How advances in media related technology are changing journalism and the role of the journalist.

By

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Declaration.

This is an original work. All references and assistance have been acknowledges.

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Contents.

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Abstract.

This thesis is an analysis and examination of how advances in new information and communication technologies have influenced and effected journalism in general and how they have affected the Irish journalistic scene specifically.

It will look at several different ways that these technological advances have had a positive impact on journalism and the day to day working lives of journalists working in the medium of online news. It will look at how these technological advances have influenced journalism in several ways including areas such as research, the gathering of news and online news presentation. It will also look into the area of citizen journalism and assess its position within journalism.

It will also examine the situation of Ireland's online news services and suggest ways in which they can improve if necessary. This thesis was carried out using a combination of primary and secondary research and consisted of academic readings, interviews with the relevant people and a close examination of some of Ireland's key online news websites.

Chapter One - Introduction.

> *The age of lead was noisy, dirty, time consuming and glorious. But it would be gone in a few years. I had entered newspapers at a time of rapid change. Computers would simplify printing and accelerate the process of newsgathering and production. I didn't know it then but I was witnessing the end of the industrial age of newspapers.*
>
> Fergal Keane – *All of these people.*

The aim of this thesis is to explore and examine, in an in-depth manner, how advances in technology that is related to the journalistic industry have changed journalism forever and for the better. It is going to explore how these technological advances have changed not only how professional journalists do their jobs but also how they have raised very serious questions in regards to the very nature of journalism and how they may change the very definition of journalism. What is meant here and what will be dissected in much greater detail during the course of the work is the idea of citizen journalism and the use of mass communication mediums e.g. blogs, social networking sites and forums, that are allowing non professional journalists to speak their mind and get there work and opinions out into the world without having to rely on already well established media outlets.

Although these technological advances could be said to include satellite technology related advances and the rise of 24 hour rolling news channels this thesis is going to focus online news sources and websites, the importance of the internet as a tool for news expression and the impact and use of mobile communication and documentation devices such as laptop computers, mobile phones and digital recording devices

The ensuing thesis is going to be broken down into several chapters. Firstly there is going to be the literary review, this section will examine some of the academic works that have been written in relation to news/media and the effect of advances in technology on this area. This area of academic writing is truly vast and so the works to be reviewed were chosen because

they were relevant to the topic or because they provided a fresh or interesting take on a particular subject or angle.

The next section will then focus on information gathered from talking with four leading journalists who have adequate experience in the field of online news and whose jobs have been changed or affected by these advances in technology. Again there are many people who could of been contacted in relation to this area of research but those who where chosen provided a unique view and help to give insight in a specifically Irish way.

Then this paper will look at and compare several online news sites that are specific and relevant to the Irish news industry. The reason for this is because it is such a constantly evolving and changing area of study it seemed more relevant and practical to examine Irish news related websites rather than focus too heavily on an academic approach that might see one delving into material that is two years old and already obsolete and irrelevant to a certain degree. And it was also felt that a thesis centred on a journalistic topic should include a look at some of Irelands leading online news sources and to examine their relative strong and weak points and by doing this evaluate the state of Irelands online news services.

It will then go onto a discussion where the information gathered in the previous chapters will be examined and evaluated and an informed evaluation will be made on how these advances in information and communication related technologies have had a positive impact on the journalism trade in general and how they have affected the Irish journalism scene in general.

It will then end in a concluding chapter where the main and major points of information will be summarised. This work will have six chapters altogether including this introduction.

Although there has been a substantial amount of academic reading and research done in relation to the topic being examined, this thesis has more of a basis on secondary research.

What is meant by this is research based on first hand experience i.e. interviews with relevant personnel and the close examination and comparison of websites that are at the forefront of online Irish news rather than relying on the work of others. The reason for this is because it was felt that it better reflected the nature of journalism itself and because the topic is such a constantly evolving one it was felt that secondary research would give this thesis a more cutting edge and contemporary feel.

<u>Chapter Two - Literary Review.</u>

This chapter looks at the academic works of several writers who have written extensively about the relationship between media related technology and the documentation, production and distribution of news both in traditional forms (print, television and radio) and in an online format.

The authors being reviewed and examined here where chosen because they provide a applicable point of view in relation to the topic of research of this thesis. They all offer unique insights into how advances in technology related to journalism have changed it forever and for the better.

The first academic work to be examined here is *Digital Journalism; Emerging Media and the Changing Horizons of Journalism* which is edited by Kevin Kawamoto. Computer-assisted research or CAR is one of the most significant ways that the advent of the internet and related technologies has changed the job of the journalist and made it infinitely easier. Whereas before the wide spread use of computers and the internet a reporter may have to sift through thousands of files or old news clippings in order to do research for a story or to investigate corruption or scandal but now they can use computer programs (such as windows based statistical analysis software) and websites (databases that are on non profit organizations, governmental and educational websites) that are specifically designed to facilitate CAR.

It not only allows professional journalist to rapidly research topics or records but it also allows members of the public to research a story online that has caught there attention in the news. And with the huge popularity of search engines like Google and Yahoo it has never been easier for the average person to type in a key word, hit search and find out all there is to know about a story or topic. Kawamoto puts it very well when he says

The impact on journalism of computer-assisted research (CAR), also known as computer-assisted reporting, has been significant. Succinctly put, CAR has not only increased the power of journalists to do there job better with innovative analytical and technological tools, but it has also allowed non-professionals – such as amateur news hounds and the general public – to access and analyse information on their own without relying on an interpreter or intermediary to get between them and a particular set of data.[1]

Kawamoto goes on to point out how CAR has been hugely beneficial when it comes to uncovering high levels of corruption and deceit. How the uses of computers as research tools allowed the journalists to go through huge amounts of information that may have been impossible if they had to be searched through manually and individually. He says

Investigative journalism using CAR has won some of journalism's highest awards. More importantly, reporters have exposed corruption, waste, unsafe practises, fraud, discrimination, environmental hazards and other social problems by tackling hitherto monumental tasks of data analysis. Typical of CAR is the close examination of records of people hired into positions of trust. Such investigations have resulted in exposes of employees who have long criminal histories that were not reported on job application forms, thereby implicating the efficiency of existing screening procedures.[2]

So as can be seen from what Kawamoto has said is that CAR has been hugely helpful in not only the every day job of the journalist and in allowing the general public to conduct their own research but it has also been invaluable in helping to search through huge amounts of important information, that is a matter of vital public interest, and that may not have been possible prior to CAR.

What Kawamoto's book also excellently points out is how the advent and use of digital recording equipment, digital still cameras and digital video cameras, has allowed news to be gathered in situations where it would not have been possible beforehand. In Kawamoto's book John V. Pavlik talks about how digital video and images can be transferred rapidly via email whereas before with the old style film cameras the images would have to be developed

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[1] Kevin Kawamoto. *Digital Journalism; Emerging Media and the Changing Horizons of Journalism* (United States of America; Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2003), 20.

[2] Ibid, 22.

and processed which could prove timely and costly. He also talks about how the use of a digital camera enabled a journalist to sneak it into an area that had forbidden journalists with cameras in order to capture important images of the Balkans war. He says

> During the 1990s war in the Balkans, Radio-B92, an independent station that stayed on the air via the internet, sent a reporter behind the battle lines to capture images of the war torn scene. But, military officials would not allow journalists with camera behind the lines. So, with the help of a compact digital camera that he could roll up in his sleeve like a pack of cigarettes, the reporter was able to sneak his camera past the military and capture images of the war. After returning back across the lines the photos were published on the Radio-B92 web site.[3]

This example from Pavlik also helps to point out the ability of the internet to allow media organizations to continue broadcasting despite times of conflict and unrest and how advances in digital camera technology allowed a journalist to document and capture important images despite an effort by the government and military to enforce a type of media censorship. The importance digital recording technology can not be over stated as it allows the free press to continue operating despite efforts to stop them and this in turn leads to a better informed public and helps to aid the democratic process.

The notion of the "backpack journalist" is what is going to be discussed next in this chapter. This idea is discussed in the work *Communication and new media; From broadcasting to narrowcasting* by John Harrison and Martin Hurst. The authors define backpack journalism as so

> The practice of single journalists taking to the field equipment to report in all media forms; radio, television, print, online. Typically such a journalist would be equipped with a laptop computer, digital camcorder and satellite phone, all items that can be carried in a backpack. Compare this with the baggage carried by a traditional television crew with lights, tripods, booms, reflector boards and monitors.[4]

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[3] Ibid, 78.

[4] John Harrison & Martin Hurst. *Communication and New Media; From Broadcasting to Narrowcasting* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2007), 251.

In their work the authors discuss Jane Stevens who describes herself and backpack journalists by saying

> I am a backpack journalist. I use a video camera as my reporter's notebook. I can put together multimedia stories that include video and audio clips, still photos grabbed from the video, as well as text. I can put together graphics information for web designers. I can throw together a simple web page.[5]

The reason Ms Stevens self description was included here was because she highlights a major point that is important to this thesis. With the vast majority of newspapers now having online versions it is no longer acceptable to simply transfer the material that was created for the print version online. The stories that are featured on a news website must now have the following features

> Hypertextuality: the linking and layering of digital information through a nonlinear hierarchical structure.
> Interactivity: the process of engaging active human or machine participation in the process of information seeking and information sharing.
> Nonlinearity: a flexible ordering system of information that does not necessarily adhere to traditional, chronological or conventionally logical patters of storytelling.
> Convergence: the melding or blurring of historically discrete technologies and services.
> Customization/personalization: the ability to shape the nature of the content and service to individual needs and desires.
> Multimedia: the use of more than one type of media in a single product.[6]

Stories that are featured on a newspapers website need to have all of the above but most importantly they need to satisfy the needs of a multimedia hungry public. A story can longer consist of just text and one or two pictures it must have video footage, audio commentary, it must have a well put together slide show of pictures and images and it must be accompanied by a well written piece or article and it all must blend together into one slick news package. That is the reason why backpack journalists are such an exciting premise and are being touted by some as the way of the future. If a backpack journalist could be described as a one stop

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[5] Ibid, 251.
[6] Kawamoto. *Digital Journalism; Emerging Media and the Changing Horizons of Journalism*, 4.

shop for news gathering, production and distribution it is easy to see why they are able to cover stories that journalists with a large crew or a cumbersome amount of equipment and gear could not. Harrison and Hurst give the example of how backpack journalism is in use in many newsrooms

> In March 2006 the ABC's *Four Corners* produced a remarkable story about the impact of hardcore methamphetamine addiction on a group of people in Sydney. Reporter Matthew Carney gained extraordinary access to the lives of his subjects, often spending days with them as they scored, got high, came down and scored again. This example would be unthinkable with a full crew of camera and sound operators, producers and assistants, but with Matthew shooting his own footage using a hand held digital camera, the world of the addicts is exposed to a wide audience.[7]

Although this particular example is of a television based production this type of scenario can and has been transplanted onto newspaper based websites. One only has to look at the *Guardians* website to see the high level of production that can and is being achieved by individuals mastering several different skills, video and audio recording plus production and editing combined with the ability to write a good news piece. Although it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the basis of good journalism is still the ability to bear witness and report the story with accuracy, fairness, honesty and objectivity and be able to write it in a way that is engaging to the reader/viewer.

What online and multimedia stories allow the journalist to do is not only write and present his or her story to the public but it also allows them the opportunity to expand it and give it the context, history and weight it may deserve. This had previously been hard to achieve in traditional print versions of newspapers and in traditional radio and television broadcasts because of time and space constraints but with the online ability to link stories together and build multiple layers of information up a story can now be given dimensions that were previously impossible and this can create a better news story that is more informative and engaging and gives the topic of discussion the outlet it requires.

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[7] Harrison & Hurst. . *Communication and New Media; From Broadcasting to Narrowcasting,* 252.

The next topic that shall be explored in this thesis is citizen journalism and the use of viewer generated content by established news organizations. In his book *Online News; Journalism and the Internet* Stuart Allan explores and discusses these issues at great length and comes up with some very interesting conclusions. Because this is such an immense area of discussion it was felt that it would be more practical to focus on a single event in order to highlight the use and impact of viewer generated content and the rise of the citizen journalist.

In his work Mr Allan highlights the London bombings which took place on the 7th of July 2005 as one of the major moments in the growth of citizen journalism. On the day in question four suicide bombers boarder three crowded tube trains and a crowded bus in London city and detonated explosives that resulted in the deaths of themselves and 52 others and caused injuries to over 700 hundred people. It also greatly disrupted the lives of thousands of people and brought with it a tsunami sized wave of public anxiety and fear. But this harrowing tragedy also saw the general public step into the news gathering and witnessing process in a new and unprecedented fashion.

This explosion in citizen journalism and content generated by members of the public brought to light the potential for change to journalistic norms the likes of which have not been seen since the advent of the telephone. As Mr Allan puts it when speaking about the terrorist attacks on London

> The social phenomenon of citizen reporting, especially where mobile technologies were pressed into service, demonstrated its potential to challenge more traditional forms of journalism in new and unexpected ways.[8]

Another point of interest from this particular example is the massive amounts of people who used the internet to access information on the attacks. As many mobile telephone companies experienced log jams from the amount of people trying to use them at the one time the

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[8] Stuart Allan. Online News; Journalism and the Internet (England, Open University Press, 2006), 144.

internet was the main mode of communication for many and online sites such as BBC News, Guardian Unlimited and The Times website became the main sources of news for millions and despite this gargantuan increase of traffic they managed to continue to operate albeit at a slower pace.

The single most significant aspect to come out of that particular tragedy in terms of journalism is the volume of citizen generated content that was used by main stream media sites such as the aforementioned BBC News and Guardian Unlimited news sites. The BBC site set up a page entitled "London explosions: your accounts"[9] which asked Londoners if they had witnessed or experienced the blasts and how had they effected them. One such harrowing account was

> It was hot, dark and the smoke filled atmosphere made breathing difficult. We could hear loud screams that came from further down the tunnel, although I don't think any of us had any idea of just how bad things were in the front carriages. I suppose that not knowing what was really going on was a blessing in disguise, otherwise I'm sure there would have been more panic. About 30 minutes later station staff managed to get to us and guided us of the train. It was only when I got home that this was a terrorist attack, which sent a chill down my spine. Jahor Gupta, London, UK.[10]

It is clear from reading an account like this that citizen journalism brings something completely new to the journalistic fold. A piece like this gives the reader a completely first hand account of what it was like to be caught up in the attacks and it creates a connection with the event that an article written by an outside journalist using first hand accounts but creating a second hand version of the story would not have been able to achieve. The *Guardian* website had a similar page on their site that allowed members of the public to give their versions of the events and also to send in photographic footage and videos taken of the carnage and the resulting scrambles to safety.

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[9] Ibid, 146.
[10] Ibid, 147.

The sheer amount of content received and the speed at which it was sent in is a clear indicator of the publics desire to get involved in the news gathering and distributive process and shows that they no longer want to be dictated to but instead want to be part of the news output. This is evident from the fact that the BBC received more than a 1000 pictures, 20 pieces of video, 4000 text messages and approximately 20,000 emails within hours after the first explosion.[11]

Some of the main stream media outlets such as the BBC and *Guardian* corporations made use of people's personal blogs in order to tap into the mood of the public they were trying to report for. As Mr Allan puts it

> A range of the major news sites also made extensive use of personal blogs or online diaries written by Londoners caught up in the events and their aftermath. Some opened up newsblogs for their readers or viewers to post their stories while others drew upon different individual's blogs in search of material to accentuate a more personalised dimension to the tragedy. The up-to-the-minute feel of these blogs typically made for compelling reading.[12]

What this passage clearly shows is that not only did the media provide a platform for members of the public to voice their feeling sand opinions it also sought out personalised accounts from every day people who had published their experience on an independent blogging site. This indicates that the main stream established media realised how valuable and vital first hand accounts of these kinds of events actually are. With online and traditional print front pages you often get the most important thing first whereas with blogs you get the most recent thing first and at times of crisis that is often what is needed.

What citizen journalists where able to achieve that professional journalists were not was access to areas that had been affected and damaged by the explosions. With many areas cordoned of by emergency and rescue services it was members of the public and budding citizen journalists that were able to provide images and footage from the inside of the

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[11] Ibid, 148.
[12] Ibid, 149.

wrecked train carriages and demolished tube stations. People used the tiny lenses of there

mobile phone digital camera to capture the true horror of what it was like to be one of the

many victims of a coordinated terrorist attack. This type of news coverage, with the average

person documenting their own suffering or the suffering of other average people, allows the

watching public audience to connect with the story in a much more intimate way because it is

not professionals providing the coverage but students, home makers and business men, it was

peoples neighbours and associates sending in the content and this resonated with the masses

in a major way. These citizen journalist types of video clips and images had the most impact

on the watching world, as Allan put it

> Video clips taken with cameras were judged by some to be all the more compelling
> because they were dim, grainy and shaky, but more importantly, because they were
> documenting an angle to an event as it was actually happening.[13]

The fact that citizen journalists document an event as it happens is a very interesting one.

Whereas professional journalists normally get to an event or happening just after it has

occurred, citizen journalists, those members of the public armed with recording equipment

(be it in the form of mobile phones with high quality camera or compact, portable digital

cameras or camcorders) and the motivation to share what they see with the greater public, are

the ones who can document a story as it happens as opposed to after it has happened. This

kind of coverage gives this kind of story the immediacy and weight it deserves. It is obvious

that due caution must be exercised when non professionals are providing content so that

issues of authenticity and credibility are not raised but if the professional editors and

journalists due their jobs correctly this should not become an issue.

This news coverage that was fuelled by the people was rather ground breaking in the way that

the public responded in such huge numbers. As the *Evening Standard* production editor

Richard Oliver declared

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[13] Ibid, 152.

> This is the first time mobile phone images have been used in such large numbers to cover and event like this. It shows how this technology can transform the newsgathering process. It provides access to eyewitness images at the touch of a button, speeding up our reaction time to major breaking stories.[14]

The assertion that this type of digital technology is transforming the newsgathering process is an excellent one line summary of what this thesis is discussing and it is echoed by Sky News executive editor John Ryley who said "It's a real example of how news has changed as technology has changed"[15]

What this examination of citizen journalism and the London bombings has shown is that members of the public can have, through the advent and use of the various technologies discussed a positive impact on the reportage of certain stories. The influx of content gathered by members of the public had a positive impact on journalism because it provided an inside angle and it helped create a connection to the story that would have been impossible without citizen journalism. It also showed how things such as blogs and non news websites can have a positive impact on journalism and provide additional or supplementary coverage and information.

In his 2008 work, *SuperMedia; Saving Journalism so it can Save the World,* Charlie Beckett, who is an experienced journalist with the BBC and Channel 4 and is also a journalism academic, takes the idea of professional and amateur journalistic collaboration to its highest degree. In his work Beckett puts forward the notion of "Networked Journalism" which is a style of journalism that has non professional journalists involved in every stage of a story from the moment it breaks until the last word is written on it. Mr Beckett quotes Jeff Jarvis, the journalist, blogger and media commentator,

> "Networked Journalism" takes into account the collaborative nature of journalism now: professionals and amateurs working together to get the real story, linking to each

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[14] Ibid, 154.

[15] Ibid, 152.

other across brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, perspectives. It recognizes the complex relationships that will make news. And it focuses on the process more than the product . . . I believe that the more that journalists behave like citizens, the stronger their journalism will be. In networked journalism, the public can get involved in a story before it is reported, contributing facts, questions and suggestions. The journalist can rely on the public to help report the story: we'll see more and more of that I trust. After the story is published – online, in print, whenever – the public can continue to contribute corrections, questions, facts and perspective.[16]

In his work Beckett at times seems to over emphasis the importance and input of the public on a story. He suggests that they will be the majority content providers on all stories and that the professional journalists will act more as fact checkers and editors. It would seem that Beckett is slightly of the mark here, it seems more plausible that the professionals will still be the main contributors to a story because they are trained to write and structure a story and know the ins and outs of libel law. But he is correct when he speaks about the public having an input in every stage and offering questions, corrections and ideas. This is evident from the fact that on online news sites members of the public can now engage in a dialogue with the journalist in question and offer his opinion and ideas whereas before you had a straight monologue from the writer to the reader.

Although Beckett seems to overstate the input that members of the public should have on the reporting of a story his general idea that the public should be involved in every stage of a stories coverage is spot on. A journalist who has informed members of the public by his or her side through every stage of a stories coverage can only benefit from it. Not only would they have many quality sources of information and facts but they would also be under close scrutiny and this would create a culture of fewer mistakes and more accurate reporting. The ability of the public to pose question to the investigating journalist could inspire new channels of research and thus uncover a new, previously unknown fact or piece of information.

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[16] Charlie Beckett. *SuperMedia; Saving Journalism so it can Save the World* (United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2008), 46-47.

Although the public should not be given the level of control suggested by Beckett they should be given a greater input into the news gathering and distributive process as this will have a positive impact on journalism because it will be a better informed style of journalism and it will be under the watchful eye of the most critical of bosses, the public. And this will in turn create a journalistic culture of near perfection.

Chapter Three - The Irish Context.

This next chapter will look at information that was gathered from talking to some of the top

journalists working in and around the area of online and digital media and journalism. The

journalists are *The Irish Times* journalists John Collins and Hugh Linehan, *The Guardians* Ed

Pilkington and *The Sunday Tribunes* Una Mullally.

Each journalist was asked questions in relation to the area of online journalism, the future of

the print industry, the impact and importance of citizen journalism and the world of digital

media in general. Some of the journalists were asked some similar questions in order to get

different points of view on similar areas and topics. With the exception of Mr Pilkington the

journalists that were interviewed are Irish. This was done as it was felt it would give this

thesis a more localised feel and it would help make it more specific to Ireland. The reason Mr

Pilkington was interviewed was because he works for the news organisation with the best

online news site in the world and it was felt that any thing he had to say on the topic of study

would be worth listening to and taking into account.

The first set of question that were asked were addressed to Mr Linehan who is the online

news editor for *The Irish Times* and also writes the blog *Mechanical Turk* on

www.irishtimes.com-

Q - How much have the advances in media related technology changed the role and job

of the journalist? And do you think the journalist's job will be the same in 10 years

time?

A - Up until this point, the change has not been as dramatic in Ireland as in some other
countries for journalists, due to a relatively slow adoption of new technologies by the main
media organisations. However, here in The Irish Times all journalists are now expected to
file to online as well as print when required. This requires a certain change in mentality on
how to construct an initial story, get it published fast, then develop it further over the hours
that follow. It also requires that journalists become more adept at using technology to get
their stories in. As for the future, I expect journalists' jobs to change fundamentally in the

next few years, including the development of audiovisual skills, more sophisticated multimedia tools such as liveblogging, A much greater requirement to interact with readers/users, and a much better understanding of the differing requirements of different platforms.

Q - What do you think have been the major positive impacts of the growth of new technology in relation the world of print media and to the job of the journalist?

A - Having archival resources just a click and search away has totally changed the way is which people put a story together. Interactivity has begun to transform the relationship between journalist and reader in what I believe is ultimately a positive way.

Q - What is your opinion on citizen journalists and the impact they have on the news gathering, documentation and presentation process?

A - In the area of opinion (be that on the politics of the day or the latest movie releases), it allows a far wider range of views to be expressed, which is a good thing, although I have to say that in Ireland, with a couple of exceptions (theirisheconomy.ie being one), they haven't improved the quality of debate as much as I would have hoped; I look forward to us being able to make more use of eyewitness reportage (and pictures) in future, although I think professional media will need to take care that the usual standards of verification and fact-checking are maintained; and I particularly look forward to the kind of work that the likes thestory.ie do, holding powerful institutions to account by demanding greater transparency and doing the hard work to extract meaning from raw data on how our society is run.

Q- Do you think that the Irish news organizations are lagging behind there UK counter parts in terms of online news content and their use of content supplied by the public?

A - Yes, Irish organisations are lagging behind their UK counterparts in terms of their online content. You won't be surprised to hear me say that I think the Irish Times is somewhat ahead of its Irish competitors in this regard and also with its use of bloggers. In relation to content supplied by the public, my view is that defamation legislation in Ireland has had a chilling effect on media organisations' enthusiasm for opening up content to uncurated comment. As for more general, 'citizen journalist' – type content, I certainly think we could be doing more in that area.

These four answers support some of what we have seen in the previous chapter but they also show that the Irish digital media area is lacking in some regards. As Mr Linehan points out

the Irish media organisations have been slow in adopting some of the relevant technology but those working in *The Irish Times* have seen their work load increase due to the need to publish their work online and keep working on it for several hours after. He also points out that there will be an emphasis on journalists to learn some new skill sets such as liveblogging, which is a blog that is updated in short amounts every ten minutes or so. In this regard it is quite like the social networking site Twitter that allows its users to update their message boards with entries that are only 180 characters long.

In his second answer Mr Linehan eludes to what was discussed in the previous chapter, the notion of CAD and that the archival nature of the internet and online resources has altered how journalists work and made their jobs easier from a research point of view. He also mentions the process of interactivity, which was discussed in chapter two, as having an ultimately beneficial impact on journalism which supports Kevin Kawamoto's claims as it being one of the vital components of digital journalism. What Mr Linehan says about the effects of defamation legislation on a news organizations desire to use content from a non professional source is very interesting and may have a serious impact on the use of content and material supplied by members of the public and this in turn may influence the citizen journalist scene in Ireland for the foreseeable future.

This next question was asked to *The Irish Times* technology journalist John Collins and it is the same as the first question asked to Mr Linehan. The reason for this was to get alternative points of view from two people working for the same news organization and see how they matched up.

Q- How much have the advances in media related technology changed the role and job of the journalist? And do you think the journalist's job will be the same in 10 years time?

A - Technology has helped in terms of producing the paper. It has changed the role of the journalist in the sense that they now typically have to file earlier copy that goes on the Web, rather than waiting until later in the day to write a more considered piece. The 24 hour news cycle also means it's harder for a newspaper to break news so we have to focus more on analysis and finding new angles to stories. In recent times we've also been playing with Twitter and Facebook but at the moment this is primarily a way to distribute news (i.e. headlines from our online breaking news service are published automatically using RSS).

More generally the rolling deadlines during the day mean that if for example you are at a big conference- by the time you file for the web, the newspaper, write a blog post, feed Twitter and record something for the podcast it is increasingly difficult to get out of the press room and find some stories. As a result press releases are increasingly able to dictate the news agenda as journalists need things to be fed to them.

This answer from Mr Collins again helps to illustrate that a journalist now must be able to perform over several different mediums and must master the technologies that go with having your work distributed in several different ways. His answer also helps to highlight the many ways that members of the public are now receiving their news and information. Not only are people reading their news in an online form and in the actual newspaper they are also receiving updates through their Twitter account and listening to discussions and audio features on their ipods and mp3 devices but they can do all of this on the move and away from their desk using portable, handheld communication and information devices like of the iphone and ipad. This shows the many different ways that new technology has allowed people to receive their news. And although it has given journalists a greater outlet for their work and has the potential to reach a far bigger audience, especially younger members of society who have a stronger and more exclusive relationship with technology and there for are more likely to interact with news and current affairs through their mobile devices if at all. It also has put a much bigger strain on the working journalist and, as Mr Collins said, has in some ways tied them to the press office more and this in turn can lead to a style of news that lacks the "on the street feel" but citizen journalism and content supplied by members of the public may be a way to combat this. It has though , overall, had a positive impact on the journalistic trade and although it has increased the work load for journalists it has also

allowed a much richer story telling style to emerge and has facilitated the access of news in many different ways which far out weighs any other results it has caused.

The next question was given to Ed Pilkington of *The Guardian* and is the same as a question that was directed at Hugh Linehan. It is used again because Mr Pilkington raises a very interesting point.

Q - What is your opinion on citizen journalists and the impact they have on the news gathering, documentation and presentation process?

A - Citizen journalism is in its infancy and we don't really know where it will lead us. There are dangers - people with little knowledge about a subject wading into it and making mistakes that can rebound around the world. But there is also a great democratic freedom to it - people will no longer accept being spoon-fed information any more. They want to be involved in the debate and interact with it and newspapers that do not let them in will not survive

As can be seen form this answer Mr Pilkington takes a more cautionary note when speaking about citizen journalism and this helps to reinforce what was said in the previous chapter about the need for journalists to act like editors and fact checkers and not allow a wave of incorrect information to flood the news supply. What Mr Pilkington says about citizen journalism having a "great democratic freedom" about it is a very interesting observation. Citizen journalism gives a once silent public a very real and very loud voice with which to speak, in countries that are not being suppressed or censored by their governments. Whereas before with radio phone ins or letters to the editor sections the opinions of the people could be ignored entirely or cut off if they did not please the powers that be, citizen journalism and outlets such as blogging and Twitter has allowed the ordinary person on the street to have their say and not be censored. And although the vast majority may go unnoticed by the rest of society they at least have an outlet for their grievances and problems and if they have something of interest or originality to say they may get noticed and make a difference.

The next set of questions where addressed to the *Sunday Tribune* journalist Una Mullally and they where inspired by a piece she had written in response to the death of the popular Irish broadcaster Gerry Ryan. The piece was titled *Ryan Confidential?* (http://www.tribune.ie/article/2010/may/02/ryan-confidential/?q=gerry%20ryan) and it dealt with how the news of his death spread via the aforementioned social networking site Twitter and how a debate has arisen between old and new media about how the death should have been reported.

Q - What do you think will be the impact and fall out from the Twitter related coverage of Gerry Ryan's death and how will it affect Irish journalist in the future?

A - I think the Gerry Ryan story and the Twitter thing and how it was handled was hugely significant in terms of how people found out the information and how the news spread so quickly via Twitter. Some journalists forgot themselves a little bit and engaged in chatting about unconfirmed things on a public platform. I think that this stories legacy may be an implementation of guidelines to control how journalists use public and often personal platforms such as Twitter.

Q - What do you think has been the major impact of media related technology and its offshoots, such as Twitter and facebook, on journalism.

A - Probably the biggest impact it has had has been the use of blogging and its ability to democratize the media in some ways, every body can have a voice and be published or self published. And something like Twitter is a great source for breaking news.

Q - What has been the impact of these advances, blogging, Twitter accounts and the never ending deadline, on the working day of a journalist.

A - A journalist's work load has gotten much bigger . . . and because people now have so many mini platforms to voice their opinion they are becoming their own individual news services. It has individualised news and it has individualised journalism.

Q - How big of a role does citizen journalism play in Ireland at the moment and how big of a role will it play in the future?

A - I think it is getting bigger in Ireland, things like breaking news incidents are generally reported by citizens and not journalists themselves because if a journalist is there when

something happens it is usually a coincidence. Mark Little's new website storyful.com will be interesting because he is convinced that citizen journalism and collecting stories from citizens is the way that news is going. I mean there have always been citizen journalists, they just didn't have the forum to report things themselves and new technological advances such as Twitter has just facilitated that, it acts as a channel. It has been a good thing that the media has been democratised in some way.

Technology has allowed a whole new tapestry of voices and different opinions to articulate the news and what is happening. But you have to be careful and have your own filter of quality control when dealing with citizen created content. No one is controlling the quality because bloggers don't have editors or fact checkers but at the same time papers get things wrong too so it goes both ways.

Q - Do you think that the Irish news sites are up to the standards of their international

counterparts?

A - No but the Irish Times has the best site out of the lot.

Q - What do you think can be done to improve them and bring them up to par with

some of the leading news websites out there?

A - Its about providing more additional interactive content that online newspapers just are not doing. They seem to think that the extent of providing additional digital media content is a slideshow or something. When will papers actually start to utilise the technology that is available to offer something additional to the reader? And I think it is really important and I do not understand why it is so slow to happen.

Q - What are your feelings about the criticisms the journalistic trade has received from

some online communities and citizen journalism groups?

A - A journalist is a skilled person who generally knows what they are doing and knows how to write first and foremost which is the main area where a lot of citizen journalists fall down. And I don't think that journalists are just gatekeepers of news and I think it's important not to down grade people who are actually skilled in what they are doing and have been working in the field for quite some time. Saying they are just the same as some randomer of the street who sees something and writes about it online is not a fair assessment.

People see access to the news and the ability to self publish as the be all and end all of journalism and that is not what it is at all. I do think it is hugely important to democratise media in terms of allowing access to additional voices because newspapers and their bosses have huge agendas just as individuals have. News is all the more richer now because there are more voices even if at times it can seem like an information overload and white noise in terms of the sheer amount of voices.

Ms Mullally has alluded to several interesting points here. She spoke about how the advent of information and communication technologies has allowed members of the public to express them self through independent, online mass communication platforms such as blogs and Twitter and how this has helped to democratise the media industry. It has done this by taking away the monopoly of publication from the main stream, corporate news groups and opening up the floor to any one with an internet connection and something relevant to say. But as Ms Mullally also points out it is not a fair assessment of professional journalists to simply refer to them as gatekeepers of the news and to imply that they do not know what they are doing as it is these professionally trained journalists who are the heart and soul of quality reporting and shall remain that way for the foreseeable future.

She also points out how journalists should be more cautious when it comes to reporting on unconfirmed information and that guidelines of control may be put in place in order top prevent a similar situation occulting again. She also eluded to the need for greater interactivity on Ireland's news websites, this is in line with what Mr Linehan said above and what Kevin Kawamoto outlined as one of the necessary parameters for good online, digital journalism.

<u>Chapter Four – Irish News Websites.</u>

This chapter will consist of an analysis of several Irish news websites. It will include both

print and broadcast news sites that are specific to Ireland. The reason for this analytical

approach is to attempt to assess the situation of Ireland's online news providers and to see

how stacks up when compared to the evidence we have already seen. It will look at various

aspects of each individual site including content, look, style, use of multimedia devices, ease

of navigation and other features. It will take each site separately but will also use some cross-

comparison as a means to see which is a sites respective strong and weak points.

The first site that shall be looked at is that of the *Irish Times,* (www.irishtimes.com). The

Irish Times website is agreed to be, by the majority of people, as Ireland's best online news

site.

It offers a stylish, simple and well laid out front page which shows off the sites many features

to optimum effect. This is turn makes it a very easy news site to navigate and to locate

various different sections. For each of its most recent news stories it offers a headline, a by

line and the time it was posted which lets the readers/viewers know how recent the story is.

However, other than the various different sections (sport, business, news etc) and the lead

story, it does not use many pictures which can lead to an appearance of the main page being

to text heavy.

It does not have an over abundance of advertisements like some other news sites. Its latest

news section on the upper right hand side is a very good source for up to the minute breaking

news and it allows for an instant peruse of the latest happenings. It does promote reader

participation quite well by urging its visitors to comment on various sections and on the

journalists blogs which in turn promotes a dialogue between the writer and the reader rather

than a monologue that had been the norm before online news sites and although the standard

of the comments and feed back may not be overly high it at least gives the reader a credible outlet for their opinion on a certain topic. It these blogs by the staff journalists that make this site the best news website in Ireland; they are of a high quality and are always on interesting topics. Such as Hugh Linehan's piece on journalistic ethics and the reporting of Gerry Ryan's death, (http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/mechanicalturk/2010/05/04/journalistic-ethics-twitter-and-the-reporting-of-gerry-ryans-death/).

Where this particular site fails slightly is its lack of multimedia features. Other than the ability to enlarge the pictures used and some picture slide shows it offers nothing additional other than the written content and still photos. It does not make use of video features or podcasts. If one was to compare the *Guardians* website (www.guardian.co.uk) and its multimedia video on the rise of the anti-Islamist group the English Defence League, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/video/2010/may/28/english-defence-league-uncovered , which features film and commentary and is basically an 11 minute expose and in depth report that would be up to the standard of a high quality current affairs program with the *Irish Times* slide show on the Irish Hairdressing Championships, http://www.irishtimes.com/indepth/slideshows//hairdressing/, which features still images and some music it is easy to see the Irish website is lacking when it comes to the multimedia aspect of the site. This reinforces what Ms Mullally said in the previous chapter about the poor standards of Ireland's online news websites and their poor multimedia features.

The next site that shall be examined is that of the *Irish Independent* (www.independent.ie). This site is also laid out well with a more vertical structure as opposed to the *Irish Times* webpage. It has a clear structure in terms of story relevance with latest stories at the top followed by national news then business news and so on until it reaches its final section on analysis.

It has a narrower, more cluttered look than the *Times* and this in turn takes away from its overall impact. It also has a breaking news section in the top right hand corner but it does not have the same ease of navigation as it does not have a site map and it is slower to react when accessing any stories or different sections and this makes it feel inferior when compared with the *Times*. The latest news section has two large pictures and the stories consist of a head line and by line. In each particular section on the lead story has a picture, head line and by line while the rest of the stories consist on one line lead ins. The lack of pictures makes it appear slightly, more boring when compared to the *Times.*

However the one area where it surpasses its rival is in the multimedia section. It too has still image slideshows but it also has short news videos with audio commentary. It has these in its various news sections. Although it does have them it does not utilise them to their optimum level. Rather than have them on its main page it has them buried in each section such as breaking news or international news. Each video is approximately 25 to 30 seconds long but it also has a 15 second advertisement before it which when combined with the slow download reaction times robs these latest breaking news video of their immediacy. The *Irish Independents* website lacks behind the *Times* site slightly because of its overall cheaper look, its harder navigation and its slowness but it is on the right track with its multimedia news videos but they need to be utilised better.

The next website that will be examined is that of *indymedia ireland* (www.indymedia.ie). This news service describes itself this way

> The Independent Media Centre Network is a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate and passionate telling of the truth. We work out of a love and inspiration for people who continue to work for a better world, despite corporate media's distortions and unwillingness to cover the efforts to free humanity.

It is one of many such sites from around the world that have their origins in the citizen led grassroots coverage of the World Trade Organization protest that took place in Seattle in

1999. It operates on a principle of open publishing and any content, video, audio, pictures or text, which adheres to its publishing guidelines, is published immediately. It is an alternative news site that is driven by citizen journalism and it tries to go against what it sees as the wrongs of more mainstream, traditional media.

The website itself has quite an impressive look about it with its use of white space and light green colouring works well together. As one would expect from its manifesto it has a large amount of video, audio and picture content and this does give it a strong citizen journalist led feeling. However, in one article on a police baton charge on protesters at the Dail (http://www.indymedia.ie/article/96602), there was very good video and photographic content but the written article was very short and this robbed the feature of any real depth or history and lessened its impact.

The site is very easy to navigate and it does have a good use of pictures and illustrations. It also makes very good use of the ideas of interactivity and hypertextuality with links to external articles and videos. However due to its stance as an alternative news site and the lay out of its articles, the text stretches across the width of the computer screen (which is very reminiscent of the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia) as opposed to being a given dimension like most news websites, it does not carry the same weight as a traditional news website and there for it lacks the credibility and believability of news sites such as the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Times*. It is too much of a niche site with its emphasis on the political to work as a fully fledged news website but it is on the right track with its use of multimedia features and its use of input from the public.

The next news website that shall be examined is the news section of the RTE website (www.rte.ie/news/index.html). The reason this site in particular was chosen was to examine and analyse the standard of online news provided by the countries national broadcaster.

This site has a rather compact and tidy look about it with the main page being dominated by the latest news headlines and then an underlying menu of news by category. It also has a small side panel that categorises stories by popularity and newness. Each of its lead stories is accompanied by a headline, by line and small picture and each of its categories is broken down further into sub categories, so world news is further subcategorised into wars and conflicts, politics etc.

The stand out feature of this website is its video and audio features. It has a downloadable podcast of an RTE world report. It also has a video feature of its lead story but most impressively it has the RTE player feature which allows you to watch past news and current affairs programs that where shown on RTE television.

So along with getting a good up to date breaking news service and an in-depth news analysis section the viewer/user also has the ability to watch recent news shows and bulletins and topical/relevant current affairs programs and they can also download a podcast of global news reports.

This news website is very easy to navigate, has few advertisements and has many good features that make it diverse and attractive. The only problems that arise when using it is the fact that it is the national broadcaster who has control so there are certain stories that are going to be some what biased but conflicts of interest arising from ownership is the norm with any news provider, the only difference being that this one is partially state funded.

<u>Chapter Five - Discussion.</u>

The aim of this chapter is to discuss and examine all the evidence that has been gathered over the previous chapters and to make an informed and well thought out assessment of the impact of new information and media related technologies on journalism in general and on the impact they have had on the Irish journalistic scene in particular.

As was seen form the literary review there has been many fundamental changes to journalism that where brought about due to changes in media related technology. These include the positive impact made by the internet for research and investigative purposes and how it has made the job of the journalist easier and has thus improved the journalism trade. It also highlighted the way that compact digital recording equipment has facilitated the reporting of news in areas or situations that may not allow the use of recording equipment by governmental or military ban. This ties in with the notion of backpack journalism and how it allows the reporting of news in situations where a large news crew or a large amount of equipment may not.

Backpack journalism also brings to light the need for journalists to be able to work over several mediums and the importance of things like hypertextuality, interactivity and personalization and the need for news sites to make the most out of multimedia features in order to attract viewers/readers.

This is one of the biggest impacts of new technology on journalism. It has allowed the story telling process to be expanded in a very big way, a news report can now consist of written text, still photographs, video footage, audio commentary and it can be linked to other similar stories that give the piece context and it can all be combined in a smooth looking easy to use package and this in turn has improved journalism. It has improved it by allowing stories and topics to expand and be reported on endlessly if needs be, which means that a greater culture

of in-depth reporting has come about which in turn means the people in position of power and trust are under an even closer watchful eye and must perform their roles with honesty and integrity.

The research that has been done has also shown how the public can have a very positive impact on journalism by giving stories and articles a more human side and allows for a greater connection between the coverage and the public. It has also how citizen journalism and input from the masses ahs improved journalism in general by forcing the journalists to be more careful when researching a topic and has allowed members of the public to comment on news stories and this in turn has helped democratize the media. And although a filter of control must be put in place in order to ensure what is being contributed is accurate and fair it is an overall positive thing and has resulted in better journalism all round.

From the research into Irish news sites and by talking to experienced journalists we have seen that the Irish online news service is in an overall positive and healthy state but that more has to be done in order to bring it up to the same level as some of its international counter parts. Although the four sites reviewed all had good features none of them was the complete package that the Irish news viewers need, want and deserve. If there was a combination of the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independents* credibility and overall news packages with the citizen journalism and multimedia led content of *indymedia* and the look, style and standard of the RTE news website then Ireland would have a very high quality and trustable news website.

The one improvement that has to be made overall is a greater emphasis on multimedia, interactive and hypertextuality features while at the same time keeping the ethos of good journalism i.e. fair, honest and accurate reporting firmly at heart. This was seen from talking with journalists working in the field.

What was also gathered from them was the importance of the contribution of the public to the news process but that it must be a monitored system. They also illustrated how advances in media related technology have made their job easier but has also placed a bigger demand on them.

The research that has been done has shown that the outlined technological advances have had an overall positive impact on journalism and have helped transform the nature of story telling and the nature of journalism itself. It has also shown that the online Irish news industry is on the right track but is not quite there yet and some improvements must be made in order to bring it up to standard.

<u>Chapter Six – Conclusion.</u>

This thesis has shown how technologies related to the media industry and journalism has had a positive impact on these trades. It has shown through various modes of research, including primary and secondary, that these advances in technology have changed the job of the journalist and has changed journalism itself by bringing the public into the fold.

It has also shown that more needs to be done to improve Ireland's online news sites and it has shown how this can be done. This thesis has also shown what the people think of certain aspects of this new technology driven change such as citizen journalism and where the culture of journalism may head in the future.

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