant for their audience. Many aggregators look down on reporters. They seem them as old fogies and members of a dying profession. They actually don't say very nice things about reporters when you ask them. They see themselves as the elite.

However, the news organizations I spoke to both aggregate and report. So in reality, there is not this sharp distinction between aggregation and reporting. Everybody does both things. And finally, many people want to aggregate and be the *aggragatee*. In other words, they push their content out to other people.

The main thing I found, however, was this. This is the key quote here, and I'll leave you with this. The key quote that the aggregators spoke to when I asked them what they did can be summed up in this quote. "What we do as aggregators isn't about journalism. It's about making sense of the internet. Traditional journalism has always been about making sense of the public and about your local community, but with the internet, we aggregators need to make sense of this *digital* world. It's why *The Huffington Post*, for example, has the guts to call itself an internet newspaper. It's about the internet. It's not about journalism, at least the way we've always thought about journalism up till now."

Aggregators live on the internet. They immerse themselves in digital content. And they see the world that they are trying to understand and put together as being an online digital world. And I think *that* may lie at the root of this hostility between aggregation and reporting. And I'd like to explore this further in a future paper. So, thank you.

[Applause.]

**Alfred Hermida:** Hello, everybody. Thank you for making it to the final session and thank you to Rosental, Amy and everybody else for what's been a fabulous, fabulous symposium. This is my favorite journalism conference like ever. [Cheers.] Yeah, of all time. [Cheers and applause.] So now that I've, you know, tried to get you on my side, [laughter], I'm going to pick up on some of the themes we've been discussing. How do journalists relate to the audience in a space that we're sharing jurisdiction with what we used to call our consumers? So, how do we then relate to it? This paper draws on data that we put together for a book. The book is coming out in the U.K. this month [and] in May in the U.S. I'm trying to take that on by giving it sort of a different conceptual framework.

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But before we get started, because I know it's late in the day, I'm going to play you a little video that satirizes really how most mainstream news organizations have actually thought about the audience. So, if we have sound.

[Video plays.]

**Man:** What do you think about this issue? Do you have any thoughts? What are those thoughts? [laughter] Will you tell us then? Any thoughts at all will do. If you have 'em, we want to hear them. [laughter]

**Man:** Are you personally affected by this issue? Then email us. Or if you're not affected by this issue, can you imagine what it would be like if you were? [laughter] Or if you already are affected by it, but don't want to talk about it, can you imagine what it would be like not to be affected by it? [laughter] Why not email and tell us?

**Man:** Yes, why not? What possible reason could there be for you not to email us? [laughter] Certainly, ignorance shouldn't be a bar. [laughter] You may not know anything about the issue, but I bet you reckon something. [laughter] So, why not tell us what you reckon? Just enjoy the full majesty of your uninformed, ad hoc reckon [laughter] by going to [BBC.co.uk/me-and-my-important-thoughts](http://BBC.co.uk/me-and-my-important-thoughts) (all one word), clicking on "what I reckon," and then simply beating on the keyboard with your fists or head. [laughter]

[End of video.]

**Alfred Hermida:** That's my literature review. [Cheers and applause.] So that's the literature part of the presentation—[laughter]—how mainstream media has adopted this. What I'm doing here is looking at it from a framework of Lippmann and Dewey in terms of two influential figures and how we see journalism and the role of media. Whether we see the role of the journalist essentially as our job to make sense of the world, gather facts, [and] deliver it to an audience that basically doesn't have the rational skills to do this, or do we see it more from a Dewey perspective? That the audience is capable of rational thought [and] our job is to educate, to engage, to help them participate in deliberative discourse. And arguably, what we have is a Lippmann way of doing journalism.

You know, very early newspapers in the 1690's did leave a blank page for people to add their comments, their views before passing it on. This was the first one in the U.S. that got shut down by the British because they didn't have a license to publish. So after one edition, it died a death. But these open spaces that we saw here have basically been closed through the professionalization of journalism and essentially the adoption of a sort of Lippmann view of what we should be doing as journalists; you know, creating professional products that are editorially authored by individuals and delivering it to the public.

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So, for this, we took a cross-national approach. We looked at 10 countries, 10 Western liberal democracies. We looked at more than two dozen newspapers. We did interviews with people working there both on the online side and also on the newspaper side to basically get a sense [of] when journalists think about participation, do they see themselves then as providing ways for citizens to have meaningful interactions, or is it still essentially a spectator's sport; i.e., send us your big thoughts by smashing your keyboard with your fists and your head?

So, while participatory tools have evolved, journalism is a remarkably consistent field in terms of how it thinks and in terms of what journalists think their role is. To analyze the entities, we broke it down using the model that my colleague, Domingo, and others had developed in terms of looking at the communication process. The journalistic processes are the five stages at which we make decisions. And then thinking, we have all these tools of participation. Let's measure and see where these tools come in and how journalists talk about this.

So, the first stage is access and observation. Essentially, this is one of the most popular formats. We saw this emerge in the previous panel, the idea of, "Send us your videos. Send us a news tip. Send us your photos. And not just about your pets, but about a news event that you are witnessing." And when we looked at how the journalists were talking about this, they assigned a great deal of value to this. They saw this as one of the most valuable aspects of the new wave of digital tools. But actually when it comes to breaking news, when it comes to extending traditional news gathering practices, but extending that through digital media, through social media, they saw great value there, but they still retained the position that, "Essentially, we are the editors. We have to decide what gets published."

One thing they talked about is that more often than not, they get way more contributions on things like pet photos than what they would consider hard news photos. When it comes to also requesting this material, the editors expressed by far a preference for soliciting material, saying, "We want your photos of the fire down the road if you have any," rather than saying, "Send us photos of what you think is newsworthy and help us make news decisions."

The second stage, which is a really crucial stage, is selection. The point at which we get to decide what actually is news. And here, essentially, that is solely in the control of the newsroom. Your audience doesn't have a way to decide, "This is what the news is and you should be reporting." There was a real reluctance from editors to give users any way of influencing that key news process.

On the third stage, processing and editing, which is then filtering that content, selecting how it's going to be written. A couple of options we found



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were stories submitted by people and citizen blogs. In citizen stories, again, there was an editorial filter there in terms of they tended to be edited by journalists. The other more open space was citizen blogs—essentially creating a space on your sites where anybody could create anything and write about it. But again, these spaces tended to be segregated from the main news area, so you very clearly had, “This is the content that we as professionals have created. This is the material that’s come from our users.”

And even at this stage, again, we saw some of these editorial concerns about quality, about the nature of controlling the editorial process. I love this quote from one of the editors in Germany, which is, “It’s not our job to give our users somewhere to inscribe their name for eternity. That’s not what we do. We journalists inscribe our names for eternity. The audience—that’s not what they should be doing.”

With distribution, [we] saw here the adoption of things like social networking through Facebook, etc., [and] content hierarchy through having mechanisms that have most viewed, most emailed. These are fairly common. These are seen on just about every news site. But, of course, there is still the hierarchy of the homepage, where the journalist decides, “This is what we think is important.”

And at this stage, we found that editors really were expressing sort of ambivalence in terms of saying, “Well, we want to see more. We’re going to get more feedback from our users in terms of what *they* rate as important, what they value, what they want to share with their friends.” But at the same time, they want to balance it with their role as the editor, as the journalist who has been trained to make these editorial decisions and deciding what is a hierarchy of news.

By far the most open stage came at the interpretation level. And this will come as no surprise to all of you—this is also a stage where journalists and editors were the most comfortable with involving users. And by far, the most common format is comments on stories. We saw some of the other ones, but comments on stories are basically virtually universal across everywhere. This idea of, “Send us your big thoughts. What do you reckon about this story? Share your big thinking.” And that came across. The idea of the quality of the material that was coming was again expressed as a concern by a lot of editors. Concerns about the type of comments that were being left, whether they were actually adding to the discussion or simply turning into a rant.

But we did find, in a small number of editors, that they did see some value here in terms of opening the interpretation stage for discourse, for actually having a discussion on key policy issues of the day. In some ways, taking that role of the newspaper as sparking a conversation, but having it on their site. And one, in fact, even talked about this idea of that comments could be an expression of democracy that potentially could be a way of bringing society forward.

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So from this, we concluded that the way journalists see the audience is, they are not just there to receive the news. They see them as somewhere between the passive receiver and the active creator. They're expected to act when news happens, and they're expected to react once it's been published by the journalist. So we called them the active recipient. So journalists see value here in the audience as idea generators, as observers of things that are happening at the start of the journalistic process, and then adding interpretation once that journalistic process has been completed.

So returning to Lippmann and Dewey, we see that it's not quite sort of just a Lippmann-esque interpretation of journalism, but certainly not going as far as saying, "We can bring in the audience into a public discourse on key policy issues." [There was] some space for that, but by and large still very much preserving the professional position of the journalist and assigning the audience very specific roles. And some journalists were intrigued by the opportunities to engage audiences in different ways, engage them more fully in all stages of the journalistic process, but by and far that was not the norm. These were the exceptions.

And I think that's one of the things we've seen in the previous section, previous panel, that I think we saw examples of the exceptions to the way journalists are reacting to participation, rather than what's been the norm. So there's lots, much more in our book, which given that Rosental is so good at this, I have an advance copy. [laughter] In fact, the only copy I have in my position, which I'd like to give to Rosental.

**Rosental Calmon Alves:** Oh, thank you!

**Alfred Hermida:** To thank him for organizing this.

**Rosental Calmon Alves:** Thank you very much!

[Applause.]

**Alfred Hermida:** Thank you all.

[Applause.]

**Seth Lewis:** All right. Well, I'll just say that these both are two tough acts to follow, the great scholars, and I think they've highlighted some really important issues for us. And I guess you could call this the panel of tension. We've talked about the aggregator reporter tension and the professional participatory tension, and I'm going to try to lever to that second one here in the case of the Knight News Challenge. And also since this is the second straight year that I've talked about the Knight News Challenge at this conference, I promise that there will not be a third. [laughter] I will not come back next year and talk about the news challenge. It is done.

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And also, the title may be a little sort of provocative in the sense that it might sound like I have the secret sauce to the news challenge, but I don't. And even if I did, of course, the challenge is over. This is the last year. So, sorry, didn't mean to leave anybody hanging on that point.

The question is, why look at this particular contest? This is part of a larger dissertation project I did last year; a case study of the Knight Foundation and its efforts in recent years to shape the substance and culture of what we consider innovation in journalism. This really kind of gets to the big question that I have which is, how is the notion of innovation, which is so central to conversations about journalism and its future today, how is this idea about innovation constructed and framed and then carried on through both rhetorically in the discourse about journalism and also in the actual material types of startups, and the funding, and the grants, and the various kinds of things that emerge, this structuring process of, in essence, kind of deciding, what counts as innovation? What does it look like? What does it sound like? And so forth.

So, this is kind of one of the big questions that drives my research. The Knight News Challenge, of course, is the highest profile competition in the future of news space, and it certainly has an agenda-setting kind of influence in this world of journalism and innovation. Because of its profile and because of the money that it's given out, it has a way of kind of setting a certain standard or a tone of what we might think of as news innovation.

So my question then becomes, you know, what is this contest? How is it working? And particularly, what is the content like of the applications that are proposed? Because my thinking is that in the content of the applications we should be able to see something about the tactics and the theories, the assumptions, the articulations of these would-be innovators, their ideas, their dreams, and so forth. And to what extent does that then reflect, especially as we look at the kinds of applications that have advanced, what does that tell us about the Knight Foundation and its efforts in terms of shaping journalism?

Just as kind of a way of background, for those who may not be familiar—the Knight Foundation is well familiar to a lot of us in here—it funds ISOJ. And the Knight News Challenge also is very familiar to us, but the reason that I think these deserve particular interest is that not only is the Knight Foundation a long-time leading funder of journalism, but has been noted by outside scholars in recent years as a creative non-profit foundation. There was a book on creative philanthropy in 2006 that used Knight as a case study. And in recent years, it has even, you could say, become more creative in terms of trying to experiment, take risks, and so forth. And the Knight News Challenge represents one of these key areas of risk. It was really kind of the signature piece of the media innovation initiative.

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And so Knight, of course, has given lots of money to journalism—\$30 million in the eighties, \$100 million in the nineties, \$300 million in the past decade. But more and more a lot of the energy and money is flowing toward these projects that are focused on media innovation and their focus on information needs for communities. Much of the rhetoric now is—and in other papers I talk about how much of the rhetoric is moving kind of from journalism toward information in a more broader sense.

Okay. So actually, I'll just back up here real quick. Another thing on the Knight News Challenge I should mention is the process and how it works. It was started in 2006; it began. Summer of '07, gave out the first grants, '08, '09 and on up till today. This 2011 cycle will be the last one.

It's a \$25-million contest. The idea being that it gives out roughly \$5 million a year. In terms of numbers, the data I'm going to talk about here are based on the first three years of the contest. That's what I had access to and that's actually what Knight had been analyzing at that time. And in the first three years, there were about 8,000 applications. And usually the way the process works [is] if you submit a Knight News Challenge grant, about 10 to 20% make the first [cut]. There's kind of a first and second cut. They are very close together. About 10 or 20% become these finalists, and then it even gets winnowed down a bit from there, but the sort of finalists are the elite 10%. So in any given year, there might be 3,000 applications, 300 that are finalists, and maybe 15 that are winners. There were 51 winners in the first three years, so your odds of winning were pretty low—.0006% won. Okay.

So, my basic question here with access to this data was to try to say, what's going on descriptively, and in terms of, what are the defining features [and] the characteristics of these applications that have emerged? And how are those associated with predicting advancement of the contest? Because the number of winners is so small, it's a better metric to look at just advancement. Were you a finalist or not? And what is the relationship there?

And the second part of this is because the tension between professional control and open participation is such an ongoing kind of issue in journalism today and because Knight in its ether ways has promoted more engagement in forms of kind of open participation with citizens, I wanted to see to what extent participatory media features are embedded in these applications. To what extent is that related to advancement as well?

So, just a brief word about the methods. I was using data from a company called Latitude, and they are a consulting firm hired by Knight. They essentially took up this bundle of applications. And I should say thanks to Rosental. He was one reason I was able to get the data. So, thank you, Rosental. As soon as I have a book, you'll get the first copy. [laughter] So, Latitude did this major content analysis. We're talking 50 variables, all sorts of variables of different kinds, as they quantitatively content analyzed these application proposals.

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There were some gaps in the data however. 2007, there were a lot of gaps in the data. So I ended up having to just simply drop that year. I was only able to look at 2008, 2009, because there would have been problems if I had looked at '07. So that gives you a sense.

Here, I had this data set, but the analyses here are mine. This is *my* secondary data analysis that you see. So just a basic profile from these '08 and '09 proposals, 2008-2009 cycle. This just kind of gives you a sense for the breakdown of applicants, finalists, winners in that time period. As you can see, that less than 1% is a very, very small number obviously.

Some further breakdowns here. A little over half of the applications were from organizations rather than individuals. Interestingly, if you look at those organizations, you break that down further, you can look at various types, non-profits, universities. Newspapers actually were rather small—2%. To me, it seems rather small given that they are so central to—you know, the newspapers would have been very familiar with what was going on with the News Challenge content. Again, this is after the Knight News Challenge had already had its first year when it got a lot of press coverage.

And then this one also I find is kind of an interesting number—roughly two-thirds of applicants were not -- either were not a media organization of any kind, not journalists, not identified as being with newspapers of any sort, so essentially just outside folks. They could be activists, just individuals, any type of entity/person otherwise that was not affiliated with media journalism.

Okay. It's kind of late in the day to look at a chart like this. So, I'm going to walk us through slowly [laughter] to try to show what we're talking about here. Essentially, I ran a...to actually look at this idea of predicting, right, to be able to say in some sense or another, how are certain variables, you know, associated with advancing in the contest? You can use logistic regression as a way to isolate the impact of individual variables by kind of controlling for the other variables at that moment in time. With logistic regression, we look at odds ratios, so the extent to which, you know, it might increase the likelihood that something may occur. And what I've done here is actually just pulled out....there were more variables. There are bigger charts. You can download the paper if you're interested. But in this case, I just pulled out the main—kind of the biggest predictors of both, positively and negatively— to try to highlight some of these findings.

So, perhaps not surprisingly, given the emphasis on information and journalism, this sort of grouping here of information flow and access—in other words, an application having an emphasis on trying to improve the flow of information and access of information to communities—was the most and strongest, positive predictor here. When we look at the odds ratios here, they are sorted here on this last column. So what this says is that an applicant that focused on this area had a 99% greater chance, or we'd say,

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you know, the odds were you had twice as good of odds of being able to advance in the contest. Journalism, 72%. That kind of a thing.

Then the next grouping here is more focused on what I'd call kind of a technology cluster. There's technology, software development, transparency of information, connecting data or datasets. You could argue that innovation and transparency are words that seem to kind of link up with ideas about technology. And these as well were strong, positive predictors suggesting that each of these predictors increase the odds of advancing by roughly 50%.

Now we get to the kind of participatory variables. And I think here you see one of the big limitations of this dataset, which is that because this was a previous analysis by somebody else, I'm not able to really do as much in breaking down these variables in this kind of data. So, I'm stuck with a couple of variables to be able to really try to find something about participation. In this case, crowdsourcing and user manipulation is kind of a clustering or grouping where we can kind of say, this is some element of participation in the application. You can see there as well, again, these are strong [predictors]. These are positive predictors there. And the applicants that seemed to emphasize those areas could increase the odds of advancement by 48 and 45% respectively.

And finally this idea of local definition of community. As you know, the criteria for the Knight News Challenge—and I should have mentioned this in the beginning, but I think it's generally well familiar with here, basically—News Challenge is saying these are projects that should focus on information for local communities. It should have some local element to it and should use digital media. So this here looked at kind of the question of locality. So the more local a project was, the more local it was down to a neighborhood as opposed to like a region as a whole or a state, the greater likelihood it had of advancing in the contest.

It's kind of interesting to look here at these negative predictors: economic, financial, one-to-one, and long-term or historical kinds of information. I think that sort of matches up with what we might expect, that Knight is not really looking for interpersonal forms of communication here, not really concerned about, you know, I think, either projects about economics or finance or proposals that seem to be heavy on maybe that business aspect of things.

So, just to focus on some kind of takeaways here, I'll kind of go back and.... well, I'll skip this one here. Just basically to say that I think, [chuckles], I'm actually going to kind of preempt Chris's question, because he told me he was going to ask me this question. Kind of basically like, so what? What did we learn, right? We already knew this stuff. And I would say, yes, yes, I mean, our gut sense of the Knight News Challenge is something along the lines of what we see here. I think that this is useful in the sense of being able to say, here is some actual data that would suggest that what we're seeing

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kind of tracks with what actually occurred within the contest. And so it's more confirmatory than revelatory.

However, I will say that, you know, not surprisingly news, information, and technology, things that were part of the criteria of the News Challenge end up showing up as positive predictors of advancement, but participation, I find, is an interesting one. It was never an explicit criteria in the contest that applicants had to propose participatory forms of media. So, this I find interesting and at least worth further exploration and something that I do more of in the paper, in another paper, looking at actually how some of these innovators framed participation, how they talked about it, and how they discussed that element.

Then finally, I think, too, this also points, if we go back to this slide here, ideas like, for instance, software development. Again, this was not a requirement that it should involve software development, but I think it speaks to something of a technological determinism that I've seen a bit in the Knight Foundation approach to innovation. This idea that if we have enough technology, that will open the door to greater information flow and access and so forth. It's sort of this idea that by just simply adopting the technology, better things can occur. And I think it's interesting, too, because it points toward this linking of journalism, and programming, and development, and so forth that we are seeing today. It's sort of an opening of boundaries that Knight has attempted to do here.

In essence, through the News Challenge and through other means, they have tried to bring journalism in contact with other communities, like the technology community, to bring innovation back into this field. Okay. Thanks

[Applause.]

**Mark Coddington:** Hi. As he said, I'm Mark Coddington, grad student at University of Texas. My co-presenter is... no, I'm not quite at the point where I'll do Hook `em Horns yet. My co-presenter is Kang Hui Baek. And we represent actually a larger group of us who worked on this paper, several of whom are in this room. One in particular who's not here, Maegan Stephens, actually put together this PowerPoint, so she gets the credit for that even though she wasn't able to make it today. We're going to look at something. Step away a little bit from online journalism specifically and look a little bit more at sort of the climate of modern media. And one of the very common critiques of the modern media climate is this idea that people only consume media that agrees with their point of view, and they will only trust a media source in so far as it agrees with their point of view, and that that affirmation ends up sort of pushing them deeper into their own views, further into those extremes. So we have, according to this idea, an echo chamber effect in that we're all confirming each other's like-mindedness, and we're all pushing ourselves further and further into sort of polarized little niche communities,

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and sort of into the extremes and away from constructive conversation, consensus, [and] all those things that are wonderful for a democracy.

The question is, is that idea actually backed up by data [and] by reality? So, this depends on a pretty tangled web of factors. There are a lot of factors here and a lot of research that has gone into researching the connections between various ones of these factors. Research has found a few relationships between a few of these factors. One is that the more partisan sources that people consume, the more likely they are to practice what's known as selective exposure. Selective exposure being when people selectively expose themselves to only a limited part of media, and media specifically that agrees with their own views. And they've also found that the more they practice selective exposure, the more extreme views they tend to take. In other words, the more politically polarized they are.

Research has also found here on the bottom side here that the more time that people spend with media, the more they tend to believe it and find it credible. And research has also found this relationship to go in the other direction. In other words, the more we selectively expose ourselves to certain media, the more likely we are to find it credible, and visa versa, the more credible we find certain media, the more time we will start spending with it. And that goes for all of these relationships that researchers found. All of them have been found at various times to go in both directions, so there's kind of a spiral effect there.

But what we haven't seen in research yet is a relationship between credibility and polarization. If you believe or disbelieve certain sources, does that make a difference in how politically polarized you are, or visa versa? So that's what we set out to find out, and we wanted to do it specifically in relation to partisan sources. We hypothesize that individuals who perceive partisan news sources, in our case, MSNBC and FOX News, as credible would be more polarized in their political attitudes, even after we control for all the political and demographic aspects. So in other words, the more partisan media you believe, the more that's going to push you into polarization. That was our hypothesis going in.

We wanted to find out the same thing with balanced sources. In this case, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, CNN and broadcast television news. Does the degree to which people trust these balanced sources correlate either way with polarization? And then our RQ2 and RQ3, we basically wanted to check these relationships the other way. Do people who are polarized tend to place more or less credibility in partisan or balanced sources? So now for method and results, I'll turn it over to Kang.

**Kang Hui Baek:** Okay. So we used 2008 National Annenberg Election [Studies] data. The data was taken from the rolling cross-sectional telephone survey during the 2008 presidential primary. The time period was February 21 to May 29, 2008. These were our measurements. For control variables,



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we had demographics, political orientation, and time spent with sources. For demographics we looked at age, gender, education, race and income. For political orientation we looked at political ideology, partisanship, political interest and political knowledge. Then we also looked at the time spent with sources.

The respondents were asked how many days they discussed politics and watched broadcast or cable news and read newspapers and listened to talk radio and so allowing comparing information over the past two weeks.

For independent variable, we look at the believability of both partisan sources and balanced sources. The respondents were asked, "How would you rate the believability of each source on a scale of 4 to 1? 4 means you can believe all or most of what the organization says. The 1 means you can believe almost nothing of what the organization said. For a dependent variable, we look at polarization. We all used the Dr. Talia Stroud method using the 2004 version of NAES data. The polarization was determined by taking the absolute value of the difference between the favorability of McCain and Obama. The higher scores indicate a higher level of polarization.

So these are the results of what we found. The first hypothesis predicts that the more an individual believed the partisan sources are credible, the more polarized their attitude would be after controlling for demographics and political variables. The hypothesis was not supported. That means the less respondents believed information from MSNBC, the more likely they were to have polarized views.

For the first research question, we asked if the credibility of balanced sources predict polarization. We found that the less respondents believe information from *The New York Times* and CNN and broadcast television news, the more likely they were to have polarized views.

The second research question asked if polarization predicts the credibility of partisan sources. We found that the polarization was negatively related to the credibility of MSNBC, but significantly related to FOX News. That means that the less polarized respondent views, the more likely they were to believe MSNBC.

And for the last research question, the third research question asked if the polarization predicts the believability of balanced resources. We found that the less polarized respondent views, the more likely they were to believe sources from *The New York Times* and CNN. But, however, polarization did not significantly predict the credibility of *Wall Street Journal* and broadcast television news.

**Mark Coddington:** [Not at the microphone.] So to try to make some sense out of those results, we found some kind of odd results in the popular choices; in particular, with MSNBC, we found the opposite of what we had

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expected. We had expected more believability. [Goes to microphone.] Oh, I'm sorry. All right. Is that better?

**Rosental Calmon Alves:** Yes.

**Mark Coddington:** Okay. So, we found some odd results that we really didn't expect. We expected the more that somebody believed MSNBC, it being a partisan source, the more they would be polarized. But we actually found the opposite, that the more they believed MSNBC, the less polarized they were. We also found no correlation with FOX News, which was, well, odd. [laughter] So that kind of leaves us with a few questions. First, the MSNBC finding. If we believe that polarization is generally not good for society, as research generally has indicated, this seems to indicate that media credibility is even more important in avoiding polarization than we thought, especially for partisan sources. Even with partisan sources, in this case, this partisan source in particular, placing more credibility in it, in some way, lessens polarization.

For FOX News, there's the question of, why does the credibility of the liberal news source correspond to polarization, but FOX News, the conservative source, not? One idea—and we're certainly open to other theories—one idea is that research has shown that conservatives are more likely to see the media as biased against them, so they are less likely to seek out sources that are different from their own. Meanwhile, liberals have been shown to seek out a wider range of sources, not practice quite as tight of selective exposure. So this could be a case in which some liberals or sort of moderate liberals are tuning in to FOX News and not entirely disbelieving it and showing low polarization as they expose themselves to a wide range of sources.

Regarding balanced sources, the second point here, the findings are a little bit easier to make sense of. Those who rate balanced sources as credible have decreased polarization scores and visa versa. And the idea being that balance is a little bit less appealing to those who are seeking a viewpoint that just confirms their own. It's a little bit frustrating when facts get in the way sometimes. Whereas, we might also be seeing that liberals are seeking a variety of sources in the same theory that I mentioned earlier. And then we also have a lot of partisans, particularly conservatives, who have been shown to really distrust *The New York Times* and CNN and see those sources as liberal when they are, in fact, at least according to the way we studied it, balanced.

Which kind of leads us to one of the limitations of the study—this last one actually—the partisan/balanced distinction. We coded or we considered those sources as balanced, but many of the audience may be considering CNN and *The New York Times* as liberal. So past studies have done it more as a liberal/conservative divide and that may yield different results.

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A couple of other limitations and opportunities for future research...this was context specific. One, 2008 study. You could explore other context. And since there's no time element, these questions were both asked at the same time. We can't claim any sort of causation. But I think this does show that we tend to see our audience in very sort of block-like, stereotype-like manner and just see people as FOX News conservatives [and] MSNBC liberals, and the reality is always quite a bit more complex than that.

So there's a lot yet to figure out, but this is one piece of data that kind of throws a wrench into that sort of popular echo chamber theory. Thank you.

[Applause.]

**Chris Kabwato:** ...behind microphones, and then we'll go into our session to ask a few questions to our panelists. You could proceed.

**Woman:** So, a really interesting presentation. I was curious, a lot of what Chris has actually been doing in other places has been looking at the influence of metrics on the way that audiences are perceived in the newsroom. And I'm wondering if just the metrics haven't gotten to these newsrooms in these international contexts in the same way that it has influenced the way that you're seeing the way that journalists are talking about users and as qualitative people, I guess.

**Alfred Hermida:** Well, we asked the journalists, what value do they assign to having people participate in their site [and] leave a comment. And by and large, it wasn't because they wanted to create discourse on public policy. It's because they thought, well, if people come to our site and are leaving a comment, they're probably going to spend more time on the site or they're going to come back to see if somebody has replied to their comment. So it's very much seen as a way of creating the site more sticky [is to] have somebody spend more time on the site. And in fact, something like *The Telegraph* with its [My.Telegraph](#), that is seen very much as creating, fostering that loyal audience, which *The Telegraph* is sort of centered—well, [a] right-wing quality broadsheet. Fostering that community online and in a sense building up. If your audience is fragmented online, how can you create spaces where they come together so they spend more time with your brand and identify more closely with your brand? So it's a very clear business case in terms of allowing participation in certain ways, rather than in others that might more affect the way journalism is practiced.

**Woman:** Thank you. Am I allowed to ask a second question or do I have to get back on line?

**Chris Kabwato:** You can just speak. Yeah, you can.

**Woman:** Do I have to get back online or can I ask a second question?

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**Chris Kabwato:** No, no. Yes, of course, you may ask a second question.

**Woman:** [laughs] This question is for Seth. One of the things I was curious about is the funding levels. For example, the case that I point to is close to home, is a .usc, that [Spot.us](#) got \$340,000 from Knight, which was considered a really large grant for a startup, and then USC got \$2 million. And so I'm wondering, you know, to help facilitate [Spot.us](#), right? And so I'm wondering if you have any sort of comments on the disparity, perhaps, in the relationship of funding, and if you looked at that, kind of like whether institutions got more and blah blah blah.

**Seth Lewis:** That's a good question.

**C.W. Anderson:** I whispered to him, "Be careful," by the way.

**Seth Lewis:** Yeah, he did.

**Woman:** Yeah, I probably shouldn't have asked that question. Please don't tweet.

[laughter]

**Seth Lewis:** No, no. No, I guess I'd answer by saying, yeah, one of the things I didn't show up there is I had some data on just kind of the, you know, how much people asked for and how much they got. And I'm going to try to remember the numbers exactly. The median grantee was \$250,000. So sort of like [Spot.us](#) is going to be median in terms of the winners. I think your question, though, more is about institution versus individuals. And one of the things that Knight was actually wanting to do with the News Challenge was to deliberately set up a kind of space where they could actually give money to individuals or small groups or, you know, deinstitutionalized folks, in such a way that they could try to catalyze innovation. The idea was basically, let's stop giving money to just all the same usual suspects like we've always done, and let's see if maybe we can give it to innovative people like Dave Cohen.

And so I think at a certain level you could say they have succeeded in kind of pushing that forward a bit. And that's part of this broader idea of prize philanthropy that a lot of non-profit foundations are working with now, which is basically, let's have a contest of some sort, kind of like a Netflix prize, but around a certain social cause or commitment that that non-profit has. And the idea is to have more transparency and more kind of funneling that money toward different kinds of actors that don't usually get big grants.

Now that being said, as your example may indicate, I mean, these could be slow changes, right? And so it may just be that still there's going to be a little bit of a reluctance to give \$3-million to an individual as opposed to an institution, but maybe they'd be willing to give them \$300,000 to get started.

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And I think also, too, that particular case may point to the fact that when they gave him the money, they had no idea how successful it would be. And so by the time they give money to USC, in this particular case, you know, [Spot.us](#) has been a success, and so there is now a certain level of legitimacy that it has now that it didn't have then, and so money can flow to it for that reason.

**Woman:** Thank you.

**Chris Kabwato:** Thank you. We'll now go to Yemen where there's the urgency of now. [laughter]

**Man:** Actually, I'm also an examiner/contributor now. Actually, I can relate to three issues in this panel, which is really of interest. Of course, the first is Highway Africa; although, it's not directly this, but I was there and it was an incredible experience. I was at the World Congress for Journalism Education where I met others. And also the issue of Knight News Challenge. I've been an applicant, and I actually passed through the second stage, so.... [laughter]

**Panelist:** All right. I probably should ask how many of you were [applicants].

**Man:** But I didn't make it to the very end...yet, it's a good means of progress and understanding where you can move. But there's also a question of I applied individually, as an individual. Do you think that's been a setback in a way? Do you feel that there is priority given to institutions over that? And of course I can also relate to aggregators. I was a journalist. I've been a journalist for over six years in my life, in *Yemen Times* in Yemen. Then I moved to building my own aggregator in Arabic language. And there I find that in some ways transferring information from the public to the -- eventually from a journalist to the public is in itself a contribution to journalism. That's my opinion. It's also a matter of benefit for both sides. So, I'd love to know your views on that. Thank you.

**Chris Kabwato:** Thank you.

**Seth Lewis:** Okay. I can take that.

**Chris Kabwato:** Sure.

**Seth Lewis:** Regarding the kind of individual versus organization, you know, I showed just kind of the descriptive fact that among all applicants it was about 50/50. I didn't...you know, the variables that I highlighted as the positive predictors, these were the strongest predictors of advancement in the contest. So there are others. I mean, if you look at the full paper, there's a long list of variables. So that particular one, I don't even remember exactly if that was significant. But even if it was, it was to a much lesser degree than

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the ones I showed up here. So to answer your question, I guess, was that particular variable—organization versus individual—a big deal? Probably not. I do think that organization was -- especially when you look at it in isolation, in other words, when all other things are being equal, that particular variable didn't show up as a really big deal. Now, I would say that just looking at the winners, generally, it has been more organization than individual. And I think that kind of points to the fact that organizations probably have just simply more resources to draw upon initially to put the application together. So, I guess, I don't know. Of course, this can all be very case-by-case. This is simply trying to provide like a general picture of the contest as a whole.

**Chris Kabwato:** Thanks, Seth. C.W., if you can answer the aggregators.

**C.W. Anderson:** Yeah. Quickly, yeah. I think you're absolutely right. I think that, you know, if you follow the sort of circuit, obviously, ideally, the information that you are generating as an aggregator of Arabic language media is then sort of feeding back into the more traditional, more reporter-based news ecosystem. I think that's exactly right. You know, there's a lot of sort of background stuff, I was thinking about, operating sort of in the background of this panel, but one of the things—or the background of this paper—but one of the things that really sort of spurred the paper on was the fact that historically—now, this may be changing, and I think the panel we saw before this one was an example of some of the ways it really is changing. But I was shocked by how little time reporters spent on the internet, in only the way that a person who spends a lot of time on the internet can be shocked. [laughter]

You know, when I was doing my fieldwork in Philadelphia, you know, I had this idea that, you know, in addition to everything else they were doing, you know, the beat reporters at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Philadelphia Daily News* were going to be checking in with local blogs, and they were going to be following Twitter feeds of the people in their community, and they were going to be as immersed in the blogosphere as I was, you know, and that just wasn't true at all—at all. And again, I think that may be changing slowly and in certain places. But so the way that relates to your question is that that ideal world where your aggregator site, which is building journalistic value, feeds back into this other ecosystem may not actually exist yet. That may not be happening as much as it should or could, you know; although, these things are changing very slowly.

**Alfred Hermida:** I'll just add to that. You can see this at the BBC with now any big breaking news will have their live page, which will have one or two journalists assigned to essentially aggregate content from the BBC, from these correspondents, from the wires, from Twitter, from YouTube, from wherever. Essentially being aggregators, because there is value in curating that content.

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**C.W. Anderson:** However, they're probably not doing it as much as part of their daily routines.

**Alfred Hermida:** No. No. It's on specific big breaking news events.

**C.W. Anderson:** Right, yeah.

**Chris Kabwato:** Thank you. We'll go to the next question. Thank you.

**Joshua Benton:** It's great to see three Neiman Lab contributors up there on the stage. [laughter] I've got two questions if that's all right. My first is for the University of Texas team. And this is probably just exposing my ignorance on an academic point of view, but can you talk about the decision behind using polarization as the metric of measurement as opposed to liberal or conservative? In other words, I imagine that if you're watching MSNBC, you could be polarized on the left or on the right, and same with FOX News. I'm just curious about the dataset that you were using or the choice behind using polarization as the—which, of course, you're polarizing comparison to someone else about that choice.

**Mark Coddington:** I was going to say Tom may know more about the dataset than any of us.

**Man:** Do you want to go to the podium?

**Tom Johnson:** All right.

**C. W. Anderson:** Nice job.

**Mark Coddington:** That's Grade A deflection.

**Tom Johnson:** I think one of the big reasons is just, I mean, there's been a lot of talk about the democratic implications of the idea that the more that you're exposed to similar points of view, the more that your views will become extreme. So, the real worry about polarization is not just that your talking to people that share your own views, but the more you do that, the more your views tend to be more extreme. So that's why we were looking at polarization. Certainly, we looked at the degree, looked at partisanship and its relationship. Not surprising that those who are more partisan are more polarized.

**Mark Coddington:** Sorry. Are you asking why we looked at the degree of polarization as opposed to just measuring whether people were liberal or conservative?

**Joshua Benton:** Yeah.

**Mark Coddington:** Or are you asking something else?

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**Joshua Benton:** I guess it's that if the underlying theory is that increased exposure to ideas like your own lead to potentially increased polarization --

**Tom Johnson:** Yeah.

**Joshua Benton:** -- if you're a conservative, watching FOX News is exposure to more ideas like your own. If you're a liberal, then exposure to FOX News is the opposite of that. So it seems like having, you know, unidirectional media but a sort of bidirectional idea of polarization is.... I'm unfamiliar with the dataset, so I'm just wondering.

**Tom Coddington:** Oh, I'm going to try to answer this one. I think you're right. I think we talked about that a lot when we came across our results, because the data is messy, because unless we can do more.... And this might be more as we go on with this study, because it's kind of half finished. To kind of parse out the difference between conservatives watching FOX News and becoming more polarized and separating out liberals watching FOX News and what is their polarization? So that, like I said, Kang and Tom know more about the dataset than I do, whether that's actually feasible to be able to run those numbers, but I agree, I think that might be part of why the results we got for MSNBC and FOX News were a little bit inexplicable at first, is because we're kind of mashing in together conservatives and liberals in that dataset.

**Tom Johnson:** Yeah. One thing I'll add, one of the things we don't know is why people do what they do. And we did say, we found that liberals are more likely to not be polarized. I mean, there's evidence that they seek out other points of view, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are for the democratic reason of weighing. In most case, liberals already know where they stand on it. They're looking at FOX News perhaps to get counter-arguments, perhaps to see it as a form of entertainment. But, so....

**Joshua Benton:** Try not to get mad.

**Tom Johnson:** Yeah.

**Joshua Benton:** Right. Thank you. Great. My other question, if I may, is mainly at Seth, but I think other folks may have thoughts on it. I know you've been ensconced in the role of the Knight News Challenge for a good, long time now and probably ready to move on.

**Seth Lewis:** Yeah, too long.

**Joshua Benton:** But in the great tradition of the end of academic presentation suggesting further research, it seems like the next logical step for you or someone else, if you'd like to move on in your life, to pursue is going from evaluation the selection process of the Knight News Challenge to evaluating the success of the Knight News Challenge selectees. And I'm



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curious just from your perspective being in it or from others, you know, what are the ideas for how to go about evaluating? Certainly, there are some that we can point to and we can very easily say, "That was a successful project," and some on the other end. But I'm just curious from a research perspective, what kind of projects might be out there for some ambitious, young researcher to go about figuring out what worked and what didn't.

**Seth Lewis:** Does anybody else want to jump in before I do?

**Alfred Hermida:** Well, I'd just say that it depends on what you mean by success. Does success mean that it worked and delivered what it aimed to deliver, or does success mean that it vamped for two years, didn't work, and we learned an awful lot about what didn't work in that particular scenario?

**Seth Lewis:** Yeah.

**Alfred Hermida:** So, I think there's obviously benefits to be gained from both—things that would succeed, but also from the lack of success of projects that are funded.

**C.W. Anderson:** I mean, I think you could also do an interesting study on the longevity of the projects and if you can try to figure out why they stopped when they did. I mean, longevities, both of those are hard, but that's a pretty simple metric, right, how long did it last and when it stopped working. Did it stop because the person got a better job? Did it stop because the project was a failure? Did it stop because it got spun off into something else and they came up with a new idea? You know, the problem with that whole line of research may be that Knight is less willing to be so open with how they think things went, because then you're really judging, was this grant challenge a success? That's a much more.... Although, Knight itself will probably come back, I'm sure, you know, with a report someday about, you know, the successes and failures of the Knight News Challenge from their own internal conversations about it.

**Seth Lewis:** Yeah, I think those are both really good points. I'll just add that the Knight Foundation is working feverishly on that very issue. They've hired a number of outside consultants to kind of try to figure out, you know, evaluate their internal processes and also to figure out, did this work? Was this a success? I guess you could say in some ways it's been a success in terms—well, at least at one level—of kind of catalyzing other types of projects of this sort. I mean, Knight is also involved in the information challenge. They have other types. There's an arts challenge. So, within Knight at least, this is considered a bang-up success. Partly, you could look at it as kind of an internal R&D kind of effort. That within Knight itself, it catalyzed a certain kind of thinking and mode of operating that has led to other types of projects like this, whether or not this ends up becoming a, you know, success in the longevity sense.

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One thing I'll mention, too, is another thing is that in the dissertation itself, which if you want to find it, you can go to my website, the full thing is there.

**Joshua Benton:** You can read the brief summary at my site.

**Seth Lewis:** Yeah, or on Nieman Labs, of course.

**Joshua Benton:** Much quicker.

**Seth Lewis:** One of the interesting things that I found at the end is that, so here Knight had gone out of its way to try to take individuals, you know, and give them money to start up these new news organizations, and whereas previously, it was difficult to start a news organization, but generally relatively easy to keep it going for a period of time. Nowadays, it's extremely easy to start a news organization and extremely difficult to institutionalize it and keep it going for a long period of time. And so now, a lot of these grantees are struggling with the question of institutionalization. After the money runs out, how do they keep it going? Do they get other grants? Do they simply just let the project go? And it was a real kind of vexing issue for them to try to figure out what were the next steps going forward. And part of it was, I think, that they thought they might get more help from Knight, and Knight kind of came back to say, "Look, you know, our purpose is to give you startup money so that you could figure it out. And frankly, we knew that a lot of you would fail, but that was the purpose of the contest, was to let failure occur in experimentation in order to then try to draw some lessons that could be applied by others."

**C.W. Anderson:** I'll just add, too, that....

**Chris Kabwato:** C.W., I think we're left with five minutes, so unless it's really a burning issue, I think let's take the last question and then we'll see what remains at the end.

**Dale Blasingame:** Dale Blasingame from Texas State University. Alfred, you talked a little bit about journalists lacking trust in the audience. What's it going to take to change that? And is that even possible because it's been like that forever?

**Alfred Hermida:** Well, I think part of that is also the mechanisms, the way mechanisms are adopted. So one of the things we found is the way journalists look at comments tends to be very much viewed by the way they've implemented comments. That they don't see it necessarily as part of the journalism, but as, "This is the audience playground, and they do stuff, and we don't like what they do, but we're fine, because we're over here in our fortress and they're playing outside our walls." So, in some ways, the way these mechanisms are adopted is influenced by the way journalists think of their role, but then that reinforces the way journalists think about their role. And that was one of the things that came out—that it's sort of the value

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of the material provided. But then also, going back to Nikki's question, the scale of material provided. So, it was almost like the metrics were it had to be big numbers. And one of the things that came through some people talking [was] that, well, most people don't want to actually be active. They just want to be passive. So looking at it using mass media metrics, which is a theme that has come out in the last couple of days, rather than saying, well, actually do we want to get the people who really care about the news, who are sort of the "knowns" in their circle, to get engaged and be active and then increase our reach through that? So, it's a really complex question.

**Chris Kabwato:** Okay. Thank you. I would like to thank our panel, but I'll just ask each of them just in 30 seconds to just wrap up what's the most profound thing that you found out in your research or that you'd like to say in wrapping up. We'll start with Alfred.

**Alfred Hermida:** Very simply—don't be afraid. Journalists, don't be afraid of your audience. This is our job. Our job is to talk to people, to engage with them, to communicate, to share. Let's do that. We don't control the media's place anymore, so we should strive—we should stop pretending that we do, and instead, find ways that we can really truly share it and build meaningful interactions.

**Chris Kabwato:** Thank you. Seth.

**Seth Lewis:** I think that one interesting thing to point out is that the Knight News Challenge becomes a space where Knight Foundation can essentially kind of try to reformulate journalism such that participation becomes a normative goal, so that participation can become attached to journalism as a kind of ethic in a way that had not been done previously. Now obviously, you can't make that leap just from this quantitative analysis, but kind of from my larger study. That's one of the key things to bring out.

**C.W. Anderson:** Is the entire world going to get online? Not people, but stuff. And if it does, does it matter? Is the way we build evidence about what's true in the world different when it's all digital? And I don't think.... that's like a broad philosophical question that you could be asking for, you know, decades, but I think it's an interesting question to ask and one that we should keep asking as, you know, the digital space increasingly colonizes the space outside of it.

**Mark Coddington:** And I think.... oh, I think I should say, you know, kind of like I said at the end, this idea of the liberal and conservatives aspects of the audience kind of existing separately in their own bubbles talking to each other and never the twain shall meet is just a little bit too easy and doesn't really match with reality. And another note is that those sides are not necessarily symmetrical. The right and the left, audience-wise, don't necessarily behave the same. They aren't mirror images of each other. Is there anything you want to say?

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**Kang Hui Baek:** So, I think although our paper has some limitation, but I think our paper is the first examination between the relationship between the credibility and polarization. As you know, the many scholars focused on polarization and credibility, but few study really examining the relationship between those two variables. So this is our contribution, our paper, I think.

**Chris Kabwato:** Thank you so much. One of the things that our researchers or presenters said was that some of their papers are still in that exploratory stage, so if you have got your checkbook or wish to collaborate with them, please do approach. [laughter] They would like to publish their books just like Alfred. [laughter] I think I have done my duty. I'm going to let my hair down tonight and enjoy Austin. Thank you so much.

[Applause.]