NEWS DISTRIBUTION VIA THE INTERNET AND OTHER NEW ICT PLATFORMS

by

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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of MA in Communications, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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ABSTRACT

The Internet has opened up the world of journalism to a new set of influences. It provides a new media platform that is of relevance across the spectrum of communications perspectives, as well as offering fresh impetus to economic theories on the nature of information.

This study provides an overview of the place of news journalism in the new information environment fashioned by the Internet. Major trends identified include the building of online communities, the exploration of the democratic potential of online citizenship, and the developing potential for the bypassing of traditional media gatekeepers. New ICTs provide journalists and publishers with fresh outlets for content. However, the process of generating that content is fundamentally altered by the new possibilities for disintermediation, including 'everyman' journalism, activist publishing and official Internet publishing by the state and others.

The Internet is seen to add to the impetus towards globalisation and corporate consolidation, even as it lowers barriers to entry to media and permits greater diversity. Against the rhetoric of cyber-libertarianism and free market ideologies that influence much discussion of ICTs, actual Internet communications developments are observed, journalists in online and traditional media entities are interviewed, and a structured assessment is made of the current state of Internet news publishing in Ireland.

Development of the Internet as a new publishing medium is assessed as modest but significant, not least for its introduction of greater interactivity, which indicates the beginning of a shift from the broadcast, few-to-many model of media to a more open environment, potentially acting as a counterweight to massification and conglomeration. For the most part, journalists in Ireland show a real appreciation of Internet issues, and, while they readily recognise changes in the information environment, they remain confident of the central role of journalism in public discourse.

INTRODUCTION

At first glance, news and the Internet are made for one another. Speed is all, distance is nothing, space for content is unlimited. News can be fast but at the same time have depth, and doesn't require a multi-million pound web offset press to publish. Democracy[1] is served because the smallest group has the same technical ability to publish as the most powerful forces in society. People can make up their own minds on issues, having had access to all the information they need. This is the unproblematic prognosis for news and for political expression in general via new ICTs.

The hype, however, is attended by, and possibly even provokes, jeremiad counter-hype. The Internet is a shallow dumping ground for the detritus of western culture, and is infested by pornographers and fascists, according to perspectives frequently aired in the news media. Further, from the critical perspective, it conforms with and even has accelerated the processes of massification, globalisation and media concentration that reduce diversity and confine further the spaces for open public debate. According to this analysis, for all its early idealism, the Internet is not about to become a push-button saviour of free thought and expression.

News and current affairs coverage is not the only conduit for the expression of ideas that relate to public issues, but it is the most direct and explicit means by which reality is mediated. As entertainment and lifestyle media expand and as news itself comes to be regarded as mass media entertainment and adopts the conventions of performance, journalists' often strident claim to represent Habermas's lifeworld is challenged (Habermas 1989, Poster 1995). 'Reality'

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[1] See the Glossary for the definition of democracy that informs this study.

has become a central component in mass entertainment, as witnessed by the advent, following on the heels of TV soap opera, of 'docu-dramas' and the 2000 TV/Internet surveillance phenomenon that is Big Brother, the ultimate expression of McLuhan's implosion of the message and the medium. The notion of an impartial or factual account of events has not been lost, however. Many journalists still report court hearings and Dáil sessions as faithfully as they can, according to the highest principles, and their work is still read and viewed on the basis of trust, without concession to the post-modern entertainment zeitgeist. They do not live in some worthy but dull corner of Baudrillard's hyper-reality, nor do they deliberately treat reality to make it more entertaining or compelling:

> *"We tell them the truth, not as we may feel it ought to be but as we can best establish it on the basis of verifiable fact and reliable sources. We never advance a story on the basis of rumour. We should measure every news story we write against our own personal tastes and preferences and then ruthlessly eliminate any trace of partisanship. We may present our readers with unpalatable realities provided we do not employ shock tactics for their own sake. We do not hold back or water down facts which we have established to be true because we feel they may reflect poorly on issues or principles or ideologies or people that we respect or hold in high esteem."*
> *(Brady 2000)[2]*

The Internet adds a new set of questions to the role of journalists and journalism. Whatever about constructed reality in broadcast and print, reality on the Internet is almost infinitely configurable according to user preferences. An Internet user can usurp the idea of immersion in the cool medium of the screen simply by choosing not to view images on screen, or they can frustrate the best efforts of news editors by picking and choosing between news outlets and displaying results on a screen unique to themselves. They do not have to hear about world debt relief or the arguments for or against a train drivers' strike. However, they can also choose to hear arguments on such issues freely

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[2] Appendix A, which is the Sunday Business Post's earnest declaration of values, reveals an interesting variation on journalistic virtue that incorporates support for business.

made, perhaps without any mediation by journalists. Millions click onto fan sites to discover what a star is going to call his new baby, but they can also, if they wish and with as much technical ease, discover the latest toll in a human disaster in Africa, without it being turned into another entertainment spectacle. Not all journalists parody journalism, but even if they did media consumers increasingly have options to see past the pretence.

The technical capacity for a more real and more accessible public sphere exists in Internet technologies, although it is accepted that this may only apply to people in western countries for the foreseeable future. A more democratic news media is unlikely to come about by means of a purely technological revolution, but media, as commercial entities, must respond to the Internet's growing relevance. This thesis is a study of how the Internet can intervene in the relationships between journalists and their audiences, of how news media in Ireland have begun to signal a response to the Internet, and of whether and how journalists here are preparing for a changing role.

Chapter 2 sets the theoretical backdrop for this exploration. It comprises a review of media theories that is necessarily wide: part of the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the Internet can be seen to touch on and advance a broad sweep of communications issues from text to screen and from institutions to audience. Levinson sees the need for new qualifications of McLuhan, but this need is also relevant in the perspectives of both the Frankfurt School and the post-modernists, while Habermas's public sphere is the focus of much expectation around new media. Chapter 3 continues the review of the literature with a closer focus on Internet developments, particularly with regard to news. US journalists have had advance experience of the nature of Internet news from which those in Ireland can learn, and the American lead in all things Internet is heavily reflected in much of this area of work.

Chapter 4 details the methodology for the research, which is based in observation and interviews. Chapter 5 notes the adoption of the Internet internationally and in Ireland, and locates the role of news in the growing online environment, with a survey of Irish online news outlets that reveals patterns of practice. Chapter 6 points to the phenomenon of self-publishing on the web, as well as underlining the growth of direct, unmediated sources of information. A new factory in your area is taking on hundreds of workers. There may be press releases on the company website and on the government site, which are as accessible as that of a national news provider, but where you choose to view the source may depend on other factors. Just as news media, like other commercial Internet entities, can track and log user behaviour on the Internet, (see www.doubleclick.com), so users can themselves configure their news intake and can closely criticise media using independent technologies described in this chapter.

Chapter 7 sets out responses of 15 journalists and editors who are involved to a greater or lesser degree in online journalism. The set of interviewees also, by intention, includes some who have not considered themselves new media journalists, and who might have been expected to react with surprise on being asked to participate. However, their work is also published prominently on the net.

Chapter 8 provides a synthesis of the understandings reached from the literature and through the research, and concludes principally that journalists and news outlets may be capable of responding creatively to the new environment of the Internet, but that much will also depend on the extent to which Internet adoption translates into a more complex and critical consumption of news.

Finally, a clarification. This study is about what people can or cannot do with new ICTs and is not concerned with any particular technology. The Internet may engulf television, or digital television may sweep away the net, or there

may and probably will be an evolution into something different again, which will still be called the Internet or may have a new name. Whatever the outcome, the essential concern here is the set of social relations that fully interactive networked media permit. For that reason, the Internet can be thought of here as a broad label of convenience representing the range of new ICTs, even if within a decade or sooner, the term may seem an anachronism.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE – THEORETICAL AND
ECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines perspectives concerning the effect on media, with
particular reference to news and current affairs journalism, of Internet use.
Section 2 provides an overview of strands of media theory, especially as they
relate to media determinism and the shift from the broadcast, or few-to-many,
media model, as updated and qualified for the Internet. Section 3 considers
the broad context of economic thinking in relation to technological change,
with particular focus on media and claims for the Internet.

2.2 Culture, media and journalism

The purpose of this section is to situate consideration of the effect of the
Internet on journalism, and of journalism's potentially altered role, within a
theoretical understanding of media. A number of perspectives set out major
challenges to the role of media, and by extension the press, in western
societies and economies, and to its ability to achieve its vaunted public aims.
While the competing views of media have their origins in thinking that
predates the net, they each have strong resonances for any discussion of the
Internet as a platform for social communication.

2.2(i) Hegemony and 'broadcast' media

Gramsci's theory of hegemony, in which the elite rules by consent rather than
by coercion, places the media at the centre of developing public compliance.
In setting out a critique of mass media and its shortcomings, Williams
addresses questions of democracy and hegemony, in particular in relation to

media ownership, commercialisation, distribution and realism. Williams's 'democratic realism' defends the aesthetic of total expression, achieved when the audience "leaves a performance, or puts down a novel, with an idea of what the author intended" (Stevenson 1995, 15). He proposes four models against which the societal ideal is squared – authoritarian, paternal (Reithian), commercial and democratic. Because of its inbuilt tendency to view the people as 'the masses', denying cultural plurality, Williams sees the Reithian public service model as having much in common with commercial culture, especially in its splitting of the audience into high and low categories (1995, 13, 14).

Even in Britain, with its relatively well established and intact public broadcasting service (PBS), the 'privileged institutions' of minority culture, such as the BBC, the Arts Council, the British Council and the dominant universities, have been fighting a losing battle against the powerful pressures of capitalist-sponsored culture (Williams 1989, 124, 125). Now, their standards reflect received social conditions, and there is too strong a functional link to major economic forces for there to be any genuine independent cultural position of the former minority kind.

Williams speaks of commercial culture in British media expressed in terms of public/private partnership or sponsorship. Broadcast, not having a direct point of sale, responded to the need for revenue either through state subsidy, licence fees or the advertising option already taken by the popular press. Advertising was firstly regarded as a mechanism to reduce cover prices and increase circulation – content was still at the core – but later newspapers became defined by their ability to deliver an effective body of purchasers. Newspaper titles died off, and those remaining changed so much as to be no longer recognisable as newspapers, having less than 10% regular news content (1989, 126, 127). This theme is echoed by Trevor Haywood in a later context:

"As recently as the late 1970s local newspapers in the UK were still interesting. They were vehicles for significant local news that also carried appropriate advertising. Now they tend to be vehicles for significant advertising that also carry some local news. It seems to be an unstoppable truth that each generation should get less and less news from its newspapers." (Haywood 1995, 156)

Accompanying the shift towards an advertising base, the viability of newspapers and broadcast media came has come to be expressed in terms of inflated audience thresholds. A 'vast throng' of 100,000 people at a cup final or a coronation would be dismissed as an insignificant broadcast audience (Williams 1989, 127).

Williams moves the discussion forward when he predicts that existing societies will be urged, under the excuse of technical reasons, to relax or abolish regulatory powers. As the importance of paranational organisations grows, individual regions will be bypassed, not only industrially but also by profit-selected systems of distribution. The common provision of necessary common services will be made to appear a 'receding utopianism'. New means of universal distribution – at first cinema, later broadcasting – brought about McLuhan's global village but, rather than a new model of universal distribution, what actually was 'ideologically inserted' was a model of homogenised audience served by a few monopolising corporations and the elite metropolitan intellectuals (1989, 128, 129).

Williams sees strong diversifying possibilities for new technologies of cable and satellite communications in reversing this trend. He outlines various possible benefits: a common carrier system for a wide range of producing and providing bodies; new forms of television transmission services, including alternative film and video but also including an electronic catalogue network, and a reference and archive network; new ways of serving previously 'unviable' audiences; databases of encyclopaedias and library catalogues; the availability of information on goods and services that could replace

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advertising; deeper interaction that would allow for true expression of opinion, instead of the shallow mechanism of opinion polls. Opinions that emerged from this deeper process would have real grounding in active social relations. Williams says this points to the distinction between a participatory democracy and a representative, or apparently representative, one (1989, 135-137).

However, he is careful to assert that these are not simple technological effects. Rather, they are directions in which society can choose to develop the new technologies, rather than leaving them in the hands of 'crude and reductive' interests. He describes uses which the new technologies allow as being "among the indispensable means of a new radical democracy and a new socialism, in numerous and complex societies" (1989, 139).

2.2(ii) Reality and truth claims

The Glasgow University Media Group's (GUMG) Bad News studies address questions of hegemony and reality, asserting misrepresentation of social reality in news; because the newsworthiness of industrial disputes is decided by the perceived inconvenience of customers, and by those industries seen as symbols of Britain's poor economic performance; because reporting works within a dominant ideological consensus in which the strike is always the workers' fault; and because working class voices are excluded from the media of mass communication, whose occupational culture is middle-class (Stevenson 1995). By contrast, coverage of the Malvinas conflict reflected the 'good news.' that the state needed to put out.

Stevenson comments on the growth of the notion that all social reality is linguistically constructed, and the even more undermining claim that 'truth' and 'objectivity' are themselves part or the strategy of the hegemonic power bloc. But he makes a distinction – one that is rare but which is important for this study – between news and other forms of cultural production such as

film and soap operas, and argues that, while all television news involves symbolic construction, certain representations of the real are more biased than others. He harshly critiques the "retreat into the audience" of those who stress reception of the message, arguing that audiences themselves are not in a position to know the facts of events such as riots. Even if the values of objectivity are shaped linguistically, this does not necessarily mean that they are not worth defending, because the alternative is total subjectivity even in social documentary. Truth claims, as "communicatively held intersubjective values that refer to states in the real world" facilitate open discussion of issues (1995, 31).

2.2 (iii) Institutions and audience power

Stuart Hall and his colleagues move the analysis away from journalism's class bias and institutional structures, and set out a distinction between primary definers – structurally dominant groups such as the police who possess privileged information – and secondary definers – those who select and interpret such information (Hall 1978, 69). This idea has important implications for how such organisations as the police and other official and corporate entities will pursue their news communication strategies in an Internet environment. Althusser makes a parallel distinction between Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). RSAs, such as the military and the police operate through force, while ISAs, such as media and education, maintain the ideological domination of the ruling class (Althusser 1984). Ideology, for Althusser "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (1984, 36). It also converts humans into subjects who misrecognise themselves as unique individuals, rather than as a socially constructed identity. Hall argues that mass media form the main ideological institution of contemporary capitalism, working to manufacture the dominant consensus by constructing reality while appearing to reflect it through 'naturalist illusion'. However, Hall moves outside Althusser's analysis to distinguish between encoders and decoders and provide a more complex approach. Encoding is

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dependent on professional norms and procedures, institutional relations and technical equipment. But the coded message can be read in three ways: the dominant hegemonic, in which the subject is persuaded, the negotiated code, and an oppositional reading. This challenges the idea of a straightforward relationship between the structures of ownership and media content. Hall follows Althusser by arguing that the principles of neutrality and objectivity in media are related to the dominant ideology, an idea that underpins much in later writing that more specifically addresses the issue of media size and the Internet.

The dispute between notions of Gramscian hegemony and audience perspectives is addressed with specific Irish relevance by Miller, demonstrating the stark power of the institutional sender. (Miller 1997). Whether ideological dominance effected via the media is a necessary requirement for the reproduction of capital or not, powerful organisations and institutions do indeed engage in information management, through secrecy, censorship and propaganda, to pursue their interests and legitimise their actions. Furthermore, Miller argues, the pursuit of these strategies make identifiable differences to the distribution of power and wealth.

He reports how focus group studies of the effects of the SAS killings of three IRA members showed how pro-state propaganda messages, such as the false allegations that the three had already planted a bomb, that the key witness in the case, Carmen Proetta, was a prostitute, and that she was preparing to withdraw her evidence on the matter (variously carried in *The Sunday Times, Sun, Sunday Telegraph, Daily Express, Daily Mail, Star, and Mirror*), continued to be believed, especially among groups from England and Scotland. Even among nationalist groups in Northern Ireland, who were able to reject the bulk of the propaganda, one *Sun* and *Star*-reading participant believed that Proetta was a prostitute. Those with personal experience of Northern Ireland were able sceptically to reject television's portrayal of the North as mostly

violent. However, almost half a British sample said they were afraid to visit Northern Ireland.

Martin Higgins, in detailing the UK Household Information Systems Project, and despite his emphasis on the household as part of the social shaping of technology, acknowledges that a complete analysis must include institutional perspectives (Higgins 2000). Cable and the Internet do not appear in people's lives without introduction, he comments, and decisions by Sky Sports on a football programme format or by Microsoft on software design reverberate in the lives of millions of consumers.

2.2(iv) The medium, the message and the Internet

His concept of the global village, as applied to broadcast media, and his thesis of media-centricity give McLuhan special relevance to constructing new frameworks of understanding that can accommodate the Internet. McLuhan calls print 'the technology of individualism' (McLuhan 1962, 158). A shared collective culture is converted in the book into a culture dependent on individual authorship and individual forms of expression.[3] Print is described as a hot medium, one that disallows participation and is high in informational content. A cool medium leaves more interpretative space for the audience to be active, and exhibits lower levels of information intensity. Cool media, such as the telephone, decentralise the production of knowledge and democratise opinion formation. Thus the 'new' cool electronic media have ended relations of dominance in communicative relations, and have in effect brought about a

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[3] Whether this can be said to be true of newspapers is another matter, since most of the output of, say, a daily title, is the result of collective effort channelled through the editorial processes. The Internet, it could be argued, will push matters more towards the individual author, but paradoxically, through the formation of community and the coalescing of interests, it could also produce an outcome closer to the shared collective, even in content that is solely or principally comprises type.

system in which no central authority can govern. This is a point of strong dispute for Williams, who attacks McLuhan's failure to recognise (in common with strands of postmodernism) the role of dominant authority relations in structuring cultural production, content and reception.

Electronic media have annihilated space and time, says McLuhan. The mediated experience of modernity has no place or location. It is organised into networks that have no hub or centre. The vertical and horizontal relations of spheres once separated by print into, for example, art, politics, economics and the public and the private have imploded. In the post-literate society, politics is inseparable from media, and vice versa.

Stevenson, like Levinson, the avowed disciple and Internet age interpreter of McLuhan, argues that beyond the highly deterministic presentation there is valuable insight into the effect of the medium on cultural life, independent of content, and that the implosion of time and space presents dangers and opportunities for democratic society (Stevenson 1995; Levinson 1999). The charge of technological determinism should not suffocate consideration of how media reshape perceptions of time and space, and the effect of media on cultural life. Castells also rejects the rigid categorisations of the apparent divide over technological determinism, calling it a false debate that distracts from the true nature of media (Castells 1996, 5).

While falling into line with McLuhan, Castells agrees with Neuman that television's great appeal is to the instinct of a lazy audience (Neuman 1991). People are attracted to the path of least resistance, as evidenced by the fact that only a small proportion of people plan their viewing. Castells traces the massive explosion of television over the last three decades: the TV is on in US homes for seven hours each day, with actual viewing 4.5 hours per adult; this in comparison to 14 minutes per day in interpersonal interaction. However, Castells denies that this means the audience is helpless. Communication depends on the interaction between sender and receiver, and he cites Eco's

view that, while the sender's messages might be constructed in accordance with the dominant ideology, addressees fill it with "aberrant" meanings according to their particular cultural codes (Eco 1994).

Castells repeatedly distances himself from what he calls "science fiction ideology and commercial hype", yet he indulges in big claims for the new communication system's global reach, integration of all communication media, and potential for interactivity: The technological transformation is of similar historic dimensions to that brought about by the alphabet: It is revolutionary. We can hardly overestimate its significance.[4] The character of communication is fundamentally changed and, because culture is mediated and enacted through communication, the emergence of the new system will change our culture forever.

Rejection of a unified mass culture undermines the concept of the passive audience in social theory. Still, he acknowledges that this does not imply that the media are neutral or that their effects are negligible. Television sets the stage: a politician who wants to be elected simply has to be on it. But the real price paid is television's mixing of messages in a multi-semantic text whose syntax is extremely lax. This 'sloppy' medium blurs boundaries of information and entertainment, education and propaganda, relaxation and hypnosis in the cosy context of home viewing. The McLuhan Galaxy is a system of feedbacks between distorting mirrors, in which culture works primarily through the materials provided by the media.

But for all its opposition to the homogenous audience, the reception-conditioned analysis shifts its ground when it encounters newer technologies. Castells traces the progression from the mass audience to diversification by means of new technologies in the 80s – in print, radio, and video recorders, but mostly cable and satellite television and massive expansion in the numbers of television stations and networks in the US, Europe and Japan, along with

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[4] A presumed copy error has this as 'underestimate' in the 2000 reprint.

dramatic penetration for global players, especially in Asia. This new segmentation and diversity means that now, in McLuhanesque terms, 'the message is the medium'. Now, the characteristics of the message, with its specialised focus on a segmented audience, shape the characteristics of the medium, e.g. MTV, CNN, Sky Sports etc. This diversification means not that governments and business have lost control over television, but the opposite. Television has become more commercialised than ever and, because of huge merger and takeover activity by transnational corporations, is increasingly oligopolistic at the global level. Salvaging something from this for the reception perspective, Castells claims that each culture and social group has a specific relationship to the media system and the practice of channel surfing introduces the creation by the audience of their own visual mosaics. We are not living in a 'global village', but in customised cottages globally produced and locally distributed. But at root the media system is still one-way: it is still the extension of mass production, industrial logic into the realm of signs, and, says Castells, for true interactivity computers need to talk to television, after first learning to talk to each other (Castells 1996, 340-342).

Castells perceptively notes that the overwhelming bulk of CMC activity is work-related, but points to the computer's fusing of work, home and entertainment into the same system, with users resent the resulting blurring of distinctions. Outside work, the uses of CMC traverse the whole realm of social activity. Personal communication is exploding in e-mail, and computer sex is expanding quickly, driven in 1990s California by the greater interactive power of the new networks and the fear of contagion and personal aggression. Some see CMC, and in particular email, as the revenge of the written medium, the return of the typographic mind, and the recuperation of the constructed, rational discourse. Others see the informality, spontaneity and anonymity of the medium as stimulating a new 'orality' expressed by electronic text. Castells fuses these two ideas and says that perhaps we can foresee a coming together of the forms of communication – oral and

typographic – previously separated in different domains of the mind (Castells 1996, 328).

Giddens sees modernity as a runaway juggernaut, where every attempt to order its path produces unintended consequences. One such effect, in line with McLuhan's thinking, is the 'emptying' of time and space, as in the Gulf War, converted by broadcast into a global conflict (Giddens 1990; Giddens 1991). But Giddens sees this effect in newspapers too. The telegraph's capacity to disembed information from social location meant that newspapers could become much more event-driven and less determined by proximity in time and space. And the mosaic nature of modern newspapers brings about fragmentation as well as the unification stressed by McLuhan, because it involves the conscious selection of certain forms of information over others.[5] In McLuhan's terms, print in newspapers is more open to personal interpretation – it is cooler – than McLuhan allowed. For Giddens, going beyond McLuhan's understanding, new networks of communication are inherent to the reflexive questioning that characterises modernity. But Stevenson says that, while technical media can have a democratising effect, in themselves they cannot guarantee informed debate, and to illustrate he points to the low quality of debate on popular talk shows (Stevenson 1995, 24 – 27). He also argues that, while McLuhan and others, along with Giddens, put the evolution of communication media at the core of mass society's development, the development of media is also related to the fall of mass society, as evidenced by the growth of cable and satellite broadcasting, video equipment, and the variety of magazine titles. (A short time later, he might also have specified the Internet.) The result is fragmentation but also a diminution in national control and imposition of ideology. Commercial systems could

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[5] As discussed later, while print has developed a highly codified set of typographic conventions, Internet text has yet to settle into such a cohesive pattern.

equally be used for 'indoctrination', but media strategies would have to be much more complex. (1995, 133, 134).

Stevenson says that that claims that electronic media abolish time and space only stand if media were no longer locatable within stable social networks. This is not the case: the evening news might be about Zimbabwe or the Philippines, but it is still more likely to be concerned with the nation or 'the west.' Meanwhile, Lefebvre refers to the survival of national press.[6] So the concept of the global village has to be taken within an understanding of social relationships (Lefebvre 1991). Meyrowitz sees television as a demystifying agent cutting through social stratification. Politicians can be seen as ordinary, and this leads to a lesser impulse towards deference (Meyrowitz 1985). Stevenson says this is overstated, and points to Foucoult's panopticon and, within that, the reversal of visibility of power: as the powerful make themselves increasingly less visible, in contrast to their former predilection for pomp, communications technologies produce increased surveillance of the least powerful. Here the argument is bolstered by consideration of the Internet's capacity for surveillance on both a mass scale and in granular detail (Turkle 1996; Darier 1998).

Postman (1985) taps into the Habermasian concept of the public sphere when he interprets McLuhan's contention of implosion as the undermining by electronic media of the rational public space (Postman 1985). Television is not equipped to enhance the values of rational democracy. Bauman's concept of the telecity sees television letting us travel without leaving home, but the experience is without empathy. This feeds into the development of virtual reality and MeTV, wherein images are selected that fit into the subject's own tastes and preferences, and again it is possible to see that this argument may be even more acutely relevant for Internet media. The danger of pre-selection

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6 Witness the launch of the 'Irish' Examiner – although this could be placed more accurately as fitting an opposing trend, in that the migration is presented to the market as one from local to national.

is that the audience chooses unchallenging content.[7] McLuhan's concepts of implosion and of cool media are recurring themes, whether as templates or as targets, in much of the literature that follows him.

Postman's attack on the role of television and computers gives pause for thought to those who uncritically herald the promise of a new communications revolution (Postman 1985). Postman decries 'technopoly' as a technological mindset that flourishes wherever people view the free dissemination of all information as an unmixed blessing. Although he recognises the potential for new creativities, he sees computer technology as representing a means of transporting information, rather than as new means of communication (Postman 1993). Postman laments the shift from print culture, typified by coherent, serious and rational discourse, to television culture, which has made that discourse shrivelled and absurd. Here he proposes an epistemological framework for looking at media, and argues that definitions of truth are derived at least in part from the medium. The culture's epistemology and ideas are given form by television, not by print, which, along with the computer, and newspapers and magazines, apes the visual quality of television screens (1985, 28).

Both Marx and McLuhan are invoked to support his position that this print galaxy determined the nature of content. "The influence of the printed word in every arena of public discourse was insistent and powerful not merely because of the quantity of printed matter but because of its *monopoly*." (Postman's italics) (1985, 41). The typographic mind encouraged rationality: public figures such as Lincoln were known for their writing, not for their looks or manner. With the introduction of the picture, via telegraphy and photography, seeing, not reading, became the basis for believing.

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[7] This argument presupposes that the audience will prefer such a route. Of course, this depends on the audience, a problematic concept for Internet purposes. For example, although much has been made of customisation, it is hard to conceive of the readers of online news deliberately eliminating any possibility that they will come serendipitously across something challenging, informative or surprising. Recent research has produced initial indications that readers prefer the less predictable experience.

Entertainment is the "supra-ideology" of all discourse on television. Newscasts trivialise the news, turning it into a parade of *non sequiturs* and presenting it as pure entertainment, and this trend has forced its way into print, as in the highly visual USA Today. Following this argument, he concludes that the threat to public discourse is not posed by the A-Team or Cheers, but by 60 Minutes.

Postman is similarly sceptical of the value of computers, arguing that they will be of great value to large organisations, but will contribute little for most people and may create more problems than they solve. He is particularly scathing on their use in education, again insisting that their primary appeal will be for entertainment. For Postman, technology is ideology. To assume otherwise is "stupidity plain and simple" (1985, 157).

Altheide and Snow concur, characterising the activities of those who bring us news as 'postjournalism' (Altheide and Snow 1991, 51, 52). They argue provocatively that organised journalism is dead. Journalistic practices, techniques and approaches are geared to media formats rather than directed at topics. The medium is the story. In turn, the topics, organisations and issues that journalists report about are themselves products of media – of journalistic formats and criteria – and when 'media logic' is employed to present and interpret institutional phenomena, the form and content of those institutions are altered. Reality is socially constructed through a process of symbolic interaction, and journalism is not untouched in this. We live in an age of media 'talent', in which 'performers' and 'actors' play caricatures of journalists. This applies especially to television, with its standard templates and routines dedicated above all else to the performance.

Kelly and de Kerckhove advance an extended McLuhanism that sees the web as a progression of the cooling of media (Kelly 1996). Where once the TV remote control gave the audience a role, now the audience is completely in charge. De Kerckhove says: "Ever since we've had the TV remote control

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unit, we've controlled the screen to a certain extent and shown our desire to participate in the production of its content. In a networked society, the real power shift is from the producer to the consumer, and there is a redistribution of controls and power. On the web, Marx's dream has been realised: the tools and the means of production are in the hands of workers."

A dictator could never use the web because of the web's intrinsic values: "In the radio world, the agenda of control, of language, is of a single person's agenda: a big man, a dictator, a Hitler, a Mussolini, a Khomeini. Whereas, the agenda of the web is that of a tribal chieftain: the language is shared, not imposed."

De Kerckhove defends the web against the charge put by Birkerts, whom Kelly derides as a "book snob", that the web could not promote the depth "of self" that the book encouraged through reader introspection. He claims that, even though the web offered possibilities for reinvention and mixing of identity, "the core business of self remains, just extended all over the planet by electronic extensions."

Levinson proposes a more general update to McLuhan to take account of the Internet. (Levinson 1999). Again, there is a softening of rigid theoretical certitude to accommodate the new scenario, rather than a simple theoretical continuum from television and other electronic media. 'The medium is the message' was not intended to mean that content was unimportant, he contends, but has been misunderstood in this way. A television screen with no programmes is not a medium, and a computer without software is junk, which is why many were replaced when the multimedia web came into being. Content is essential for 'media-hood'. Levinson softens McLuhan's radical media-centricity, ascribing much of this interpretation to McLuhan's unorthodox mode of expression, and describes himself as a 'soft' determinist. The evolution of media is "anthropotropic", that is, the quintessential ingredients of human existence and communication steer the evolution of all

media. And, he says, the idea of the human as master of media, rather than its slave, achieves its fullest expression on the Internet.

McLuhan showed that older media become the content for new media, and their hidden dimensions become more visible as a result. For example, the narrative structure of the novel became more visible after cinema adopted the framework, and the process continued through television and video recorders. But, says, Levinson, the Internet is poised to make content of them all.[8] The Internet makes the global village a reality. The online villager equipped with connected PC can engage in dialogue, seek out rather than receive news stories, and exchange information much like the inhabitants of any village. Another dimension of McLuhan's metaphor made real is that of decentralisation. Where McLuhan said that "centers are everywhere and margins are nowhere", television headquarters remained centres. Now, in the age of the Internet "in which anyone with a web browser can launch a news story", the corporate gatekeeping of news is beginning to subside. Levinson heard of Diana Spencer's death via the Internet an hour before network television had it, the Starr report was available on the Internet in its entirety when mere excerpts could be had on broadcast media, and a day in advance of its newspaper publication. For print, the effect, while incomplete, is "a washing away, an overwhelming, of traditional gatekeeping in the media" just as the church's role as gatekeeper was washed away by moveable type.(Levinson 1999, 11). Already, McLuhan had pinpointed the invention of the photocopier as the beginning of self-publishing and the reversal of the fortunes of media gatekeepers. Levinson poses another quandary for online news, when he outlines McLuhan's 'rear-view mirror' perspective on new technology, whereby each technology is mistakenly seen as a progression from previous technologies, and without consideration of its independent

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[8] This addresses the idea of the Internet as a platform for other media, rather than being a medium in its own right, or as a collection of technologies. For convenience and simplicity, this qualification is usually implicit here in references to the Internet.

effects. The telephone was the talking telegraph and the radio the wireless telegraph, although in each case the newer arrival was radically different. If so, the question might be asked whether online news formats have been thought of as little more than electronic newspapers or asynchronous broadcasts.

New media, says Levinson, should be interpreted with reference to McLuhan's tetrad – the four ways in which a medium can be interrogated. What does it enhance or amplify in the culture? What does it obsolesce or push out of prominence? What does it retrieve from the past, the realm of the previously obsolesced? And (looking to the future) what does the medium reverse or flip into when it reaches the limits of its potential? He compares the convergence of communications technologies to Hegel's idea of the spirit of the age, and the ongoing tensions between media reversing into each other to the dialectic.

True to the idea of new media encompassing old ones, the Internet encompasses (or is in the process of encompassing) most media that have come before it. But the written word is the common denominator and this enhanced writing is the net's ubiquitous *lingua franca*. Where Postman (1993) decries the effect on reading and writing, Levinson takes the view that because it is a prior media that has become visible, the written word is becoming more publicly explicable. Media have unintended consequences: the intentions of its inventors, and the expectations of its purveyors, are largely irrelevant to the use and impact of media. Electronic media in general, but PCs in particular, have "accentuated the human penchant to lead, to hunt and gather information on our own, to make our own decisions, rather than be spoon-fed by central authority…" (Levinson 1999, 91)

The connected PC has three parents – the book, television and the telephone. Text offline may be considered a hot medium, but text online has the potential for instant interactivity, and hypertext makes the web the quintessential case of a cool system "catnip to anyone with a taste for

intellectual inquiry"(1999, 117). Asymmetrical, threaded communication such as that found in discussion groups heightens the impact of the mix, and the tempo of such discussion is ideal for intellectual dialogue.

Levinson says that in this intelligent media environment, journalistic gatekeeping is one of the features of former media that will be altered. The printed book erased the church's ability to act as gatekeeper, but in its demand for standards in spelling and factual accuracy, engendered a need for a new type of gatekeeper. Where before spelling was variable, now it became a badge of erudition. But, while advertising freed the press from government, it imposed its own need for gatekeeping, by constraining the 'news hole' and requiring that great care be taken in what could be published. Newspaper gatekeeping is the most insidious, because newspapers generally hold themselves out as presenting 'All the news that's fit to print'. Letters to the editor are no answer to this, because they in turn are subject to space constraints and gatekeeping.[9] Classic network broadcasting is even more in need of gatekeeping – more expensive to produce and hobbled by a non-negotiable time restraint. While the Internet is poised to tear down the gates entirely, the assumption that gatekeeping is needed persists so strongly that it could survive the advent of the medium that makes it unnecessary.

Levinson proposes a more democratic and useful role for former gatekeepers. In the digital age we may be able to transform the gatekeeper into an evaluator – gate-keeping as an endorsement, not as punishment by total exclusion. He refers to two examples of divergent approaches to gatekeeping: Amazon.com allows any and all to review books, and also takes reviews from conventional publishers. BarnesandNoble.com, which grew out of an older, pre-Internet entity, boasts that it only uses "professional" reviewers. A further

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[9] And that gatekeeping need not be passive. The author's first experience of working in one newspaper was to be asked to compose an angry letter to the editor.

progression is that online editors[10] or gatekeepers become matchmakers, in the way that Amazon recommends further titles. (This occurs in a different way in news websites via the links that editors choose to put within or adjacent to an individual story. Here, there is no apparent attempt to match individuals to online resources; rather the aim is to match those resources to the story. In this way, the reader is opened to the possibility of other than a pre-planned encounter.)

What happens when the web becomes "pre-eminent ratifier of culture and reality" (1999, 154)? Text, says Levinson, is the key. Radio prized orality and Roosevelt; television prized staged, one-way visuality and Reagan; but the interactive, text-driven web favours literacy (Kennedy). Reagan is unimaginable in a serious online dialogue of text.

Archiving and retrievability online translate into accountability. Online, the past is as readily accessible as real time. It is as easy to write on the web as it is to speak, but anything spoken on the web is in principle spoken forever. But it is also possible that the web will 'reverse' into propaganda. In the 1997 sci-fi film Starship Troopers, all hypertext links lead to more propaganda, and the only real choice future web browsers have is to click Exit. The triumph of choice on the web reverses into the illusion of choice.[11] Government, not corporate power, is the main threat to freedom of choice in the future, he claims, although he points to the frustration of government in controlling information, not only on the Internet, as in the striking down on free speech grounds of the Communications Decency Act in 1997 by the US Supreme Court (Stevens 1997), but also, for example, in small media such as Soviet samizdat.

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[10] It is worth noting here that in the US 'editor' may refer not only to the head of a publication or department, but can also denote a copy editor, or sub-editor.

[11] Choice is already qualified in some online services, such as AOL and, allegedly, Unison, and it is also possible that choice could become a paid-for commodity, as in television.

The Internet, says Levinson, is a remedial medium – it is a reversal of the inadequacies of television, books, newspapers, education, work patterns, and almost every medium and its effect that has come before. Relevant to this agenda is Elizabeth Einstein's comprehensive account of the role of print. This is so not only because of the frequent comparisons between the advent of the Internet and Gutenberg's invention of moveable type, but because she makes a convincing case, far removed from the heat of the debate over the Internet, for the central importance of the medium (Eisenstein 1979).

Eisenstein anticipates Kelly's (Kelly 1998) thoughts on the invisibility of major technologies, whereby it is argued that the more embedded technologies become, the more important they are. Despite our myopia to the importance of print, the more abundant printed materials have become, the more taken for granted they are, the more profound their impact. Typography is still indispensable to the transmission of the most sophisticated technological skills, underlies the modern knowledge explosion and much of modern art, and accounts for much of what is singularly characteristic of mid-twentieth century culture. But the more printed materials accumulate, the more we are inclined to overlook them in favour of more recent media like television (Eisenstein 1979, 17). Eisenstein points to the greater danger of forcing an evolutionary model, based in the more commonly expressed caution and emphasis on continuities, on a revolutionary situation and in turn casts those who wish to emphasise continuity between scribe and printer as 'sweepingly evolutionary'. She quotes Francis Bacon:

> *"We should note the force, effect, and consequences of inventions which are nowhere more conspicuous than in those three which are unknown to the ancients, namely printing, gunpowder and the compass. For these three have changed the appearance and state of the whole world ..."* Francis Bacon, Novum Organum, Aphorism 129

With much Internet activity often uncritically characterised as reflecting the essence of the spirit of entrepreneurship, it's interesting to note the qualities of early printers. Eisenstein observes that frequently the profit motive, while not denied, was combined with motives that were altruistic, and at times even evangelical, a pattern that may also be seen to apply strongly to Internet culture. "A variety of interests were served, and not merely those represented by economic man. (Eisenstein 1979, 23). Another aspect of the adoption of print that echoes clearly in today's Internet, in particular with regard to McLuhan's 'rear-view mirror' as applied by Levinson, is her description of the early use of print. The initial increase in output in the second half of the fifteenth century was so sharp that contemporary observers described it as supernatural, whether it was seen as either a blessing or a curse. And even if a printer like Peter Schoeffer tried to duplicate manuscripts as closely as he could, (as today an online provider might largely reflect its print-based content) the absence of change in product was combined with a complete change in methods of production, providing seeming continuity through what was in fact radical change.

The effects of wider dissemination of books did not relate simply to circulation. Instead, Eisenstein emphasises the cross-fertilisation that the new medium allowed. Not only were more copies of a given text being produced, but different texts were now brought closer together for individual readers. Even a printer who duplicated a seemingly antiquated back catalogue was still providing the reader with a richer diet than had been supplied by the scribe.

Eisenstein notes that in historical discussion of the New Republic of Letters, and of the strands of events surrounding men of letters leading up to the French Revolution, seldom if ever do the specific effects of the advent of printing inform the discussion. However, she argues that both the thrust of Enlightenment propaganda and the invisible meeting of minds that came with its diffusion cannot be understood without taking these effects into account. A new form of social action emerged that was indirect and at a distance, but,

despite the necessary secrecy and often ephemeral nature of Enlightenment propaganda, the real life printing press, driven by real life characters, created a new kind of public for *idées forces*, even if the revolution did foment in the minds of solitary readers.

While her placing of print at the centre of revolution puts her in broad agreement with McLuhan's theories, Eisenstein disputes the limitations imposed on 'typographic man' by McLuhan and others such as Mumford, arguing that the reading of novels probably helped sustain humanitarian movements, and new and imaginative faculties were brought into play, in addition to powers of calculation and abstraction, through access to print (1979, 150, 151). She also accuses McLuhan of skimping on historical analysis, and expresses strong reservations at the ability of the communications studies approach to grapple with such an important historical feature. But the main thrust of her work in the context of this study is that it centres the medium, and lends credence to those who link the Internet to new communications possibilities.

2.2(v) Reality and the lifeworld in the public sphere

Thus far, the disquisition on media has related largely to general principles of truth and democracy, related to the role of changing media. The lines of debate drawn out in this dynamic are also extended to discussion of the Internet. However, another important strand of interpretation is provided by Habermas, whose work has opened a wide seam of discussion of the potential for the reversal of the refeudalisation of the public sphere and the re-establishment of rational critical discourse. Habermas develops the largely pessimistic analysis of the Frankfurt School. The bourgeois public sphere arose with the development of capitalism in 17th and 18th century coffee houses in Europe, although a public sphere had previously existed in the agora of classical Greece (Stevenson 1995; Webster 1995). They opened a social space where the better argument, not the status quo, held sway. Through the principle of publicity – which holds that culture is inter-

subjectively produced and should be opened up to rational questioning – it was established that the public use of reason was superior to its private utilisation. But this ideal started to recede when in the 19th century the emergence of monopoly capitalism re-commercialised a briefly unshackled press. This, along with the development of broadcast media, has meant that commercial culture has been consumed in private, requiring no response. Once again, symbolic display, stage management and trivialisation come to the fore to effect the hegemonic exclusion of a more informed culture, and the ascendancy of a depoliticised one. Adorno characterises modern culture as childlike, with a regressive desire for the repetition of unchallenging cultural formulas. But, where the early Frankfurt School turns to high art for meaning, Habermas sees potential in the reconstitution of the public sphere, and it is here that his theory intersects with the broad debate on media and democracy, in particular on the role of public service broadcasting (Williams 1989), but also latterly on the Internet.

Poster acknowledges Habermas's departure from the older Frankfurt School by locating the point of critique in the "lifeworld", the egalitarian space of the everyday rather than in the elite moment of high culture (Poster 1995). Mass media have potential to play an emancipatory role by bringing information to a large audience, but overall his stance is that the media cannot provide an ideal speech situation or a democratic public sphere. Benjamin, writing in 1936, saw film as promoting equality and critical reception, bringing art to the people, although he allows that this depends on how it is deployed. Baudrillard used as an example of simulation the phenomenon of the opinion poll, which changed the mode of existence of political opinion. Media simulations, says Poster, disrupt and refute the modern social logic of representation. Poster goes further than Baudrillard's radical notion of the simulacrum, arguing that his work is still infused with a sense of the media as unidirectional, and so overlooks the potential of decentralised media such as the Internet. Nevertheless, he says that Baudrillard's writings form a transition to a second media age, "one in which the constraints of broadcasting will be

breached so that the politics of the media can emerge in other than modernist terms" (1995, 18). This meshes with Lyotard's advocacy of a post-modernist shift to the 'little story' – celebrating difference and escaping the metanarrative of Enlightenment instrumentality. In Poster's analysis, the Internet is a successor to the telephone in terms of decentralisation and the universal exchangeability of the positions of sender and receiver. This many-to-many system is set in opposition to the concept of a broadcast model of few senders beaming or printing messages to the mass audience. Modernist theory sees the Internet in a binary way – socialist v. capitalist control – but doesn't admit to the possibilities of new cultural formations of the self, as does the Internet. [12] But Poster counsels caution against the utopian impulse that such technologies engender, and reminds us that Hungary before World War I initially used the telephone as a one-way broadcast system and restricted dissemination to the ruling class.

Much has been made of the growth of virtual communities on the net (1995; Turkle 1996) but Poster disputes the opposition of 'virtual' and 'real' communities and especially the idea that the former compensates for the loss of the latter. He argues that for both, not just the virtual variety, it is the treatment of communications as meaningful and important that makes them vital to their members, and points to the precautionary tale of an online 'rape' to ground expectations of virtuality. Nevertheless, he asserts that, when virtual reality technology becomes as commonplace as television is today, "then surely reality will have been multiplied" (Poster 1995, 40). In later writing, Poster dismisses critics of broadcast media as nostalgic jeremiads, but also argues that the Internet takes media beyond the cultural studies understanding of reception because of its many-to-many nature, its enabling of simultaneous reception, but also direct alteration and redistribution of cultural objects, its divorcing of communicative action from national or

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[12] Already, the concept has found expression in online news in Ireland, with online.ie inviting users to 'Find Yourself'.

spatial relations, its provision of instantaneous global contact, and its insertion of the subject into a machine apparatus that is networked (Poster 1999).

Poster cites Habermas's 1962 condemnation of 'new' (electronic broadcast) media as splitting the public into a minority of specialists on one side and an uncritical mass of consumers on the other, although such a structure seems far more easily applied to broadcast media than to Internet technologies. He accepts that electronic writing advances the qualities of print, fostering critical thinking by the reader, and helping shape the autonomous rational individual. But it also subverts print culture. Word processing makes texts volatile; multi-authoring is more feasible, hypertext introduces new linkages and search tools produce new texts. Bulletin boards are frequently anonymous; in digital conferences electronic text replaces not print but face to face communications. As Derrida argued, all text can be deconstructed and the 'logocentric' meaning subverted by the reader, so electronic writing speaks to the instability and uncertain authorship of text (Poster 1995, 70). For Poster, uncertainty and contingency are key: Weiner's "cybernetic" theory sets out a mathematical ratio of information to noise as the basis for a theory of communications, but Poster cautions against the conceit that theory is independent of the world – and says that the first principle now is that there is no first principle.

In Poster's view, the conception of online communities as a revival of the public sphere is mistaken. The protean nature of identity on the Internet is not consonant with forming a stable political community; and dissent on the net does not lead to consensus, which is the aim of public debate and rational argument. The net is entirely new, and historic precedent cannot predict its effects on democracy (1995).

Webster robustly rejects post-modernism's insistence that there is no truth, but only versions of truth (Webster 1995). Merely because events and analyses have to be communicated and therefore established in language does not

mean that truth is merely a language game. News 'worthy of the term' is representational, even if it is imperfect: comparing news reports of the same issues and events may bring out different versions and emphases, but there is also much in common between them. News journalists do respond to the empirical reality. Without this anchoring, one ends up in Baudrillard's assertion that the Gulf War never happened, or was merely a war-game simulation (Baudrillard 1992). However, this does not translate into support for the concept of a reinvigorated public sphere. New communications technologies may be capable of helping to re-open the public sphere, but Webster places these as struggling against the tide created by global networks dominated by government agencies, transnational corporations and international media conglomerates – "the commodification of knowledge, the assault on public service institutions, the emphasis on persuasion, the escalation of advertising-oriented media".

The perception of the role of the public sphere is shared by Giddens, within the concept of risk society (Giddens 1999). He sees media destroying the public space by means of relentless trivialisation and personalising of issues, while the growth of multinational media corporations gives undemocratic geopolitical power to tycoons. However, Giddens also bears witness to the power of media to democratise within the context of the risk society. Television and the communications revolution produced more active, reflexive citizens in the former communist states of Eastern Europe. Now, they engender disillusionment in mature democracies, where corruption is increasingly exposed and tolerance of power cliques such as Britain's 'old boy' network has diminished, something that is germane in the Irish context of scandals over cronyism. The old mechanisms of government no longer work in a society where citizens and those in power live in the same information environment, because of the intrinsically open framework of global communications.

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Trench and O'Donnell, in their discussion of the use of the Internet by voluntary and community groups in Ireland, acknowledge a more complex view of a plurality of parallel public spheres reflecting the needs of sub-groups in society (Trench and O'Donnell 1997). A related perspective is Anna Malina's concern that the potential of local community networks is in danger of being turned to the use of institutional and economic hegemonies, if it is capitalised, albeit compassionately, into market values by social, civic and economic entrepreneurs (Malina 1999).

A useful overview and advancement of the debate is provided by Slevin, who also treats the public sphere with direct reference to the Internet (Slevin 2000). Once again, the tension can be coarsely described as between potential and pessimism, reception and representation. Slevin recognises that Habermas's account of the public sphere and its refeudalisation fails to foresee the effects of the Internet. He stresses the Internet's opening up of "unprecedented opportunities for participatory opinion formation, making it even more urgent for us to explore how individuals and collectives might actively participate in critical discussion and debate, and how this participation may be liable to be thwarted" (Slevin 2000, p. 78). Unlike mass media, the Internet cannot be dismissed as non-dialogical.

While he defends the role of audience research perspectives, he sees two-way Internet communications as transforming communications by intensifying reciprocity and interdependence, and leading to the development of more inclusive information environments (he provides examples of three African websites) not as a simple effect of the existence of the World Wide Web, but as a result of policies better suited to dialogue, empowerment and solidarity, and to coping with globally-scaled inequalities.

His more complex and inclusive approach to the Internet is summed up in his refusal to see hope in a straightforward revival of the public sphere, but in his salvaging a potential role for Internet publicness through the implementation

of Habermas's four conditions for the creation of successful deliberative arrangements: the need to keep controversial questions open, the need to maintain criticisable rationality, the need to preserve overall goals, principles and rights, and the recognition of moral positions. Given these conditions, the Internet can at least partly live up to some of the great claims made for it.

2.3 Economic and political perspectives of ICTs

2.3(i) A revolution, and for what?

Debate on the Internet's potential for transformation of human communication often tends towards polarisation:

> "*Crudely summarised, the 'left' political response is usually populated by a mongrel assortment of anarchists, pacifists, Luddites, and those benign curmudgeons or academic humanists that the Unabomber found so touchingly harmless. On the right we find the increasingly popular sentiments of post-human pragmatism, a neo-extropian blend of pseudo-scientific rationalism that embraces a range of techno advocates, including futurists, ravers, Wired magazine, and the 'chaos' clique of scientific research in non-linear dynamics*" (Cassidy 1998, ix).

While such distinctions are apparent, and are necessarily reflected throughout this study, it is more useful to concentrate here on the insights that both 'sides' can bring to perspectives of the information environment that journalism will inhabit in new media.

2.3(ii) A frictionless market

If for some the Internet demands regulatory guidance and encouragement in its role as a bulwark of public discourse, for others the hidden hand of the market is what the net is about. This Internet comprises inherent checks and balances aided by powerful and supple technology, and in the dominant vision in official communications, in much uncritical press coverage of net economies, and in the rhetoric of Internet industry marketing, is best left by government to get on with business: This is the Internet as interpreted through the prisms of booming rates of adoption, and of the expressed need

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for freedom to compete with minimum regulation. In the words of Esther Dyson, the Internet "will change all our lives. It will suck power away from central governments, mass media, and big business". The net gives 'awesome' power to individuals, for good or bad: to discover information across the world or to spread lies across the world, to undermine central authorities, and to aid dispersed groups to whatever ends (Dyson 1998, 6). The Internet will make it easier for "people who want to change the world" to operate without high overheads. As economies of scale dissipate, so production of intellectual property is being moved back into the home, bringing with it a proliferation of content competing for attention (Dyson 1998, 105).

Self-regulation, disclosure and transparency would act to prevent those in power from overstepping the mark. Informed "customers and citizens" are key to this process, and, "That requires a vigorous, free press – and an educated, informed citizenry to pay attention to it" (1998, 129).

Dyson's schema for the regulation of content are market and technology-based. New Internet capacities and techniques such as caching, mirroring, linking and framing all have potential for copyright and information ownership conflict, made manifest in the case of Microsoft Sidewalk v Ticketmaster or in the case of a settled action against TotalNews, which framed MSNBC, CNN, the Washington Post and the LA Times. Content ratings services based on PICS (Platform for Internet Content Selection) will be set up by entrepreneurs and investors. Business models will range from stand-alone services or software to alliances with communities and other content businesses. In the ultimate expression of self-policing, ratings services will be rated by other ratings services.[13] In any event, Dyson argues, the

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[13] PICS is used in CyberPatrol, NetNanny, MS Explorer and other programs. RSACi (Recreative Software Advisory Council, Internet), meanwhile, uses "objective criteria" implemented on Internet search sites.

protection of freedom of speech, combined with the ungovernability of the net, will combine to preclude heavy regulation (as demonstrated by AOL being prevented from acting against spammers, and the anonymous re-publication of copyrighted Church of Scientology writings in the face of court interdictions).

The empowerment that Dyson speaks of is market empowerment. Although less radical than some of the libertarian rhetoric of some of her associates, the understanding she puts forward is heavily skewed towards Internet actors as businesses or as consumers. For Dyson, Internet protest is about consumer rights and the addressing of dissatisfaction with products and services: she cites the case of Intel's faulty 1995 Pentium chip and the subsequent outbreak of adverse publicity over the net that forced the company to grant replacements and refunds and to apologise for its initially arrogant handling of the affair (1998, 27).

She defends companies and institutions' freedom to collect data on individuals, arguing that outlawing cookies, slowing the free flow of information and other such measures would hinder customisation. However, Dyson favours anonymous remailers such as the controversial anon.penet.fi because they are the "self-appointed guarantors of freedom" (1998, 235) informally preventing abuses without recourse to the heavy hand of law. Where anonymity is abused by criminals, she says, these are easy to trace because of their persistence and predictable habits, such as sending harassing mail to a few people or publishing copyrighted material through the same few points.

An essential backdrop to the system of self-policing is the need for full disclosure. In order to establish credentials (of a doctor, for example) and avoid possible conflicts of interest, users will gravitate towards 'defined communities' or search for badges of validation. Third party verification systems such as TRUSTe (www.truste.com), created by the Electronic

Freedom Frontier, will be in demand; P3, the Platform for Privacy Preferences, is an extension of PICS to allow it to label privacy and data practices, while consultants see a business opportunity in providing online privacy audits.

Toffler and Kelly provide the radical economic basis for Dyson's frictionless marketplace. They emphasise, above all else, information and the information economy, in a fundamental progression of the idea of the post-industrial society as propounded by Daniel Bell (Webster 1995). Toffler theorises that, where for the last 300 years the principal struggle within industrialised nations has been over the distribution of wealth, the coming struggle for power will turn into a struggle over the distribution of and access to knowledge, and this will apply in every human institution (Toffler 1990, 20). This latter is borne out in the dispute between the EU and the US over privacy and access to personal information (Davies 1998), and by contested views of copyright on the net (Deutsch 1998). Deutsch focuses in particular on tensions between service providers and the 'Content Community' – cinema, recording, publishing, licensing and software industries – which has been engaged in a global strategy to create new copyright rights for the digital age. Copyright legislation introduced in the US and by the EU to implement the World Intellectual Property Organization treaties would increase liability for service providers, whether or not the service provider had any control or knowledge of an infringing transmission. In the US, service providers may face an untenable choice between flouting privacy legislation by monitoring traffic, or neglecting copyright protections by staying in ignorance of what is passing through their servers. Two cases illustrate the legal uncertainties: in Playboy Enterprises v. Frena, the court held that merely operating a bulletin board system imposed direct liability. In Religious Technology Center v. Netcom, the court refused to find a service provider liable for copyright infringement, because it did not have 'actual knowledge' of the infringement (Deutsch 1998, 8, 9, 22).

Toffler refers to 'mosaic democracy' – representing the end of mass democracy as societies fragment into smaller groups. Technology permits customisation and market niching, and media multiply and serve ever-narrower audiences. In this scheme, small vested interest groups may be able to wield the balance of power (Toffler 1990, 244).

Already, the rise of the 'info-agenda' has seen a stark increase in the number of information-related laws in the US and elsewhere. This coincides with the fact that a public whose livelihood increasingly derives from manipulation of symbols is more sensitive to their power significance and more conscious of the 'right to know'. Authorities around the world have been passing freedom of information laws, as well as privacy legislation (1990, 313).

Toffler also predicts conflict between information-rich and poor states to erupt over the issue of copyright. Like Levinson, Toffler argues that a system of protection of intellectual property needs to be in place to protect innovation. Meanwhile, the new economy is tightly tied not only to formal, textual knowledge but also to popular culture and imagery. "The old lines between showbusiness and politics, leisure and work, news and entertainment, are all crashing and we are exposed to a hurricane of often fragmented, kaleidoscopic images" (1990,. 328).

In Toffler's emancipatory analysis, the poor are not excluded. Network effects, technological convergence and the economies they produce will ensure inclusion and universality. Convergence of television and computers will shift power from broadcast networks to users. Ubiquity of the technology will be ensured by self-interest: the more users in the network, the more valuable the network. Between them, interactivity, mobility, convertibility, connectivity, ubiquity and globalisation will produce a revolutionary nervous system for the planet, a technological realisation of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's Noosphere (de Chardin 1964).

Dissent and freedom of expression is central to this system rather than threatening to it. "For the vast extension of the global neural system coincides with the most important change in the function of free expression since at least the French and American revolutions" (Toffler 1990, 362). Because growth arises from cultures provoked by new and often dissenting ideas, the protection of freedom of expression is on the agenda for everyone, not just intellectuals and civil libertarians.

In accordance with Toffler's analysis, in an examination of the Silicon Valley economic culture, Schement finds that private property and the pursuit of profit are the driving forces behind the commoditisation of information, and draws a distinction between the information society as unmodified capitalism and the information society as post-industrial, posing the question as to whether information will replace capital as a primary resource (Schement 1989).

Kelly expands the transformative theme in his discussion of network dynamics and their effect on an economy, and also challenges the validity of mass media. (Kelly 1998). His model reverses the notion of intelligence as coming from the centre. Using a naturalistic metaphor that coincides with Levinson's thinking, he proposes the notion of the swarm. Millions of dumb PC nodes connected in a neural network create the intelligence of the web. This hive mind is formed of the ubiquitous computing and pervasive connections of the network. Some minimal leadership, or government, is required to steer it through complex decisions, but decentralised and autonomous networks are the key to the benefits of the new economy over the coming decades (Kelly 1998, 13-19).

The network has growth built into it, through what Kelly calls the law of increasing returns. At first, there's no content because there's no audience, and there's no audience because there's no content. But, as in the case of the fax machine, small increases produce large results. The value of a physical

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network increases exponentially as the number of nodes increases. But the value of a social network multiplies even faster, because such networks include possibilities for three-way and many-way communications (1998, 24-25). Openness and democracy are also pre-requisites: network externalities – which are benefits brought about external to the operations of individual operators – tend to concentrate success and produce apparent monopolies. But the logic of the net inherently lowers prices and raises quality. The danger of 'monovation' can be averted by moving key intellectual properties into the public domain, by creating open systems and by releasing software source code democratically (1998, 27, 28). Evidence of this process is provided by the success of the Apache web server program and the Linux computer operating system, both based on open code.

More specifically for media, the network economy is characterised by falling prices and increasing supply – an inversion of the traditional economic curve. This includes headlines and stock quotes: once some titles such as the New York Times attempted to charge for access to online news, and real-time stock quotes were a premium information service. Now, they have become so widely available that they have been standardised, and must conform to a generic web browser specification. Magazine publishers already behave as if the product costs nothing to produce, relying on advertising to subsidise cover price or by simply giving it away. No geographical or temporal boundaries exist, and relations in the network economy will grow to rival those of the nation state (Kelly 1998, 72)

It is now possible to address niche middle-sized audiences – 'the hard middle' – in ways more effective than that pursued by magazines. The emerging broadband network offers many relations that magazine subscription could not. These include spontaneous reply, symmetrical bandwidth,[14] true peerage

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14 Where Moore's Law has accurately predicted a doubling of computer processor power every 18 months,(George) Gilder's Law holds that total bandwidth of communications systems will triple every 12 months.

communication, archives, filtering, and community memory. This will produce much that is meaningless, rumour or paranoia, so the 'over-reaching' role of big media will remain and even be enhanced (Kelly 1998, 105, 106). Audiences are no longer stable, but become 'flash crowds', as seen in peak loads for event websites such as the Kasparov v. Deep Blue chess match, or eve-of-election coverage on CNN (1998, 107). Relationship technology, or R-tech, is becoming increasingly important, as firms strive to anticipate what the customer wants, as seen in Firefly technology or variants such as that used by Amazon.com. The information generated to anticipate desires and to suggest further reading or music choices is not the result of centrally deployed computing power, but of collaborative sorting among many nodes (as in Amazon's suggested reading lists and reader reviews or, more recently, in Napster's music swapping network). People do not act purely as individuals: what people want in news, for example, is not the 'Daily Me', but the 'Daily You and Me', the publication their close circle of friends read (Kelly 1998, 123).

Others such as Negroponte (Negroponte 1996) and Gates (Gates 1995) address more purely technological speculations. Gates in particular stresses the ability of the reader to customise content that will traverse space and time:

> *"You will be able to specify how long you want newscasts to last. This will be possible because you'll be able to have each of your news stories selected individually. The newscast assembled for and delivered only to you might include world news from NCB, the BBC, CNN, also the Los Angeles Times, with the weather report from a favourite local TV meteorologist – or from any private meteorologist who wants to offer his or her own service. You will be able to request longer stories on the subjects that particularly interest you and just highlights on others. If, while you are watching the news cast, you want more than has been put together, you will easily be able to request more background detail, either from another news broadcast or from file information" (1995 118).*

Heavy investment by media in such services will be required but will be worthwhile as numbers online grow to 90% of the population (presumably US).

Tewksbury foresees plummetiing call charges, a massive increase in Internet telephony, and 'tele-immersion' via IP, fuzzy logic which will enable computers to process 'partial truth'; neural networks will simulate human brain intelligence so that systems will be capable of learning from experience, allowing advanced concept-based searches for information, filtering and indexing methods, and expert systems will provide advanced forecasting and analysis capabilities; intelligent agents or (ro)'bots' will serve as personal assistants, searching, navigating and filtering information according to the individual's likes or dislikes (Tewksbury 2000, 4-7). These will come in the context of massive bandwidth increases: The US's Next Generation Internet initiative (NGI), has been developing technologies that achieve speeds up to 1,000 times faster than today's Internet. Internet 2 joins the efforts of 160 US universities together in a programme which is also developing the backbone network Abilene, capable of 2.4 gigabits per second, or 85,000 times faster than today's modems.

But, argues Silverstone, new media is not a matter of network speeds and artificial intelligence (Silverstone 1999). We still have choices and dilemmas to face. Technological change is not divorced from ideology, and ideologies, as masks of material interests, remain "even in the innocence of the Internet". Preoccupation with the interweaving of technology and capital has arguably blinded us to human capital, to the realisation that technology is as much if not more about skills and competence, literacy and access, as it is about investment and interfaces (Silverstone 1999, 10-12).

The application of transformative theory to business management has also begun, as new experts emerge to advise on strategies for survival and prosperity in the new information economy. Davis and Meyer put forward

the notion of a 'connected' economy in which businesses will have to abandon traditional methods and 'blur' themselves and their products (Davis and Meyer 1998). They warn that distinctions between product and service, buyer and seller, home and work are becoming blurred by the primacy of knowledge and complex webs of intangible factors centred on knowledge. Now, attention is the most precious productive resource, to the extent that advertisers on the web reward users by means of systems 'earn-as-you-browse' systems such as CyberGold which in turn provide businesses with invaluable market data and individual customer profiles. Similarly, O'Connor and Galvin outline possibilities for interacting with customers and for gathering data on them, refer to market research companies pooling data for medium-sized businesses, and observe that market segmentation is shifting from a demographic base to a behavioural base (O'Connor and Galvin 1997). The pursuit of such strategies tends to reinforce niching and could indicate a shift in business communications away from mass media towards more finely directed relationships based on interactive media.

Dertousoz tempers the technological determinism of Third Wave thinking with a social dimension. As he puts it, "'Discussing the humie and techie issues together is important" (Dertouzos 1997, 52), and what is needed is "a sociotechnical combination of policies and technologies that approximate a nation's status quo of information handling, the making of international agreements, and re-examination of how policies, national and international, towards information need to change" (1997, 292).

Nevertheless, his analysis is based on the rule of market forces, not social intervention. He argues that the concept of hardware and software providers trying to limit access to a limited range of services would be like having a roads system built by one car company that deliberately made it difficult to drive other manufacturers' cars. But eventually, such companies must surrender to the 'Information Marketplace', which will be driven by consumer demand for choice. But not everything about this marketplace is

revolutionary, and it is not inevitable that it will promote egalitarianism. Despite its democratising potential, the telephone did not topple monarchies, perhaps because of fear of monitoring. Social realities rather than a simplified system of enabling technologies should inform debate: "the overarching question is ultimately non-technical" as it is essentially a human choice for governments, organisations, and citizens (1997, 224).

Dertousoz also makes an important observation that is often overlooked. US GNIP (Gross National Information Product) stands at 60% of GNP. The Information Marketplace will touch every human activity, yet he says media companies and journalists alike are excited about content – mostly entertainment content – even though this represents only 5% of the economy.

2.3(iii) Continuity and change

If liberation and independence are features of the new technologies for some, these perspectives are counter-balanced by a more dystopian view of technology generally. For Clark, radical social change has been sacrificed in the evolving relations around science, innovation and technology that have facilitated increases in economic productivity. Generally, Clark holds that there exists a complex web of interrelationships between technical conditions and the social order. In particular, he proposes that, after the industrial revolution, the problem for most societies is how to people can cope both individually and institutionally with continuous and rapid technological change (Clark 1985, 22).

Clark is pessimistic on the potential of technology to engender change of itself. Given the interrelationships between society, economic forms and technology, he concludes that technology and science itself have become endogenous to society. In addition to emphasising Smith's division of labour, he takes a re-analysis of Marx's view of relations between science and

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production which posits the view that Marx was not simply an economic determinist who preached that growth in scientific knowledge is merely a response to economic demand. Marx also argued that the systematic application of scientific principles to economic production could only be achieved when the industrial system was fully mechanised – taken out of the limitations of the human – and where the separation of the worker from his product was complete. Economic gain is achieved at the price of social change (Clark 1985, 45).

It would not be surprising if some media workers grappling with digital systems could readily recognise their situation in Braverman's description of the impact of technological change on work (Braverman 1974, cited in Clark, 1985, 38). Reacting to then vogue-ish notions of time and motion seen as turning workers into machines, Braverman argues that management is motivated by a psychological desire to control workers, that the labour process turns workers into mindless wage slaves, not comprehending the production process as a whole, and that de-skilling of work is an increasingly pervasive phenomenon, giving rise to the need to address the link between skill content and job security.

The transformative theory is also powerfully attacked at its roots by Webster's critique of the notion of the post-industrial society as proposed by Bell. (Webster 1995). Webster accuses Bell of 'neo-evolutionism', in that he thinks in terms of a progression from pre-industrial to post-industrial societies, and of historicism and teleological thinking – even though Bell explicitly rejected such charges (1995, 32). Webster outlines Bell's analysis of increases in productivity bringing about a white collar, information-based 'service society' developing a more planned, self-conscious and caring trajectory because of the increase in professionals in health, education, research and government. Society would shift from an 'economising' mode towards a 'sociologising' mode. However, Webster observes that that this has not happened in actual service-heavy societies such as Switzerland. He points out that industrial

employment in Britain remained at a stable 45-50% from 1840 to 1980, and argues that the dramatic reduction to less than a third since 1980 came about through recession and government policies (1995, 37-41). Webster stresses that service occupations are not confined to ephemeral or non-material activities but are also common within the industrial sector as an expression of the of division of labour. Bell's 'primacy of theoretical knowledge' is challenged as vague and ill defined. Education certificates represent merely the inflation of qualifications and their link to employment. Similarly, much R&D is applied rather than theoretical, and researchers continue to act as 'servants of capital' (1995, 48, 49).

Webster outlines a post-Fordist understanding of how new malleable technologies may reverse the accepted trend of deskilling of labour and produce an upskilling, whereby workers become more specialised and more involved in the production process. This replacement of assembly line industries by high skills, niche production, small firms in a new globalised environment also offers a counterpoint to the theme of transnational giantism in media, and Webster identifies the notion as particularly relevant to professional employees in cultural industries – writers, teachers, television producers – who already deal reflexively with information (1995, 159, 160). Nevertheless, globalisation of communications means that, along with massive growth in information-based industries such as financial services, and in volumes of financial data traffic, in any year a similar set of Hollywood movies will top the chart in various countries. This has a significant part to play in the global economic system, providing an underpinning social milieu for economic forces, if not directly stimulating demand for western-style goods (1995, 144).

Winston focuses harshly on the technological determinism of theories of the Information Revolution, arguing that over the past three centuries Western civilisation has displayed fundamental continuity despite enormous changes in detail (Winston 1998). The idea of the Information Revolution springs from

historical ignorance of pre-digital technologies, and both the popular and supposedly scholarly hyperbole surrounding the area engenders pontificating by both technophiles and jeremiads who exhibit the same traits of vivid imagination and poor judgment. Instead, Winston seeks to place technological change, and in particular change in communications technology, within a consistent model, where technology is the expression, or performance, of underlying scientific competence. Central to the model is the progression from competence to performance across the social sphere, where powerful accelerating and braking forces operate.

Winston introduces the 'law' of the suppression of radical potential, which describes how constraints operate to allow the social fabric absorb the new 'machine'. Business are not going to invent technologies that put them out of business; a stable trading environment will be preserved, and the market works to control 'cut-throat' change and competition, so that technologies take decades rather than years to gain acceptance as inventions in the marketplace. This mechanism also acts to bring newcomers into the fold, rather than letting the market be overthrown from without (Winston 1998, 11). Such reasoning could readily be applied to consideration of the media industry's response to the Internet. Can it be argued, for example, that there is a supervening social need for more diverse sources of news? Do existing media and other interests act to suppress Internet media technologies, or to slow their adoption until they can absorb their impact within existing commercial and institutional frameworks?

Winston fits the development of the Internet within this model, and argues that it cannot claim what he calls radical exceptionalism. Diffusion of the Internet, he claims, has been no faster than any preceding communication technology (although he fails to support this contention with relative statistics) (Winston 1998, 321). He traces back to the 1940s the development of the various technologies that go to make up the Internet, and argues that it is in this time frame that its progress, speeded and impeded by social factors,

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must be measured. The distant operation of a single computer by a telephone wire was accomplished by Stibitz with the IBM Model 1 in 1940, leading to mainframe timeshare systems being sold by the 1960s, and wide application later on. Cybernetics and information theory is traced back to Weiner's wartime work on predictive gunsights, which provided the genesis of 'cybernetics', and to the formulae developed by Shannon and Weaver at Bell Labs in 1949, designed to optimise telephone systems efficiency. It is a technical observation, but also an important social one, and with downstream consequences for news publishers, that cybernetics and Information Theory "were important to the Internet because Information Theory commoditises information, draining it of semantic content. Encoded electronically and treated as being without meaning, messages become far more malleable ..." (1998, 321).

Throughout his detailed narrative of the development of the Internet, Winston is anxious to demonstrate the overbearing power of social forces, and the most powerful of these is the military's need for 'distributed' (i.e. decentralised in order to be safe from attack) computing capability. He dismisses the apparent independence of the Internet's architects, as typified by those who produced the various protocols, as a technicist illusion, arguing that the civilian agenda in the net's development was a cover for the real military supervening social need. Taming of the technology is effected by the institutional manoeuvres that put the Internet in the hands of large-scale corporate capitalism, including, by the mid-1990s, Microsoft.

> *"What (Bill) Gates' interest represented was nothing but the last phase in a straightforwardly classic expression of the suppression of radical potential whereby the new technology is distributed among the established players to minimise the threat to their business." (Winston 1998, 333, 334)*

While he acknowledges that the Internet will make communications cheaper and quicker, he points to the narrow demographics of early adopters (white, North American, computer worker graduates), the alleged exaggeration of adoption rates, the problem of network capacity, the inefficiency of search engines using Boolean operators, and, scathingly, the unlikely expectation that people will want to adopt video conferencing, online shopping, or 'interactive' stories. The radical potential of the technology, in the narrow sense of its ability to support radical dissenting media, is also dismissed, based on early experience. Winston records the fact that ARPANET was used to leak army intelligence during the Vietnam War, but he also emphasises the ease with which pornographers, militias and various other undesirables were swatted by the authorities and by AOL (1998, 334). Cable television failed to provide diversity: because television has inherited the Hollywood star system and other conventions, the established norms constitute a barrier to entry, so that the analogy with magazine economies, where lowering barriers have produced massive new diversity, does not apply. A full-scale traditional service with a broad range of original programming rather than a diet of repeats requires a regular audience of 10 million homes. Half a million readers for Guns and Ammo magazine would not support a viable Guns and Ammo cable television station. Now, cable has been assimilated, its radical potential undermined, and Americans pay twice for their viewing, through advertisements and by subscription (1998, 319). Surprisingly, this analysis is not extended to the Internet, where there are arguments that such reasoning might not so readily apply.

For Winston, the status quo is foremost. Because of the law of the suppression of radical potential, business, media, alienation, nuclear families, right-wing governments, technologically-induced health hazards, traffic jams, deep-fried food, dating, and poverty continue as usual. There is no revolution – only, as Marx put it, 'the constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, ever-lasting uncertainty and agitation' (1998, 342).

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A similar take on technological change is expressed by Steinberg in a closer examination of Internet technologies in the 1990s (Steinberg 1998). Much of this development has been predictable and continuous in nature, based on conserving technologies already developed over the previous 20 years. Change has been accommodated and discounted as part of a continuous process of development, followed by standardisation due to network effects that produce 'lock-in', the concentration on particular technologies as their adoption snowballs.

Internet Protocol itself, on which the entire edifice is built, had been due to be displaced, with US Government support, before its rate of adoption prevented such a change. At the various network levels, developments have confirmed industry adhesion to prevailing norms, such as Ethernet and Frame Area Relay, even when these technologies have proved restrictive in pure engineering terms. At the level of processing power, Moore's Law describing the geometric rise in processing power is now such a dependable prospect that companies rely on it in their planning, and the telecommunications industry is already predicated on the continuous development of optical technologies to increase bandwidths. The success of the much-hyped Java as a programming language is based not so much on its questionable claim to be a universal platform, but much more on the facility it offers to practitioners whose skills are based around the widely-deployed C++. A similar process of consolidation underpins the web, says Steinberg. Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) won because the web, which is based on HTTP, appeals to the largest possible number of users, not because of any innovative qualities of the protocol itself. Riding on the web's success, it has become the net's Esperanto.

Steinberg's analysis is that communications technologies do not represent innovation, as defined by Schumpeter as a necessary element in market capitalism. If everything is predictable, then the non-rational entrepreneur has been displaced. There is no revolution in technology.

In his historical view of the telegraph, Winseck also argues for the continuity of communications technologies as encompassing the Internet, and sounds a warning to those who argue that new ICTs are inherently liberating. (Winseck 1999). He identifies stages of development of the telegraph that might also be applied as conceptual tools to new media today: methodless enthusiasm, ruinous competition and strategic consolidation, media convergence, the transformation of law, followed by media divergence. Essential to his analysis is the reality of commercial and governmental influence on the technology, as well as the effect of legal battles establishing rights over information. Information scarcity, not abundance, became the source of profit. The advent of common carriage, which meant that telegraph companies had to treat newspapers equally, wherever they were located, is linked to a historical divestment by telegraph companies from newsgathering.

Especially relevant here is the fact that ties between the press and the telegraph were clear in the US from the first attempts to commercialise the telegraph in the early 1840s. News publishers were among the first sponsors of the telegraph, providing the largest source of revenue and establishing organisations such as AP to exploit the potentials of electronic communication. Press and telegraph owners were 'obsessed' with the speed of communications in a pre-copyright era when being first with the news was what mattered, and it was only when time differences were eliminated that the economics of news shifted toward monopoly and efforts to secure the commodity value of information, as instanced by the London Stock Exchange and Extel. Later, strategic rivalries played out in the laying of cross-channel cables drove the absorption of smaller operators, before a phase of 'ruinous' price wars; media divergence between the telegraph and the emerging field of telephony came about despite the inherent compatibility between them, and this provided the rationale – then supported by commercial interests – for government ownership.

Elsewhere, Winseck puts forward the view that, while media convergence has always been a historical possibility, but was foreclosed by industry or governments intent on preventing cross-media combinations, now the push to bring about information highways promotes media reconvergence (1998). He sets out three potential evolutionary paths: the emergence of exclusive 'information suburbs' in contrast to idealistic notions of the information society; new media as adjuncts of traditional media; or a strategy to expand universal service and media freedoms for the many, using ISDN as the cornerstone of the fixed public telecommunications network.

Stephens cuts across some of these arguments when he attempts to incorporate the idea of revolutionary media technologies as occurring within a time frame of centuries and in the face of opposition (Stephens 1998). He compares what he calls today's communications revolution with the invention and development of writing and print, and says lessons to be drawn from those technologies are that 1. New communications forms take centuries to establish. 2. In their early stages, they imitate older forms, (e.g. the imitation of hand-written manuscript form in early print). 3. They are attacked. In a section in Plato's Phadreus, an Egyptian myth is used to attack writing, which, Plato's character concludes, will weaken memories and produce only "a semblance" of wisdom, not "truth", not "real judgment". 4. They remake the way we look at the world. Stephens contrasts the uptake of television with the slower adoption thus far of computers, but speculates that, as video moves onto the web, it will be the central component in a media revolution.

Levinson demonstrates how social resistance to change operated via initial suspicion of the telegraph (Levinson 1997). He tells how Reuters was forced by its British press customers to send news from the Continent via both telegraph and carrier pigeon, as the new medium alone was not trusted. This regime applied for seven years after the 1851 laying down of the Calais-Dover cable. Similarly, telegraphed news of Lincoln's assassination was denounced in London as a hoax started by stockbrokers. Each new technology occupies the

'niche' of initial suspicion but the current computer revolution is 'to some extent (sic) unique' in that it has both improved the status of its predecessor, television, but also moved to partially shed its initial image of a cold, dehumanising instrument (1997, 54, 55).

Grossman remarks on industry and official opposition to public information about chemical plant hazards being put online, for fear of terrorist attack, and makes the observation that the controversy would not have been caused by a similar proposal to put the information in print (Grossman 1999). He posits this as a manifestation of de Sola Pool's thesis that new media tend to have their rights limited in comparison to established forms. A similar controversy ensued when it was proposed that biomedical research reports be published on the Internet. Grossman says that it is no longer possible to give people the information they need while withholding it from the few who will abuse it.

2.3(iv) A radical openness?
Against the persuasive arguments for continuity, there is a strong strand of opinion that sees radical characteristics in networks and networked media that translate into radical potential in society. This sub-discourse sees the Internet as having engineered in the values of the people and organisations that collectively invented it, as well as being inherently democratic. It is a perspective that is variously accused of being technologically deterministic, of fetishing technology, and of displaying gross naivety; nevertheless it informs much of the popular, commercial and academic rhetoric of the Internet, and especially of that relating to the potentialities of more meaningful and democratic communications, while also addressing the specificities of Internet culture and technologies.

For Hafner and Lyon (Hafner and Lyon 1996), the Internet still reflects the iconoclastic personalities and proclivities of those who built it. These were pioneering inventors with nothing to lose, opinionated pragmatists who built on existing technology but who saw past the inertia of ATT and IBM. The

net's *de facto* bylaws started out in 1968 as a 'Request for Comments' because Steve Crocker of UCLA wasn't sure who was in charge of net protocols and didn't want to sound too official. Bob Kahn, one of the inventors of TCP/IP 'relentlessly championed' the openness that helped the Internet prevail over other networking technologies. That openness and 'ad-hocracy' have so far survived commercialisation. While Kahn's partner, Vinc Cerf, 'gave the net its civility'. Joseph Licklider, in his paper 'Man-Computer Symbiosis' imagined home computer consoles and televisions linked into a massive network, and foresaw the potential for direct democracy.

Describing how computer hobbyists and pioneer MUDers recognised the organising and community potential of the Internet, Turkle argues that the Internet carries a political message about the importance of direct, immediate action and interest group mobilisation. "It is the symbol and tool of a post-modern politics" (Turkle 1996, 243).

A coherent interpretation of the notion of embedded values is given by Castells, who bases his analysis in McLuhan and who recounts the by now famous story of the net's origins, through Arpanet, Milnet, the National Science Foundation, major research universities, technology think tanks and hobbyists (Castells 1996). Central to his understanding of the Internet is the inherent resistance of the distributed network to control from above, because by design it has no centre and by dint of the many-to-many nature of its communications. Scientific, institutional and personal networks created a milieu of innovation whose dynamics and goals became largely autonomous from the specific purposes of military strategy or super-computing link-ups. But also there was input from the growing computer counterculture, characterised by its utopian vision and links with anti-war protest. Exclusion from the official system of development led to innovation outside it. The modem came out of the hacker movement and its inventors, Ward Christiansen and Randy Suess, distributed the Xmodem protocol free, allowing computers to bypass a central host. Usenet was invented to defeat

Arpanet's exclusivity, and its inventors also distributed the code free (in the same way that the Apache web server and the Linux operating system are being distributed today). The first manifestation of the cheap computing power and network communicability was the growth of bulletin boards (BBSs), and the most striking demonstration of the potential of the media was the use of the BBSs to protest at the Tian An Men Square massacre in 1989. The BBSs form the basis of virtual communities and often these are typified by rejection of undeclared commercial interests (Castells 1996, 352-355).

A mere four years on, in the light of increasing commercialisation, this description of net culture may seem dated, but Castells says that this electronic grass roots culture has marked the net forever. He does comment perceptively that government and commercial interests both favour the expanding use of the network even if it is still largely spontaneous, unorganised, and diversified in purpose and membership. He predicts an important role for universities as agents of diffusion and social innovation: graduates will bring the message of the new medium with them as they enter the mainstream. Secure networks will be developed for credit card transactions and suchlike, while the net will become a global agora, with an inevitable dose of deviance. The utopian pioneers will look on apprehensively as the Internet becomes the generalised medium of communication, bringing with it the limits and miseries of humankind as it is. But the countercultural inheritance remains in the informality and self-directedness of communication, the idea that many contribute to many, and each one has her own voice and expects an individualised answer, and the fact that, even if CMCs are colonised by business, they, unlike the mass media of the McLuhan Galaxy, have technologically and culturally embedded properties of interactivity and individualisation (Castells 1996, 356, 358). While this partial account would appear to place Castells firmly in the camp of utopian technological determinism, in his writing on other aspects of the 'network society' he displays a far more pessimistic approach, and his highlighting of

inequalities under US neo-liberal policy certainly ensures his separation from others in this quarter (Castells 1998).

The instrumental view of the potentialities of the Internet is spelt out by Agres, Edberg and Igbaria, who propose to set out a research framework for investigating virtual societies but who admit to the exclusion from their discussion the implications of CMC or Internet community. They eschew technological determinism, claiming that their review identifies technology as an 'enabler', and they recognise that further study is needed to determine the social and psychological impacts of people engaging in a steady diet of 'metaphysical' activities. However, their analysis is narrowly based on economic considerations, and they make the familiar proclamations in this domain: "Workers will ... have to accept that the job security offered by corporations is a thing of the past," or, "Flexibility and the ability of the population throughout much of the world to adapt to changes will be enablers for virtual societies" (Agres, Edberg et al. 1998, 74). The limits of this kind of approach undermines much in EU and Irish official approaches to CMCs, according to Preston, in that they fail to address wider public interest issues (Preston 1997). They embody a contradiction that we have already seen observed in relation to US-style cyber-libertarianism: on the one hand extolling the revolutionary power of new ICTs to transform social and economic relations, on the other, displaying a conservative political-economic and cultural bias. Preston argues strongly that new institutional arrangements are needed to ensure diversity and pluralism of content within the various domestic media markets.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE – PUBLIC SPHERES OF THE
INTERNET

3.1 Introduction

Against the wider theoretical background provided in Chapter 2, this chapter
considers societal claims for the Internet, setting them against more cautious
opinion, and relating them more closely to the role of journalism and
publicity. Section 2 considers the role of the Internet in public discourse, with
competing visions and rhetoric of the net and of its potentialities and dangers.
Section 3 sets out to establish the contiguous relation of the concept of
community, one of the main strands of thinking about the net as a media
platform, but one that often excludes direct consideration of media and
journalism. Section 4 moves to more direct deliberation on the role of
journalism in an Internet age, and of how journalists and others are arriving at
an understanding of issues facing news online.

3.2 The politics of virtuality

3.2(i) Cyberspace rhetoric and the outlook for participation

The nature of the Internet as a technical platform for many-to-many
communication has spawned ideas of a communications revolution that
provides for complete freedom of speech, unmediated exchange of opinion,
direct democracy and a revival of community. The sweeping, high-blown
rhetoric of much of this discourse has left it open to criticism. Popular
pronouncements such as the Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace
(Barlow 1996) or the Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age (Dyson, Gilder et

al. 1994) set out seductive goals of freedom and democracy. But it is worth noting that much of the discourse on cyber-democracy is driven by libertarians, accused of sponsoring a conservative business-friendly Republican Party agenda, attempting to dismantle the social structures associated with Second Wave industrialisation (in the US, the New Deal and the Great Society; in Europe, the welfare state) while offering tremendous benefits in an unrealisably distant future (Shenk 1997, 174-176).

3.2(ii) 'Real life' and virtual spaces

In a distinction that runs parallel to already articulated notions of simulated realities and the lifeworld, the most sanguine of prognoses for the Internet come often from those whose perceptions of life in a virtual sphere online depart to the greatest degree from what is referred to as real life (RL). Often, the basis for this optimism is the re-ordering of relationships and values by means of new media. For Ed Krol, the ethic is one of honour on a new frontier:

> *"The two overriding premises of network ethics are: /individualism is honored and fostered. /the network is good and must be protected. Notice these are very close to the frontier ethics of the West, where individualism and preservation of lifestyle were paramount" (Krol 1992, 35)*

Castells calls the new virtual environment the 'space of flows': relationships are formed around flows of information rather than of physical or temporal location (Castells 1996). For Howard Rheingold, the Internet represents a means to build vibrant new communities of meaning in which power passes to individuals and challenges the monopoly of existing hierarchies over the communications media. This is the Internet of the Well, of MUDS and newsgroups, and of independent thought. (Rheingold 1995). Levinson styles the leaders of asynchronous discussion as publishers working with peers to produce an online magazine (Levinson 1997, 131). The idea that politicians and media should be bypassed is not as recent as these contributions suggest, however: Naisbitt argued in 1982 that representative democracy had outlived

its usefulness, and that individuals in the society had the capacity to decide directly how government and businesses should operate (Naisbitt 1982), while an extreme vision is also promoted of a private citizen looking at television and voting electronically on such specifics as alcohol trading licence applications, social housing spending, and a criminal trial, with each citizen's vote cast by proxy if they don't act to override it (Stryker 1990). Moore adds another chilling scene, picturing individuals taking part in an online plebiscite in the US to decide whether to launch a nuclear strike against Libya (Moore 1999, 57) .

Proponents of teledemocracy, such as Newt Gingrich and Ross Perot are prone to assuming that the technology used to facilitate such a system will be neutral, says Street, who argues that political ideas cannot be separated from the technology that supports them (Street 1997). Technical change renders new possibilities and new notions of democracy, and these possibilities must themselves be subject to critical political analyses, in the same way as traditional media have been. It is on this topic that full voice is given to the dystopian version of the future. The anti-democratic possibilities in the new technologies are frequently drawn from the science fiction of William Gibson, but Shenk instead claims to have found it instead in the real life fears of 'K', an anonymous major figure in the software firmament:

> *"This is like the atom bomb. People don't understand how tumultuous this technological revolution is going to be. They think that the world will look pretty much as it does now, just faster. But they don't get it: it's going to be a completely different world. I'd say democracy has about a fifty-fifty chance of surviving"* (Shenk 1997, 53).

K fears the application of the new technology for propaganda, and points to the use of radio in the 1930s not only by Franklin Roosevelt, but also by Hitler, and of television by "great communicators" such as Jimmy Swaggart and Pat Buchanan. We yearn for an equitable, educated, civil democratic

society through technology, says Shenk. But the promise is never realised. Democratic culture has dramatically elevated technology, but technology has not elevated democracy.

A consistent thread through the thinking of Berners Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, is the matching of engineering and network characteristics with social roles, often with democratic processes. Because of low overhead, what he terms 'social machines' will make sample national plebiscites feasible, he says, but he is quick to deny that he is advocating a shift from representative democracy. We should be careful not to do things just because they are possible, he says. Still, he makes reference to the use by over a thousand companies of such systems in business, conducting online proxy voting for corporate shareholder meetings (Berners-Lee 1999, 186). Berners Lee also makes the link between electronic voting and electronic participation over the web, and looks forward to a progression from argument by what he calls repetition of soundbites to 'hypertext exposition'. Because the web presents a record, it allows arguments to be justified and challenged; users can look up and compare what politicians, or the principals in court cases, actually say, regardless of what is claimed on television commercials and nightly news interviews (1999, 187). Berners Lee is not a complete utopian, however, and flags the undesirability of the vertical commercial integration of the medium with its content, as well as recognising the risks associated with finely targeted marketing messages.

Rheingold argues that interaction online is not about technology, but about what people can do with technology: it is potentially more significant than the relatively random exchanges in which we engage in real life, because participants actively choose the discussion they join and subsequently shape.

"A tremendous power shift is underway, and despite the obscure or phoney terminology used to describe it, this power shift is about people, and our ability to connect with each other in new ways much more than it is about fiber optic cable and multimedia appliances. The revolution triggered by the printing press was about literacy, and what literate populations are capable of doing (e.g.: governing themselves), long after it had anything to do with the mechanics of moveable type. The technology enabled the power shift, but the power shift was created by the people who used the tool to educate themselves" (Rheingold 1994).

While online communities are judged to create social realities (Baym 1995), or permit the sharing of imagined realities, (Reid 1995), a counterpoint here is the use by national and ethnic groups to re-establish 'real life' ties, such as that described by Mitra in an account of the Indian newsgroup soc.cult.indian (Mitra 1996).

Rheingold's is the complete claim for the democratic potential of the Internet: not only do people use it to exchange information, but they will also be able to effect government through it. His optimism makes him a target for many critics but also serves as an anchor point for debate. Even those who accept the reality of this new world step back from this revolutionary position. Robins allows that Rheingold's vision is leavened with concern for the social order (Robins 1996). However, he argues that communitarianism itself is an anti-political myth sustained by the illusion of transparency and consensus, and this myth is now sustained in Internet rhetoric at the level of global Gemeinschaft (Robins 1996, 18). We continue to have physical and localised existences, even if new technologies have opened us up to de-realisation and de-localisation.

Online technologies are not neutral platforms. Flichy writes that the Well, with over 300 online conferences on a wide range or subjects, sprang from the Californian counterculture (Flichy 1999). Its founder, Stewart Brand, editor of *The Whole Internet Catalog,* is a former hippie and its first leaders had lived in a real life commune. There is a strong echo of Habermas here:

subscribers of the service belonged essentially to the intellectual community; and the founders' intention was to build a free space for creative and experimental communication, a new public space, similar to the café or square. Personal responsibility is emphasised and the motto is 'You own your own word'. Flichy also observes the meshing of this culture of the 'digerati' with print journalism, especially via Wired magazine, to help spread the Internet 'craze.'

Fernback considers that online community goes beyond the notion of an underground newspaper, because members have much more personal investment in the former. Here again, online exchange is presented as an extension of the public sphere – not to one Internet space, but to many, which arise as spheres of 'counterpublics' – gay, feminist, trade unions, anarchists and other factions (Fernback 1997, 36-54). Fernback demonstrates the commitment to free speech in such groups, telling of an incident in 1990 in which access provider Prodigy tried to limit the number of messages its members could send, a policy defended by some as equivalent to a newspaper exercising control over its Letters to the Editor page.

3.2(iii) Fantasy islands and real-politick
Turkle's depiction of life in this virtual, evanescent environment, alongside or within which it is proposed that journalists will have to co-exist, centres on identity within the new electronic spaces. (Turkle 1996). She enunciates the concept of cyberspace as an extension of the social realm in her description of a debate on gun control, currently the subject of deep controversy in the US. In the debate in an early MUD called Habitat, participants tried to decide policy on 'gun control', i.e. whether to allow virtual characters to use 'guns'. Eventually, a 'sheriff' was elected. "In the nineteenth century, utopians built communities in which political thought could be lived out as practice. On the cusp of the twenty-first century, we are building MUDs, possible worlds that can provoke a new critical discourse about the real" (1996, 250). Similarly, a study of Usenet behaviour indicates that newsgroups reflect social structures

(McLaughlin, Osborne et al. 1995). They are communities working out of standards of behaviour, with reproaches for technical and ethical violations.

Turkle describes the re-defining of self that occurs through the 'dizzying' freedom of online participation (Turkle 1996). She explores how people go online in MUDs to assume new identities, for example 'changing' gender in order to have new sexual encounters, and finding fulfilment in being able to use, in co-operation with others, talents denied in narrow working lives. Giving expression to the post-modernists idea of hyper-reality, she describes a 'virtual rape' in the LambdaMOO in which a female participant's character is forced to have sex by a male aggressor who has taken control of her virtual character. The victim responds with rage in a later session, weeping, as she demands the virtual castration of the transgressor as punishment for his breach of 'civility'. Can this type of interaction be taken seriously? Such scenarios, which parallel or even extend beyond hyper-reality, present clear difficulties for sceptical journalism with its validity rooted in the lifeworld. Turkle records a journalist's assessment: Dibbell, writing in the Village Voice, says the tone of the response is ludicrous in RL (real life), woefully understated in VR (virtual reality), and makes sense only in the 'buzzing, dissonant gap' between the two (Turkle 1996, 10). But this is one of the landscapes in the new environment in which online journalism operates. Turkle also links the countercultural origins of the MUDs to a wider, political movement. The Internet, she says, carries a message about the importance of direct, immediate action and interest group mobilisation. "It is the symbol and tool of a post-modern politics" (1996, 243).

A more explicit connection with public debate is made by Aitkens, who says the roots of the Internet link well with Dewey's concept of a distributed decision-making process (Aitkens 1999). He has placed his own open forums such as MN-POLITICS, OPEN and UK-POLICY "at points where the logic of distributed systems creates new publics in which decision makers can take part or observe" (1999, 191). He also participated in the Nexus project

(http://www.netnexus.org), a policy network set up in 1996 in which Tony Blair participated and which also used the UK-POLICY e-mail forum. The downward trend in television news audiences, combined with the rise in the net news audience, is claimed by Aitkens as an indication of success for this strategy.

3.3 Community and activism

3.3(i) Worldviews without journalists

This section concentrates on ways in which the Internet is seen as facilitating the integration or rebuilding of spatial communities, and the incorporation into public debate of marginalised perspectives. It will be seen that a consistent theme either expressed or clearly implied in this debate is the bypassing of mainstream media and journalists as agenda setters, gatekeepers or interpreters.

Rakow says that a new way of studying media is required (Rakow 1999). The first method concentrated on what media did to people; the second, audience-oriented approach asked what people did with media. Now, with interactive media, there is a model that draws from both cultural and critical studies and addresses the significance of public conversation. She describes the setting up of a Televillage Committee in Grand Forks, North Dakota in terms of stressing the importance of bringing citizenry into the process to counterbalance commercial, governmental and existing media interests. A controversy over the fact that the sole local newspaper was given the city's website address, grandforks.com is reported (Rakow 1999, 72). Here, traditional media is seen as part of the conservative establishment that will be overthrown or at least qualified by new media.[15]

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[15] In Ireland, the country's name has been incorporated without controversy into the most successful news site, ireland.com.

But if the Internet is capable of reshaping traditional forms or organisation, status and ownership, there is no easy transition. Turkle invokes Foucoult's insight that, rather than force, it is discourse in which each individual learns self-surveillance that controls the behaviour of large numbers of people, and she extends this application of the all-seeing panopticon to the Internet. On the net, surveillance and control are a constant theme, and it is not important how frequently these are applied: what matters is that people know that the possibility is always present (Turkle 1996). This mechanism is highlighted by Stapleton, who also refers to the notorious monitoring and archiving activities of newsgroup provider Deja News (Stapleton 1996).

Mehta and Darier argue that Foucoult's concept of governmentability offers a more complex analysis of power than top-down domination of the elite (liberalism) or an economic class (Marxism), based on self-normalisation of the individual (Mehta and Darier 1998, 107-116). They apply Foucoult's ideas of centralisation around government and its institutions; and intensification of the effects of power, at the level both of the population and of the individual. On the Internet, there is no central control, but fear of reprisal from authority shapes the behaviour of many. Here the argument is recognised that less visible power produces greater disciplining and normalising effects on the Internet, principally through the defining language, in accordance with de Saussure's concept of 'signifier' and 'signified' (Holtzman 1994).

The increased power effects of central policy are instanced by Mehta and Darier in the case of Californians Robert Thomas and his wife, extradited and convicted under obscenity laws in Tennessee for redistributing material via their bulletin board. Similarly, Danish and US authorities co-operated to arrest Americans downloading pornography from a Danish BBS. In 1994, in an attempt to implement a publicity ban on a sex killing case, Carleton University and the University of Guelph in Canada monitored students' private email and blocked access to newsgroups where accounts of the trial, not banned in

other jurisdictions, had been placed. These newsgroups included alt.censorship and alt.journalism.

Mehta and Darrier speculate that perhaps the vaunted promise of freedom of expression is merely a strategy towards increased normalisation, surveillance and control, even if resistance is also possible. Like most technologies, the Internet is bound to have simultaneous effects. It is not a simple means to democratisation of communications.

There are many others who add qualification and caution. Jones outlines the unproblematised expectations for online community, and says, "the importance of the disappointment that engineered communities have brought cannot be understated (sic)" (Jones 1995, 19). He says it is by no means certain whether or not communities formed by CMC will become part of public culture. He makes two fundamental and important objections: because the Internet is unrepresentative, the impression of participatory democracy is illusory; in addition, ongoing message threads do little more than sum up discussion, and they do not provide participation, reflection and critical debate (Jones 1997). Access to the Internet reflects social inequalities, and so, as pointed out by Trench and O'Donnell, it cannot be assumed that each interest group has the same ability to make its voice heard (Trench and O'Donnell 1997). Meanwhile, the flip side to focussed and more relevant communication is fragmentation: more than agoras, virtual communities resemble exclusive health clubs where members meet largely to promote their own interests and to reinforce their own like-mindedness (Fisher, Margolis et al. 1994).

The role of existing mass media in providing benefits similar to those claimed for online discussion groups is highlighted by Coleman, who points to the paucity of political coverage generally and of elections in particular, as evidenced by falling UK election audiences (Coleman 1999). He sees the political agenda being set by mutually dependent spin doctors and senior

media editors, and sets out a distinction between this type of corrupted 'virtual deliberation' and direct deliberation of citizens in interactive forums. However, he is careful to recognise that interactive discourse is not unique to online situations. In a view that runs counter to opinions of interactive broadcasts, such as RTE's Ryanline, as having little to contribute to public debate (O'Sullivan 1997), Coleman points to the fact that, in a week during one of the recent Orange parade stand-offs in Portadown, BBC Radio Ulster's Talkback programme received calls from one in 50 of the Northern Irish population over 16, far above anything seen in Northern Ireland newsgroups (Coleman 1999, 198, 199). Coleman also raises the need to consider the quality of deliberation in interactive communications, and to the danger of electro-plebiscites being appropriated by populist or demagogic forces.

The observation of poor quality of deliberation is a frequent one. In the online chat rooms of Dutch and Swedish political parties, deliberative value of exchanges was low (Nixon and Johansson 1999). While the chat rooms served to convey an impression of interactivity, they were more often occupied by junior members communicating at the same level, rather than any bottom-up process. Nixon and Johansson also observe that central party machines have seen digital democracy as a means of bypassing traditional media, whom they regard as distorting their message, and as a spin-off effect of influencing reporters viewing their sites for background information.

Coleman argues that modern 'media democracy' is premised on claims that the interflow of communication between party and media elites substitutes for the absence of authentic public deliberation (Coleman 1999, 58-64). The ritualised TV political interview has become a form of virtual deliberation. The first use of ICTs in the political process was not to open up the discourse, but as 'parasitic tools' in the more efficient servicing of existing media. Computer databases were used in recent election campaigns in Britain and the US to provide 'rapid rebuttals' by spin doctors to damaging

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statements from their opponents. Nevertheless, the ability of the Internet to expand communicative interaction – and he says that this does not necessarily depend on wide diffusion of the technology in each particular country – could have a greater impact on democracy than the emergence of television had in the 1960s. Coleman enumerates ways in which this can occur, despite severe limitations in the interactivity of media sites and of official sites that mimic online newspapers:

– More transparent institutions, as evidenced by the publication of parliamentary proceedings online
– Disintermediation allows members of the public to bypass journalists and talk directly to the elite, as on the White House website which receives thousands of contributions, although at present this is a charade as there is no notion of a connection between public input and policy
– Citizens can achieve greater public participation and unmediated publicity, as demonstrated by the success of the UK Citizens Online Democracy project
– Education for citizenship
– The capacity to build networks across policed borders, to highlight human rights abuses in regimes such as China and Bangladesh.

Zhang and Xiaoming demonstrate that Chinese communities abroad have benefited from Internet media that surmount both geographic and political obstacles. (Zhang and Xiaoming 1999). The overseas Chinese-language press has often been subject to suppression and harassment, as in Thailand in the 1960s, Vietnam and the Philippines in the 70s, and in the US during the Cold War, as well as in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar during various periods. In addition, the Chinese ethnic press in Asia has suffered a decline in tandem with a decline of Chinese speaking, and has also been affected by competition from mainstream media.

Now, there are signs that some of these problems are being eased through use of the Internet. Inside China, underground journal *The Tunnel* is sent by email to dissidents abroad, who publish it on the web. *The Tunnel* is distributed within China via chain e-mail. Another dissident student magazine, *China Monthly*, failed as a print entity but was able to re-establish itself on the Internet. The Internet remains a supplement to traditional media, and is still a medium for the elite, but it is argued convincingly that ICTs can be a cohesive force as well as fragmenting, and it is not enough to conclude simply that online publications turn such groups into ethnic enclaves (1999, 28).

But for Mosco it is a myth that deep-seated desires for community and participation are reflected in the information superhighway. (Mosco 1998). ICTs are promoted by transnational companies and governments in much the same way as previous technologies were hyped by world fairs. The railroad was to bring peace to Europe, steam power would eliminate the need for manual labour, nuclear energy would be "too cheap to meter." But computer communication is as banal as previous technologies and by itself will not bring about social change. Like other media, it can be used to foster communication, mobilise people, and produce, process and use information, but caution is needed because terms of access and use are increasingly set by companies who will wish to protect their own hegemony. Mass labour protest can still talk louder than messages conveyed in cyberspace, he argues.

Johnson warns that technological utopias are nothing new (Johnson 1996). In the 1960s, the Johnson Administration in the US initiated the 'Wired Cities' programme as part of the 'Great Society' project. The plan spoke of electronic democracy, interactive services and education, but the outcome was disappointing because of the take-off of deregulation and what Johnson calls 'the neo-Liberal lie' that deregulation means more choice and more democratic communications (Johnson 1996, 83). Cable television represented a similar failure. Johnson says resistance to manipulation of the symbolic space manifests as 'cyberculture' or 'cyberia' – the face of white, middle-class

bohemia in the 90s. It is the cutting edge of the consumer culture of the digital age, as evidenced by the advertisements in Wired and Mondo magazines, and has the same source as the Clinton administration – the white, middle-class suburban male (Johnson 1996, 94-98). And Robins charges that the shallow, progressivist marketing that attaches itself to this culture reflects the hegemony of corporate interests and conforms to a new corporate global agenda divorced from conditions in real cities or nations (Robins 1999). He cites Bauman's comparison of the ethereal space to medieval Latin: occupied by the learned elite who have little to talk about with those on the outside, i.e. in real life.

3.3(ii) The problem of access

The debate over access and participation often centres on discrete technologies, and the degree to which they facilitate or hinder universal uptake. Locke outlines the various Internet platforms for interactive communication and debate, but argues that all are limited because of their requirement of access to a computer. (Locke 1999). He says that in 10 years time such interactivity will have moved to digital television.

This view is shared by Haywood, who observes that every medium loses its dominance to become one choice among many. Information access points will become more diverse for those who can afford smaller and more portable devices, but television will dominate for the foreseeable future, and a general solution for both information and entertainment may be a single 'box' (Haywood 1995, 169). Improvements in the ease of use of the human-computer interface will more than anything else accelerate mass acceptance of the world of software and the Internet, CD-ROM and interactive television. It will also erode the ability, due to the former user-unfriendliness of information systems, of intermediaries such as those in financial services to justify a role and charge for services (Haywood 1995, 107). Haywood forecasts that developing countries will not be happy to remain outside the information economy, and that 'thinking' countries may have to protect the

infrastructure that supports the tradeable sources of knowledge (Haywood 1995, 125).

Castells takes a dialectic position here, forecasting that, even if CMCs are colonised by business, they, unlike the mass media of the McLuhan Galaxy, have technologically and culturally embedded properties of interactivity and individualisation (Castells 1996). The medium stimulates participation from previously excluded groups, including women and lower-status workers on company networks. It denies the traditional symbolism of power embedded in face-to-face communication (Castells 1996, 360). But CMC will not be a general medium of communication for the foreseeable future – its rate of diffusion will hardly match that of television for a long historical period. It will be restricted to an educated segment of the population of the most advanced countries, so that the elites who have shaped the format of CMC will be structurally advantaged (Castells 1996, 363, 364). The oft-stated objective of Internet industry interests, and a key part of the argument for the net, is access for all. Cerf, dubbed 'Father of the Internet', for his invention of TCP/IP, proclaims that:

> *"The Internet is for everyone – but it won't be until in every home, in every business, in every school, in every town and every country on the Globe, Internet can be accessed without limitation, at any time and in every language. The Internet is for everyone – but it won't be if it is too complex to be used easily by everyone. Let us dedicate ourselves to the task of simplifying Internet's interfaces and to educating all who are interested in its use." (Cerf 1999)*

But, says, Mansell, the Internet will not be for everyone, as market players move to adopt monopolisation strategies, even if they vary in form from previous strategies (Mansell 1999). As portal providers such as Yahoo! and Excite learn to more closely personalise their services, a shift has begun from open to closed virtual environments, even in the face of network abundance. Excite recently acquired Throw, a service for building virtual communities, to strengthen the customer's trust in the site as well as to deepen its analysis of

user profiles. Such strategies, says Mansell, are designed by the new intermediaries between producers and consumers to produce a balkanised online landscape to restrict access to users whose profiles fit the needs of advertisers and sponsors(1999 13).

A wider approach to access is advocated by Burgelman, who argues that concepts of universal access and public service need to be redefined beyond concerns associated with media (Burgelman 2000). What is happening with ICTs is fundamental to policy frameworks developed in Western European countries since World War II, and the social contract that underpins relations in most of our societies. For example, new ICTs will affect job creation and telemedicine as well as education and media. An approach that concentrates only on media economies and institutions will be minimalist in nature, because in such sectors oligopoly has been accepted, and where regulation is put in place it usually is concerned only with commercial competition than with the concept of access (2000 54).

Addressing Internet policy, Burgelman says that providing public service in 'a world of networked abundance' clearly means being active beyond classical distribution platforms. With a drop in cost of access, the main question may shift to one of access to quality networks and content. However, traditional financing methods such as subscription or licence fee would be absurd and probably counterproductive (2000 62, 63).

Bates makes the point that access to information is increasingly necessary to cope with modern life, not just politically but also economically and socially, and therefore questions of equity arise (Bates 1989, 22), and Castells similarly argues that multimedia will form an all-encompassing domain of previously separate media, "of popular culture and learned culture, entertainment and information, education and persuasion" (Castells 1996, 372). But increased access accompanying increased bandwidth is not a foregone conclusion, argues Kling, who says that social barriers to adoption of Internet

technologies have not been taken on board by the Next Generation Internet (www.ngi.net) research project (Kling 1999). Kling proposes that 5% of the project's $100m yearly budget be given over to education and social research.

Concerns over inequalities in access are discounted by those who point to the adoption of older technologies by rich and poor alike. Kelly, in an interview with banker-economist Michael Cox, reports that 93% of Americans classified as living in poverty have a colour television, and 60% have a video recorder and a microwave oven (Kelly 1996). Given the steep drop in the price of computers relative to performance, this would indicate that adoption rates would be equally strong among the under-privileged.

But what really works to exclude women and minority racial groups from CMCs is not any inherent bias in computer technology against them, according to Hibbits (Hibbits 1996). He argues that text, as a central component in online communication, has been the main obstacle, because as the traditional code for communicating with the technology it has favoured educated white males, while those who have had less access to education have a stronger oral traditions. However, as multimedia computer interfaces develop, as on the World Wide Web, this bias will be overcome.[16]

3.3(iii) The informed citizen

Stevenson comments that Golding (Golding 1990) has shown that access to modern forms of information are structured by the practices of the state, as well as divisions of class, race and sex, and Baudrillard and others point not to a lack of information, but too much. Stevenson says that Habermas presupposes that putting people into conversation will result in the emergence of common versions of the good and increased social solidarity. Such felt connections would become increasingly disconnected from the national context, but would also be subject to the constraints imposed by transnational capitalism. Unless we are able to realise a sense of community and attend

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[16] And, at least in the case of women, has been overcome, as shown in a later chapter.

rationally to the needs, fears and concerns of others, the end result will be more destructive forms of social atomism. But for this agenda to emerge, citizens will be dependent on 'quality' forms of information and democratic forums for discussion (Stevenson 1995, 64-68).

The objective of strengthening, rather than escaping, geographic links, is central to the local civic networking projects such as Santa Monica's Public Electronic Network (PEN), which Schmitz reports as having established direct discourse between the homeless and the wider community (Schmitz 1997). Klein sees online forums as a means to avoid barriers to participation, and holding out the promise of facilitating the formation and operation of citizen associations that would be more responsive and robust (Klein 1999). This was borne out in 1995 by the experiences of a Boston-based citizen association, the Telecommunication Policy Roundtable – Northeast (TPR-NE). However, Tsagarousianou and others, in a comprehensive study of electronic democracy projects in Santa Monica, Bologna, Manchester, Amsterdam, and Berlin (Tsagarousianou 1998) conclude that most electronic democracy initiatives have been top-down, representing a very particular form of publicness directed by the official agenda.

Reinforcing the appreciation of such difficulties, Hale, Musso and Weare describe a 1997 study of 290 civic access websites in California which identified three obstacles to democratic participation: lack of civic education, citizen apathy and the disconnection between citizens and their representatives (Hale, Musso et al. 1999).

In his broader contemplation of civic networking projects, Tambini explicitly draws out the potential implications for journalism in the realisation of online local democracy efforts, in the context of a rebuilding of the Habermasian public sphere. The abundance of space displaces the role of editor, and the reader selects material, which is provided raw, rather than 'half-digested' by a journalist. (This scenario carries clear implications within Hall's analysis

(Stevenson 1995, 36) not only of media as secondary definers, but also of separate institutions, formerly primary definers such as police or courts services, communicating directly in the public sphere.) However, because of low uptake and problems of access, Tambini argues, the benefits of new media are contingent on an appropriate regulatory and economic framework. In addition, although he is optimistic for the democratic role of CMCs, he is doubtful of the relevance of geographic community. He questions the nostalgic impulse to represent traditional communities online, as in the frequent accounts of the revival of the New England town hall, and says the emphasis instead should be on the question of whether new communities of interests can be constructed (Tambini 1999, 324).

Tambini focuses his fears on the use of the net by extremists as instanced in the case of the extreme right-wing Thule-Netz in Germany, fostered by the network's cheapness and its anonymity, as well as the ease of posting of libellous material (Tambini 1999, 319). However, Zickmund, who details activity on 'white power' and skinhead newsgroups, also notes that they face a significant current of direct opposition, with individual liberals confronting neo-Nazis and Holocaust deniers online (Zickmund 1997, 200). Zickmund, while acknowledging the dilemma of whether to censor such newsgroups, reinforces the ideal of online discussion when she advocates more incursions by those prepared to debate with the extremists.

At least in one narrow respect, Tambini's analysis of wider access is disputed. In her study of cyber café customers, Lee found that such facilities did not represent an extension of the public space to information 'have-nots', but that the bulk of use came from habitual net users who were temporarily away from their usual access (Lee 1999). Again raising echoes of Habermas, Lee notes that the cyber café phenomenon has been described as resurrecting the coffee-house where people gathered to read newspapers and interact. But it was found that most users had pragmatic reasons for being there, rather than wanting to socialise. One of the principal activities found was that of

travellers reinforcing their own sense of the local, by contacting friends at home and by reading online newspapers. Others were interpreted as using the technology because of its progressive and fashionable image (Lee 1999, 341). Women made up half of the respondents to the survey and were seen often to be in the majority in the cyber café, which took the Internet out of the realm of the male-oriented gadget PC (1999, 344).

3.3(iv) From activism to overload

In his interpretation of Beck's concept of 'manufactured uncertainty', and of modern populations living on the 'volcano of civilisation', Cottle states that within that understanding mass media hold a key position with regard to communicating major hazards (Cottle 1998). Cottle argues that coverage of lower-level, more local risk indicates a more complex understanding of people's relationship with this civilisation of threat, and allows for the opportunity of the individual to be self-reflexive and to participate in single-issue concerns. The pursuit of such concerns is fleshed out by Zelwietro in his study of 400 environmental organisations in 10 countries (Zelwietro 1998). As yet, a minority of organisations are consciously using the net for its political utility, but those who do are likely to be more politicised. News items (66%), newsletters (53%) and other organisational information (49%) were the three most prevalent types of material that such groups disseminated on the Internet (1998, 50).

While the results of Zelwietro's study are far from conclusive, there are by now many celebrated instances of Internet activism, or campaigns in which the Internet was exploited, from McLibel (Vidal 1997) to the Chiapas rebellion (Knudson 1998). In the latter case, the famous Subcommander Marcos, said to be influenced by the ideas of Althusser, used email and bulletin boards more successfully than a newspaper and a commandeered radio station to disseminate his propaganda. Wallach, one of the leaders of the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, acknowledges use of Internet in organising the campaign, and relates how the Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch acquired

secret copies of the OECD's Multilateral Agreement on Investment and "scanned it into the Internet" (Anonymous 2000). Net dissent is also directed at the entertainment industry: rock band Metallica, more used to being interviewed by fawning music hacks, felt the effects of new media when they suffered Internet ridicule after they objected to the Napster site's free distribution of music (Cassell 2000; McCullagh 2000).

The technological convergence effects of Internet being used as a platform for radio are observed by Donow and Miles (Donow and Miles 1999). These include the online reporting of the Anwar Ibrahim trial by RTM, the Malaysian state broadcaster, RCS (Radio Corporation of Singapore) and Radio Australia, and Radio B92's use of Amsterdam site XS4ALL (www.xs4all.net) to defy Serbian attempts to close it down (staff also used loudspeakers from office windows).

But disintermediation works in the other way, allowing governments to operate propaganda sites, such as the Serbian operated Kosovo Information Centre (www.kosovo.com) or giving companies the opportunity to tell their own story, as advised by The Irish Tourist Board (Anonymous 1997). In the words of public relations practitioners Alexander and Lukaszewski, "Tomorrow's communications techniques may allow PR people to bypass reporters completely. Eliminating the media 'middlemen' also holds the potential of reducing the power of the press and forging more intimate bonds between PR people and their clients" (Alexander and Lukaszewski 1995). Shenk addresses the potential for information overload in the new media environment, arguing that it is only recently that humans have started to produce information faster than they could absorb it. He is nostalgic for a time when information dissemination was helpful and positive, dispelling ignorance and superstition, empowering individuals, and, through mutual understanding, diminishing the likelihood of conflict. Email spamming is now an everyday occurrence; the first incidence provoked outrage when lawyers Laurence Canter & Martha Siegel sent junk email to over 6,000 newsgroups

on the Internet, offering their services for an upcoming visa lottery (Shenk 1997, 25). Shenk theorises that the escalation in information availability has led to the "two-by-four" effect: the audience has to be hit over the head with a plank of wood to get its attention, as seen in 'shock jock' radio and other media sensationalism, and translates into acrimonious accusation in political campaigns and exaggerated claims by environmental activists (Shenk 1997, 104, 105). Software companies exacerbate the problem, forcing consumers into 'upgrade mania' and demanding that consumers continually retrain to use the latest versions (Shenk 1997, 86).

Now, according to Noam, the difficulty is not how to produce information, but how to contain it (Noam 1995), as the equilibrium between information production and ability to process it was abruptly disturbed with the introduction of computers, microwave transmissions, television and satellites. And the increasingly common requirement to be technically literate is considered part of a process that is driving society towards inequality and disintegration "regardless of how many people on the Internet believe they are saving the planet" (Sale 1996, 257).

3.4 Media forms and news directions

3.4(i) Internet logic

This section looks at how the Internet is positioned to remedy the shortcomings of traditional media, and as an agent impacting on media size and diversity. Consideration of the direction of mainstream online news, as produced by professional journalists, and its future manifestations is structured principally around questions of interactivity, including that of hypertext, the speed effect of the continuous news cycle, and the role of objectivity. The latter part of the section, with contributions from other sources, considers the ways in which journalists debate these issues, and how and to what extent the news, including news in other media, is being influenced by developments in new media.

3.4(ii) Pricking the spectacle

As previously observed, much writing on Internet technologies dealing with community and democratic participation provides relatively little by way of direct analysis of the role of existing media. Tambini, writing about the civic networking movement, sets as his framework a direct link to the inadequacies of traditional media, and draws on historical perspectives to support his reasoning that new media will require a carefully prepared regulatory environment (Tambini 1999). The privatisation and deregulation of broadcasting and telecommunications, combined with the end of bandwidth scarcity, technological convergence and broadcasting, and growing access to computers amplify questions concerning the institutions of democratic communication. Freedom of speech, impartiality, public service, and universality of access are threatened as public service broadcasting is squeezed and commercial media expand in most European countries, against a background of globalisation. As the ethos of public service broadcasting is also eroded by charges of elitism, a larger proportion of 'information for citizenship' is carried by for-profit broadcasters. What Tambini calls 'the critique of society and politics' becomes a consumerist-led spectacle formed in soundbites. But new media allows renegotation of the relationship between public, nation and state. "As new media are interactive they institutionalise citizens' right to reply, to select information, and to communicate directly with one another or their representatives without the gatekeeping influence of editors" (Tambini 1999, 311).

Where Tambini extends the analysis to the logic of new media, other commentators have been content to decry the increasing degradation of the public spaces that the media already inhabit. Bagdikian outlines a US scene dominated by the commercial agenda and by monopoly trends (Bagdikian 1997). Of the 1,500 daily newspapers in the US, 99% are the only daily in their cities. In radio, among 11,000 commercial stations, six or eight formats dominate. Of the 11,800 cable systems, all but a handful are monopolies in their cities (Bagdikian 1997, preface to the 5th ed., xv). Media are being driven

increasingly by purely financial criteria. Profit levels of daily newspapers are two to three times higher than average profits among the Fortune 500 companies. Almost every US urban newspaper US has a business section that usually includes presentation of bosses as heroes or "exciting combatants" (Bagdikian 1997, preface to the 5th ed., xix).

The Columbia Journalism Review maintains an updated list of conglomerates and their interests that shows no sign of a pause in the trend (Anonymous 2000).

Wheeler recognises the possibility that multimedia will succeed where mass media were perceived to have failed due to their incorporation by the elite and to global ownership, but warns that new media's development may parallel the concentration of ownership (Wheeler 1997, 202). He considers that Habermas's argument that the media have become the site for political manipulation appears increasingly sustainable, and asks if a new media system could put the citizen first by undermining state control, diminishing the power of corporations, reformulating political activity and changing social habits. The Internet's two-way flow of information and diversity taking the place of objectivity presents an opportunity for the reformulation of the public sphere. But, as before, the problem of access remains; consumerism may replace citizenship as media moguls co-operate with telecoms and computer businesses; the public sphere will be eroded and democratic choices limited by the rise of 'disinfotaintment'; surveillance will increase, or the public will sell their privacy rights through credit cards and telephone banking. He too describes, for example, how ICTs, rather than opening up more diverse avenues of communication, have been used by British political parties to bolster the traditional, vertical informational flow, i.e. from party to mass media to the public (Wheeler 1998). "Technology is not an agency, for it may be employed positively or negatively" (1997, 234), hence the need for legislation and regulation to ensure new media attain their democratic potential.

It remains to be seen whether more media competition brings about more diversity, according to Van Cuilenberg (Cuilenberg 1999). Nor is diversity in itself necessarily desirable, if it does not match variations in social reality. Reflection and openness are dialectically opposing strands of diversity: media that reflect the majority or 'mainstream' cannot be considered fully open. Cuilenberg focuses in particular on the view propounded by the economist Hotelling that competitive markets drive producers not towards diversity but towards risk-avoiding conservatism. So buyers nearly everywhere are faced with "excessive sameness" of products that deliberately vary only slightly from the norm. Hence, says Van Cuilenberg, very competitive media markets tend towards homogeneity more than monopolistic or public service models. This is the 'diversity paradox.' Moderate competition, however, allows media professionals the space to experiment and to serve niche and minority preferences. So government policy should be directed, not at producing more competition at the centre, where the middle of the road is already well served, but towards promoting openness, stimulating the production of content at the margins where, in particular, because of its low barriers to entry, the Internet provides attractive opportunities (Cuilenberg 1999, 195-198).

The critical questioning of mainstream media, especially newspapers, is not a solely academic preoccupation, as indicated by a study that found increasing scepticism of the British reading public towards printed news, even at a time of increasing circulations (Weymouth 1998). While 86% of the British public consider themselves to have a strong interest in news, only 48% expressed confidence in the written press, while the corresponding figure for radio and television were 79% and 85% respectively.

Segell and Chalaby, in an analysis based in Ulrich Beck's outline of risk society, highlight the uncertainties of market, technologies and regulation of digital television as a major break within modernity (Segell and Chalaby 1999). It has long been foreseen that commercial pressures, combined with superior technological expertise in the private sector (Murphy 1986), will weaken the

presence of public service broadcasters in the public sphere. Segell and Chalaby say stiff competition will increase pressure on digital content providers to serve niche markets and to question the sustainability of others. They position the Internet as a factor increasing market competition, rather than providing diversity. They observe that already the Internet has affected television viewing: PC-owning households in Britain consume 21 percent less television than average viewers (15 hours a week against 19 hours) and more than half of surveyed households said that their favourite time to connect to the web was between 6pm and 8pm, when some of the most popular soap operas are scheduled (Segell and Chalaby 1998, 354). [17]

The erosion of public service broadcasting is further remarked on by Charles Fairchild, who provides an overview of the removal of regulations governing radio in the US, the consequential concentration of ownership and, with economies of scale, freedom of commercial radio to ignore the needs of local communities (Fairchild 1999). Here deregulation sold as being 'in the public interest' turns out in practice to be in the broadcast industry's interest. One striking result is that newscasts for 10 stations in Washington DC are identical, coming from a single source, but are 'personalised' for individual stations using call letters, as the network HQ strives for invisibility. In the Irish context, Sheehan notes that the promise of more democratic participation via new communications technologies remains unfulfilled, and the 'revolution' has been assimilated by the increasingly internationalised market economy. "Underneath all the freedom of choice rhetoric, however, is the reality that freedom for the pike is death to the minnow" (Sheehan 1992, 59). Hickey puts the case, as proposed by the 1998 Gore Commission Report, for a public service element in the digital TV landscape, and describes how this idea is opposed by industry (Hickey 1999), while the concept is moved beyond broadcasting by Thalimer, who champions the idea of a protected "national information service" treated as a public utility and controlled and

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[17] Here , journalist and talk show host Pat Kenny blamed the Internet for a drop in ratings for The Late Late Show.

monitored by the widest range of citizens possible (Thalhimer 1994). He quotes Grossman, former president of NBC News and the Public Broadcasting Service:

> *"Democracy will be best served in the 21st century by returning to the 18th-century idea of an independent and totally unregulated press, a press that is controlled by many different owners, a press that offers access to many different voices, and a press that makes available essential public affairs, educational and cultural programming to all our citizens"* – *(Grossman 1991, 56; Thalhimer 1994)*

Winsbury sees the need and the possibility for PSB to flourish in the age of digital television and the Internet (Winsbury 1999), but Haywood foresees cultures surrendering to uniform global media.. Information is not power – a lot of it is designed for diversion and entertainment and not to influence events – and many powerful people are poorly informed (Haywood 1995, 176). With the rise of the conglomerates, small publishers and broadcast stations will find it difficult to survive, as their strengths of independence and objectivity are expensive to maintain. With this oligopolistic scenario comes also the threat of censorship of information that may be damaging to parts of the group's non-media business, and the more general reality that big corporations increasingly mediate a lot of news about themselves (Haywood 1995, 218).

Transnational players will operate their own brand of self-censorship to put their strategic interests first. Rupert Murdoch, pursuing greater things in China, sold Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* to Robert Kuok, who is close to the Chinese government. He also agreed to excise the BBC's World Service from satellite broadcasts in order to protect the interests of his Star satellite TV operations (1995, 197). In Western Europe itself, Silvio Berlusconi provides a concrete example of the unhealthy mixing of politics, business and media (1995, 205, 207). A more diverse range of small, independent carriers would be just as vulnerable to political and economic

pressure, but those applying the pressure would have to work harder to achieve it (Haywood 1995, 25).

Moore gives an equally global perspective on mass media and the possible tensions the Internet will create (Moore 1999). The broadband Internet will be the ultimate distribution mechanism for the mass media. Contrary to Locke's prognosis (Locke 1999), he says it will subsume many other media, including TV, and will also be the platform for many daily transactions, including news. Today's Internet is a non-monetised communications realm that has been experienced by Netizens as a renaissance of democracy, even if much of its discourse tends to come from right-wing organisations, while those with more democratic values seem more divided as to its purpose. But this may be more a reflection of wider politics in this age, and Moore, pointing to the recent bouts of eco-activism in mostly western countries, speculates what might happen if a period of popular activism were to occur, "such as we saw in the 1960s, the 1930s, 1900s, 1848, 1798, 1776, etc.". This possibility, along with the push for commercialisation, is why states will want to rein in the net, and may also largely explain the mass media image of the net as the domain of hackers, terrorists and sexual perverts (Moore 1999, 41). In the same vein, Dwyer and Stockbridge outline conventional media hostility to the Internet demonstrated in 'media panics' over violence and pornography online, in the run-up to policy decisions over Internet regulation. Between 1994 and 1997, The Age, the Sydney Morning Herald, and the Australian Financial Review (all Fairfax-owned broadsheet titles) had a ninefold rise in stories discussing violence on the Internet. Headlines ranged from 'US Student Jailed for Sending Murder Fantasies on the Internet' in The Age to 'Call to Stop Depravity on Internet' in the Sydney Morning Herald (Dwyer and Stockbridge 1999).

Moore contrasts Internet with the mass media, and comments that, while they are both global communications networks, the two could not be more different. The net provides the full spectrum of social thinking, while the

mass media systematically project the world view of their owners, and that world view is becoming narrower as ownership becomes ever more concentrated into a 'clique of majors'. These include the four US conglomerates Time Warner (since merged with AOL), Disney-Cap-Cities, Westinghouse and GE (the latter two running media interests alongside nuclear and weapons industries) along with Rupert Murdoch and others. Globalisation represents a challenge by transnational corporations to democracy and the nation state, the traditional site of the struggle between citizens at large and elite economic interests. Modern mass media serve to propagandise this purpose, with persistent homage paid to the inevitability of market forces and 'modern' efficiencies. Now, cyberspace may become the vehicle for more sophisticated manipulation of public opinion, and moves are underway to control it. Ultimately, the regulations being laid down for libel, copyright and pornography will make Internet culture untenable, and there would need to be, in essence, a bonded professional staff to moderate Internet postings to avoid liability to prosecution. In common with others, Moore calls for regulatory efforts to prevent monopoly concentration – both vertically and horizontally – as elements in an integrated policy on media and telecommunications (Moore 1999, 59).

Nichification is a process that has its roots beyond purely news media strategies, according to Fallows, who observes that, as retail marketing has narrowed its focus, so too have newspapers. This represents diversity of shopping rather than diversity of opinion. Specialised shops have found more targeted media to communicate with the market, from direct marketing via catalogues to 'infomercials' on cable TV (Fallows 1996).

O'Connor still sees hope for independent journalism in a big media world, identifying its strength as cross-border networking to facilitate the distribution of local content creators' output. His optimistic commentary proposes a version of new media that sits between traditional formats and forms of direct participation. In an era of snowballing media mergers, small media are turning

their size into an asset. He tells how his company, Globalvision, covered the South African struggle against apartheid, despite distance and censorship, by means of 'inside out' journalism. This consists of providing equipment such as low-cost camcorders and computers to those inside a country, and, then tackling the crucial problem, which is distribution, with its paradox of 'more choices, fewer voices' as fewer entities control channels that produce homogenous fare for the global monoculture. O'Connor recognises that the Internet will not escape this process either, as big media attempt to make it conform to previous models by means of branding strategies. But, citing the defiance of the talismanic Belgrade B92, sustained by an international network of support, as well as the non-profit Internews in the former Soviet Union and the media website Media Channel, he argues that small media can succeed by co-operating and providing for pluralism in a new environment (O'Connor 1999).

Atton provides a review of thinking about and within the alternative press in Britain, and its links with a growing social protest movement, organised in particular around environmentalism and anarchism (Atton 1999). Although confined to print, it nevertheless addresses some of the issues of horizontal communication and democratic participation that arise in discussion of actual or possible Internet publishing topologies. Again, physical distribution is seen as a central problem determining the success or failure of alternative titles. Atton endorses the notion of an alternative public sphere, citing the instance of West German anti-nuclear media, as "a culturally embedded social practice," although this oppositional culture is better supported in Germany. Atton says this sphere indicates a nexus of institutions – including its media – that work together outside the flagging parliamentary system to enable the public to debate issues independently of the state (Atton 1999, 55, 56).

Nevertheless, the negative nuances in O'Connor's dualistic view are taken up by Abrahamson, who argues for the relevance of the historical market-led development of other media such as magazines and broadcasting to

predicting that the Internet will feature pervasive commercialisation, niche-building and fragmentation, less regulation and considerable economic concentration (Abrahamson 1998).

This outlook is followed through by Barnett, who sees the contribution of new media to the political process being as problematic as the inadequacies of traditional media (Barnett 1997). New media may offer opportunities for elite groups at the margins, but the dominant discourse will remain with the traditional media, so that the primary objective should be to change the nature of political reporting and of politician-journalist relations (Barnett 1997, 216). Barnett outlines the ways in which old media have failed democracy, by trivialising, sensationalising and distorting, and notes the rise of news management and corporate PR and the subsuming of politics into the marketing arena. But he says new media will similarly have problems of access and ownership, and will have to contend with the continued efforts of political and corporate entities to put the best face on their statistics and strategic choices. Barnett questions whether new media can overcome the prevalent sense of cynicism and political detachment. He says that online political campaigns such as those run by Amnesty International are mostly replacing rather than augmenting postal campaigns, and that local authorities, as evidenced by their approach to the potential of new local cable channels, are more concerned with using ICTs for economic rather than democratic ends (Barnett 1997, 211). Barnett also notes criticisms that electronic democracy could manifest itself as little more than a consumerist model of registering preferences or be at best little more than a time-saver for the politically motivated. His central thesis, however, is that single-minded and simple-minded messages of old media will simply overwhelm all the potential of new media, which will be left with the primary purpose of shopping or downloading films.

Castells, similarly, sees new media splitting into those aimed at 'the interacting and the interacted', as part of his progression towards a media world of 'real

virtuality'. Knowledge of how to find information and 'use the message' will be essential to distinguish the experience of CMC from standard mass media, whose emphasis is increasingly on entertainment (Castells 1996, 371).

Roscoe suggests that the transformation of the Internet to a mass media broadcast model is already well underway, and that journalists have played a central role in this shift (Roscoe 1999). He says the construction of the Internet audience has come about: because journalists and media workers, failing to understand the Internet, have naturally fallen back on models of existing media; because media companies have tended to 'leverage existing content', and because the dominant view of the Internet has changed as the number of people has increased geometrically. We are so used to conceiving of ourselves as consumers and audiences that we impose this identity on ourselves (Roscoe 1999, 681).

3.5 Self-censorship

If, as much of this discussion appears to suggest, mass media neglects or skews the democratic function of journalism in pursuit of global commercial agendas, then it must do so through ownership control of editorial content – self-censorship by media organisations themselves or by journalists within them. Daniel Chomsky (Chomsky 1999) adds to the previous work by Herman and Noam Chomsky (Herman and Chomsky 1988) which identified media ownership control as one of several structural constraints in their 'propaganda model'. He sets out to demonstrate, through archived documents relating to publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger and three top editors over a span of 50 years, how owners have exerted editorial influence at the prestigious New York Times (even though the exercise of power is more likely to have been covert and the written record is sparse). Chomsky shows how publisher control is directed towards the editorial page but also into the news pages, chiefly with an anti-communist agenda, through a variety of episodes in which control is explicitly and confrontationally exercised through

blunt demands, or by bureaucratic means, as in hiring policy, where candidates were assessed as being a certain number of degrees 'left of centre' (Chomsky 1999, 592, 593).

But allegations of journalistic self-censorship cover more comprehensive territory. In the wake of the AOL/Time Warner merger, Hickey canvassed opinions about the effect on journalistic independence (Hickey 2000). The record merger, variously heralded in news headlines as 'The triumph of the Internet as an irresistible force'; 'The prototype for a twenty-first century media colossus'; and 'The beginning of the end of the old mass media', immediately raised fears for independence and credibility of coverage. Time Warner chief Gerald Levin and AOL boss Steve Case issued assurances that independence would be safeguarded, with similar sentiments expressed by media commentators Jeff Greenfield of CNN and Marc Gunther of Fortune. Greenfield, however, admits that, "I absolutely agree that bigger aggregates of corporate size increase the potential for conflict of interest. OK – now you've said that, now what ... If AOL/Time Warner starts mucking around with the editorial decisions of CNN, a lot of us would say, 'No thank you, we're not sticking around' ". Time Inc.'s Editor-in-Chief Norman Pearlstine told Hickey that the problem would be whether journalists working for the new entity would have the self-confidence to reports its successes. But Hickey refers to Time magazine's front cover stories on Warner Brothers' Pokémon: The First Movie, as well as Eyes Wide Shut as well as several other Time Warner products.

Hickey says Internet guru Dyson sees funding of journalism in terms of the economies of entertainment. The bigger the company the more money for its journalists to do their jobs. "I don't think this merger changes things much. It recognises the changes that have already occurred with regard to how the media work." The only real positives she sees for journalism is that Time Warner "gets a new lease on life – more excitement." He outlines how conglomerates have generated new media entities in recent years, from

CNN's cable news networks to Microsoft's Slate, and concludes that mergers like AOL/Time Warner may be good for consumer choice, bringing new channels, but that where conflicts arise journalists will have to fight to defend the truth. Self-censorship in the wider oligopolistic mainstream media is also indicated, as part of a system of mutual interests, in Kaplan's detailing of media organisations' financial and business links to US politicians and lobbyists, a topic which has yet to be fully explored in Ireland (Kaplan 1998).

The extent of self-censorship is described in a recent survey of journalists in the US (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2000). Of the sample of 206 reporters and 81 news executives, both local and national, 41% admit that they have purposely avoided newsworthy stories, or have softened the tone of stories to benefit the interests of their organisations. Journalists expressed widespread concern over commercial and competitive pressures, and said that market concerns were responsible for most instances of self-censorship, which occurred when stories considered important were avoided because they were thought too complex or 'boring.' Peer pressure – fear of embarrassment or potential career damage – is cited by about half of all journalists as a factor for avoiding newsworthy stories. The charge of self-censorship is also levelled against Newsweek for famously holding back on the Monica Lewinsky story, only for the story to be made public by Matt Drudge (Gitlin 1999).

An interesting comparison of editorial control in professional news cultures is provided by Essen, who studied working methods in German and British newsrooms (Esser 1998). The latter are highly structured and hierarchical, with copy being handled five, six or seven times in a process beginning with reporter and ending with the editor or deputy editors. German newsrooms are run on a more holistic basis, with reporters having much more involvement with their stories. Notable exceptions are Bild and Der Spiegel, whose journalists are paid premium wages. Esser echoes the anecdotal myth of the Daily Telegraph's sub-editors' desk being inhabited largely by

communists, when he notes that many journalists consider themselves politically left of centre and left of their title's readerships, but in British newspapers their 'personal' bias is counterbalanced by organisational bias effected via news processing centred on the 'back bench', the core of senior editorial staff. By experience and observation, journalists quickly get a good idea as to what sorts of stories will be used by their paper. Esser cites the candid account of Anthony Bevins who worked at *The Sun, Sunday Express, Daily Mail* as well as *The Times, The Independent*, and *The Observer*:

> "It is daft to suggest that individuals can buck the system, ignore the pre-set taste of their newspapers, use their own news-sense in reporting the truth of any event, and survive. Dissident reporters who do not deliver the goods suffer professional death. They are ridden by newsdesks and backbench executives, they have their stories spiked on a systematic basis, they face the worst form of newspaper punishment: by-line deprivation ... It is much easier to pander to what the editors want." (Bevins 1990, 399)

Media marginalisation, as well as direct censorship, are the topics of Pettit's study of Irish alternative publications (Pettit 1997). Petit analyses the editorial and commercial, in particular advertising and distribution, practices of An Phoblacht, Gay Community News and the Big Issues. Petit observes that the 1996 Report of the Commission on the Newspaper Industry in Ireland fails to consider An Phoblacht/Republican News as a national weekly newspaper, despite its then circulation figures of 20-23,000, greater than some local newspapers, *Anois*, the Irish language weekly, *The Irish Catholic* and *The Sporting Press*. If the title was not excluded on the basis of a circulation benchmark, it is worth considering whether its radicalism put it beyond the pale of printed press for the report, which recorded a satisfactory diversity of coverage in the Irish press. While the other two publications have received significant state and advertiser support, the republican propaganda vehicle accepts no

advertising, receives no state subsidies, has been banned by the country's principal print media distributor, Eason.[18]

As seen earlier, according to Dyson, the economies of the Internet are ideally suited to small media (Dyson 1998), while others have invoked them as a necessary balance against the prevailing discourse of mainstream media. Toffler observes that, as witnessed by the Lockerbie bombing, Chernobyl, and the Spycatcher episode,[19] "the use of media outside a country to influence political decisions inside it is also becoming more common." (Toffler 1990, 319). Toffler says that fears of homogenisation by global media are overstated; the shift to diversity will ensure that audiences will not be bombarded with a single message from a few giants. Individual output might be good or bad, but the most important new content of all will be democratic systemic diversity, which will include subversive media, and he points to prototypes such as Mexicans filming police brutality in LA and pre-revolutionary Czech students playing Vaclav Havel videos in Prague streets. He explicitly links media development into the wider Third Wave synthesis. In the industrial system of wealth creation, newspapers, magazines, movies, radio and television became the prime instruments of massification. But, like its manufacturing equivalents, demassified media in the Third Age sends different images to closely targeted groups. Interpenetration forms the media into a system, reducing the power of any one medium, but greatly enhancing the power of the media as a whole. Toffler notes how Third Wave media – satellites, fax, handheld TV cameras, computers, copiers, and global communication networks – were deployed by Chinese democracy protestors deliberately aiming their message at foreign audience, while the government used force and Second Wave mass media. He proposes this phenomenon as a precursor to the overwhelming of Second Wave tools of 'mind control' (Toffler 1990, 345-350)

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[18] An Phoblacht was one of the earliest Irish publications on the web.

[19] To which could be added the Shayler affair.

In Goldstein's understanding, globalisation and conglomeration are balanced by nichification and the new appetite for two-way communication (Goldstein 1998). He relates Miller's view that there is evidence of direct, conscious manipulation of news by higher corporate powers and by advertisers. Within news journalism, the quest for ratings, budget cutbacks and careerism combined to produce a kind of "trivial spectacle that doesn't really tell us anything" (Miller 1998). Against this, however, he recognises arguments that the Internet is eroding notions of an all-powerful media elite, and that fears of Orwellian domination by media are wildly overdrawn.

The possibilities for 'Everyman Journalism' on the Internet are enthusiastically outlined by Godwin, staff counsel for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, who says that now anyone can aim to become a Drudge. "With a $1,000 desktop computer and a connection to the Internet, anybody can reach an audience of thousands or millions, the kind of audience that once only a Hearst or a Murdoch could reach." Nowadays, all you have to be is a Matt Drudge. "You may aim higher than Drudge does, but the beauty of the new medium is that you don't have to be any richer than he was." (Godwin 1999)

Traditional journalists, says Godwin, most commonly object to the notion of the 'Everyman Journalist' on four grounds:

1. They have not served apprenticeships under editors: Godwin argues that constant feedback to online journalists can and does hone skills in a similar way.
2. Bad journalism will drive out good journalism: Godwin counters that bad journalism already exists, in the routine distortions of big media institutions. In addition, the tradition of solo-operating journalists is older and more venerable, going back to Samuel Johnson. Furthermore, this is an arrogant argument that sees citizens as sheep, uncritically accepting all they read.

3. Small media cannot achieve what large organisations can: Godwin recognises the importance of 'heavyweights' that are less likely to be pressured or swayed, but says this status comes at the price of commercial compromises and advertising concerns, which meant that – prior to the era of Internet publishing – important stories would never see the light of day.[20] He says journalism pursued by talented individuals on the Internet will enrich traditional, capital-intensive professional journalism. Schools have been teaching citizens for years to learn about subjects and to write about them. Every educated person can be a journalist.

4. Amateur journalists will be ignorant and disrespectful of professional and ethical values: Godwin makes a plea for established journalists to welcome the new journalists so that they can evangelise them. Now, more than ever before, the commercial and political pressures on institutional news media are likely to compromise journalism and foster bad reporting. The best direction for journalism combines the strengths of traditional news bodies with the diverse resources of the Internet.

But small media are not necessarily or entirely dependent on the Internet for its success. In the organisation of mass demonstrations in Beijing, East Berlin, Bucharest, Budapest and Prague, distribution of small media was the key. Such media ranged from photocopied sheets, periodicals, graffiti, and in Iran, voice tapes (Mohammedi 1994). In Britain, the Undercurrents group of video activists publish a regular video news magazine of 'the news they don't see on the news' (McGuire 1999). Freespeech TV, based in Colorado gets non-exclusive licences for social and environmental programming and distributes them on cassette to cable stations around the US. Paper Tiger is a public access TV show broadcast in New York and San Francisco, and like

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[20] Godwin is claiming, at least by implication, that the Internet, by providing a platform for alternative opinion, has already had a beneficial effect in reducing mass media self-censorship.

Undercurrents analyses and challenges the output from the mass media communications industry.

3.6 Layers of interactivity

The breadth of the space in history that newspapers occupy is summed up by that famous claim that one weekday edition of the modern New York Times contains more information than the average person in 17th century England was likely to encounter in an entire lifetime (Noam 1995). But now, as we have seen in previous sections, interactivity rather than volume of information alone has become a quality by which media are critiqued, certainly since McLuhan but especially since the advent of online communications.

Barthes identified interactivity in printed text, exploring the idea that the narrative is not entirely delineated by the text itself, but also depended on interaction between writer and a non-passive reader (Barthes 1977; Kilfeather 1996). Levinson refers to a legal-commercial extension of such interaction in the practice of anthology editors, magazine editors and now online services which assert copyright to collections as a whole, even though individual authors may retain copyright (Levinson 1997, 143). Kaplan, while recognising that print culture contains a culture of reader resistance, stresses that electronic writing, and hypertext in particular, carries with it a 'radical instability' that may threaten the socially determined power relations of the technology (Kaplan 1995).

Kilfeather outlines the potential of hypertext beyond the printed word, and its effect in turning the act of reading into an act of authorship (Kilfeather 1996). Hypertext offers such an array of possibilities that the author cannot know what the reader will choose. There is no univocal text. This idea of the reader as author challenges not only the question of news publishers' policies on hyperlinks, but also much that is taken for granted in the currency of news. For example, the idea of a text holding infinite possibilities that can be

realised only by individual readers is the antithesis of the rigidly formulated style of modern news stories. Tarling interprets this quality as anti-elitist (Tarling 1995). He claims that electronic writing is based on an anti-hierarchical ideal that gives reader and writer the same power, and so is inimical to any closed system, and promotes ways of thinking that would be suppressed in print-oriented cultures.

But if news websites have reader power and interactivity built into their texts, it is not enough for Katz, whose savage analysis of newspapers moving online has defined much debate of the emerging issues. (Katz 1994). Katz characterises such online publications as bland, smug, and elitist. He argues that most efforts to migrate online have been unsuccessful because of a false interactivity. CompuServe and CNN have ensured that newspapers are stale before they are put on delivery trucks. Online newspapers are "our least hip medium" (with the possible exception of network TV news) – relentlessly one-way, non-interactive and smug, astonishingly primitive graphically, and with a message to readers to take it or leave it, "and if you don't like it, write us a letter." By contrast, the growing computer news culture fosters a sense of ownership, kinship and participation.

Newspapers in AOL's Newstand are unnatural and silly. Their only positive contribution is in the odd community message board, but this feature is just another BBS, not a feature of the newspaper. The New York Times's @times service is singled out as arrogantly providing a false interactivity: there were no live chat areas; users could write to @times, but not to the newspaper through the online service, which had been established by the Times's commercial section; and the newspapers' archive had already been sold to Nexis. With few exceptions, he charges, online newspapers are expensive hedges against onrushing technology, with little rationale of their own. Emails were answered carefully, but "in the same *pro-forma* way they thank readers for writing letters".

The San Jose Mercury News, an online pioneer, provided more interactivity, but Katz argues that its best online features were native to the online medium and could have been provided by an Internet service provider alone, while the core newspaper content lost the user-friendliness and prioritisation of print.

Online culture is unpredictable; newspapers sell organisation and informational predictability, and one can complement the other, says Katz, citing the experience of *Time Magazine* online. He claims that Time's new online culture is changing the magazine itself, so that now its "once-Olympian" editors receive drubbings from online activists in chat forums. In one such forum, managing editor Jim Gaines went online to communicate live with an estimated 70,000 visitors, many of them demanding to know why the magazine had darkened a picture of O.J. Simpson. It was, says Katz, "the media equivalent of cows learning to fly."

In spite of all, Katz sees a central role for newspapers in the new information environment: " ... the explosion of new media needn't eliminate the traditional journalistic print function. Quite the opposite, it could make newspapers more vital, necessary and useful than ever". Although newspapers need more interactivity, there is still a role for detached voices standing back, and for less arrogant fact-gatherers and opinion-makers. Here, Katz makes an important distinction that directly addresses the debate over technological determinism, urging that newspapers, instead of being "smart" about going online, should change not their technology but their content. Newspapers were founded by "hell-raisers" but have become dull and restrictive, and fail to take account of the "dreary toll corporatization and chain ownership – the great fears of online users – have taken on newspapers' voice, vibrancy, and relevance." Instead of spending fortunes on futuristic fantasies, newspapers would be better off hiring "a couple of hundred" bright young reporters.

In another article written in response to media hype about Internet reporting of the war in Kosovo, Katz points to the difficulty in verifying stories coming

from individuals, and argues for the need for conventional standards of reporting – accuracy, credibility and analysis (Katz 1999). The need for traditional newspapers to play to their existing strengths in this way is also stressed by Bogart, who advises publishers not to become distracted by the web, and to plan long-term strategies for investment in quality content that is produced free of concern for short-term financial results (Bogart 1999).

In a less polemic vein, a study of UK regional newspapers found that their commitment to interactivity was uneven, and that their online editions gave less rather than more space to news (Willett 1999), although once again, as in the case of Irish newspapers (Burke 1998), the provision of services to the expatriate community was a major feature.

Some of the problems facing online journalism were sketched out in a Harvard debate entitled 'Press and the New Media' (O'Reilly & Associates. 1997). This debate is highly relevant to the interviews with journalists in Chapter 7. Janice Caplin of News Corp. said: "The good news about the web is that everyone has a voice. The bad news about the web is that everyone has a voice. Unfiltered voices is not necessarily what we have time for" (1997, 278). Denise Caruso, director of digital commerce for the New York Times, said that journalism brought with it standards and some sense of credibility. "There's a big difference between raw information and people who check out the facts" (1997, 278). But Caplin and Brock Meeks, chief Washington correspondent for Wired magazine, noted that some people liked having first-hand accounts. Meeks said he used the Well for raw accounts, and that this appetite did not mean that such accounts would be accepted uncritically. "People playing journalist on the net and spouting off unconfirmed facts will be branded as such," he said (1997, 278).

John Markoff, new media correspondent for *The New York Times*, spoke of a nightmare scenario for journalism where "we can all rush to wherever the news is." Panellists generally criticised sites that repackaged material, singling

out in particular the PoliticsUSA site (www.politicsusa.com). Caruso highlighted the value of online journalism providing links to related information but particularly to alternative views, as in Mother Jones magazine (www.motherjones.com). On the subject of companies such as Toyota posting their own sites with content other than straightforward advertising, Caruso said there was nothing to stop this material being presented as news. Meeks, however, referred to the Miller Brewing Company's sponsored homepage, 'The Taproom' (www.mgdtaproom.com), which carried news content from alternative publications without pressing advertising of its beers. But he also recognised the dangers of sponsorship from interests such as tobacco which, while promising to withdraw a series of promotional measures in order to avoid strict controls, had not mentioned that they would also stay out of the Internet.

Where Meeks typified "advertisers ... throwing their money at sites they think are hot" as "pretty stupid", Markoff said it was "spooky" when customised advertisements were returned that matched a web search for information, and Caruso agreed that she was "freaked out" by this too. However, Caruso said such matching was "almost unavoidable given the media and what it was designed to do" (1997, 282).

Markoff said he had no idea who the audience was, while Meeks, claiming that he had never been concerned the audience – "I just write like I think" (1997, 281) – said that from audience feedback he could tell that he had about 30,000 13 to 18-year-olds reading his material, a very appealing demographic for newspapers. Kaplan said News Corp. believed that the web audience would grow and that it would become "far more of a mass media (sic)" (1997, 281).

In a discussion of media concentration, Caruso said that, with the overwhelming volume of pages on the web, and because to keep a site manageable there was a limit to the amount of material that it could carry,

there was a danger that alternative voices would be left out as consumers were attracted by familiar brands (which would possibly gravitate towards a cable TV model of basic v. premium services). On whether new media would be one-to-many or many-to-many, Meeks distinguished between participative formats such as newsgroups and email, and websites. Kaplan said most people went online for two-way interaction. Markov pointed to the development of push technologies such as PointCast, which inserted advertising at regular intervals, and the 'channel model' adopted 'on top of the web' by *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Boston Globe*, where they produced regional products for their markets.

The participants generally agreed that newspapers and television were suffering as a result of net adoption. Kaplan said that companies that had seen content as an easy way to advertise over the web were rethinking the strategy, because it was more difficult than they had thought and they were "discovering that really, there is a reason that journalists get paid, however meagrely ..." (1997, 286) .

Schultz elevates interactivity as the central role of the online version of the traditional media outlet (Schultz 2000). The strengths and shortcomings of interactive measures taken by the online edition of the New York Times are analysed in terms of the continued justification of the role of mass media. To get beyond naive or commercially driven versions of a 'participatory wonderland', he says, quoting Friedland, we need to examine how new technologies can be used "to extend democratic practices and lead to a broadened public sphere" (2000, 207). He takes issue with those who see a new age based around Netizens. Thousands of Internet sub-communities in cyberspace cannot provide the integration necessary for the public sphere to operate, and, with attention becoming one of the important scarcities of the new era, central sources may become more, not less, important as institutions of integration and providers of a shared lifeworld (2000, 207, 208).

Schultz turns for definitions of true interactivity, as opposed to connectivity, to Rafaeli, who distinguishes between two-way and reactive communication. Two-way communication is present as soon as messages flow bilaterally, but reactive settings require, in addition, that later messages refer to (or cohere with) earlier ones. Interactive communications forms threads: later messages in a sequence take into account not just messages that preceded them, but also the manner in which previous messages were reactive. While NYT staff are reasonably open to communication with readers by email, they are generally reactive, i.e. few enter into genuinely interactive discussions with readers. Staff face time constraints and also misuse of email by PR companies and pressure groups, as well as more junk and hate mail than by letter (Schultz 2000, 212).

Schultz also finds that NYT staff rarely join in online forums, and says this may be because the online entity is organisationally and spatially separated from the print parent. However, the newspaper forums have advantages that relate to reader-to-reader communications: they are related to the content of the mass media, which gives discussions a common background, making for greater coherence. And specialists tend not to overwhelm discussions, as can happen in Usenet groups (Schultz 2000, 214).

Users are positive about the online forums' role in providing a space for informed discussion, and their activity both in the forums and in a high rate of email follow-up indicate strong interactivity. With highly political and energetic debate, there is a danger of attracting extremists: one respondent warned for abusive postings alleged that this came close to censorship, but Schultz sees moderation as an advantage of forums provided by professional news media. Interestingly, a very small proportion, 28%, of those taking part took the print edition regularly. Schultz also points out that participation is biased to older male readers, more than half of whom have a post-graduate degree (2000, 216).

Schultz concludes that mass media are still the most important and efficient factors of integration, and have a role in developing new concepts in interactivity to balance the confusing variety of the net, and to bring more equality of access. This approach should not be confined to 'elitist' publications like the New York Times, but should be pursued by local mass media. He notes that the boom in newspapers coming online is coming to an end, and that newspapers now have to address online problems and opportunities more seriously. The challenge is to preserve the mass media as institutions of integration and public discourse, and combine them with new interactivity (2000, 217).

Schultz contrasts the NYT's regime with the false efforts of other media, and singles out NBC's failure to respond to 3,000 emails after it invited contributions on a technology programme in 1994. An official admitted the network had not looked at the messages and had no plans to do so. Most newspapers give readers the opportunity to email staff, and some have launched special email services. When Bill Clinton visited China in 1998, USA Today advertised in its print edition that readers could send email questions to the reporter who travelled with the US President.. The newspaper also gives readers a chance to 'Ask Jack!' – Jack is a weather editor to whom email questions can be sent. They are answered publicly on the web by a staff of four people (Schultz 2000, 212).

Rather than concentrate in depth on one newspaper, Massey and Levy studied 44 English-language newspaper websites in 14 Asian countries (Massey and Levy 1999, 141, 142), with discouraging results. The researchers use five 'dimensions of interactivity':

1. Complexity of choice available – meaning diversity and not solely technological augmentation
2. Responsiveness to the user, which could be sub-divided into potential for responsiveness and actual responsiveness

3. Facility of adding information

4. Facilitation of interpersonal communication

5. Immediacy

While complexity of content choice in news was high, little else was complex. Poor use was made of the net's capacity for immediacy or for allowing readers to add content, options for interpersonal activity were "virtually non-existent", and responsiveness to the user was very low, indicating that email addresses published on the site were more likely a form of window dressing. A notable exception is the *South China Morning Post*, with a strong dedicated staff.

Looking at the online editions of *The New York Times, The Washington Post* and *USA Today*, Li concludes that the newspaper remains the primary element in the 'hybrid' computer-newspaper model, with relatively restricted use of graphics due to bandwidth limitations and text the dominant format (Li 1998). Li notes the inherent interactivity of hypertext, but points out that online newspapers go beyond two-way interactivity. The publishing cycle is no longer a barrier for editors, who can put up the latest information based on audience feedback, which is immediate and continuous. Li records a notable first for the *Dallas Morning News*, which ran a story about Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh on its web page hours before the newspaper was published. The act of publishing electronically before printing the story lends credibility to web news, Li says (1998, 354).

The primacy of text forms part of Levinson's response to Postman's criticism of the computer, in which he says that despite the increasing presence of images on the Web, computers remain text-heavy (Levinson 1997, 163-165). He expects the Internet to greatly increase the habit of literacy, because it is a rising informational tide (1997, 172). His claim is enhanced by partial results of the ongoing Eyetrack study by the Poynter Institute, which appears to

affirm the primacy of text on web screens, as users take in text before images (Lewenstein, Edwards et al. 2000). Earlier studies of newspaper readers found that they focus first on photos, then text. In the web study, 92% of main text stories attracted attention, along with 82% of news briefs, while in some cases subjects clicked to a main article page before coming back to the site's front page to focus on images. However, the results should be interpreted cautiously as they are based on a small sample of subjects.

3.7 Speed and accuracy

Technological change is not new territory for many journalists, who have seen newsgathering and publishing systems alter dramatically over the last several decades, in a process that continues now with database and Internet searching techniques, some of which are outlined by Reddick and King (Reddick and King 1995). Apart from pragmatic considerations of story research, they highlight some of the ethical problems presented. Is lurking in newsgroups the same as using a hidden camera? Journalists should attribute the source of their information, and online information has the same limitations as information gathered using any other technique. *The New York Times and The Washington Post* published the Pentagon Papers even though they were classified and had been stolen., a scenario that would not have arisen without the invention of photocopying (Reddick and King 1995, 219, 220). Similar lessons are put forward by Musgrave, who also advises that the quality of hypertext links provided reflect on the reporter's credibility, and so should follow 'logical' connections in the news story (Musgrave 1996). Simon and Napolitano enthusiastically describe how, as part of a new discipline of 'computer-assisted reporting', complex database and web searches, as well as spreadsheet analysis, help journalists uncover stories (such as land purchases by members of the International Olympic Committee), as well as quicken research, add depth and be less reactive (Simon and Napolitano 1999).

But the Internet forces deeper issues in the dynamic of news, in its pace and in its geography. Writing in 1980, Smith foresees some of the questions that would emerge (Smith 1980), not as a consequence of online dissemination, but as a result of distributed facsimile printing via satellite of the Wall Street Journal to make it the United States' first 'really national' newspaper, and also refers to similar systems in France, "extending politically oriented Parisian newspapers into the provinces" (Smith 1980, 40, 41) Smith predicts that the newspapers will become conscious of their roles as specialist carrier, database, information processor, and as communal memory, and points to a route away from the glorification of authorship toward the collectivised holding of information under the control of a 'librarian-editor'. He also points to the danger of undesirable internal partitions in society, with a lot of higher quality information directed at the few (Smith 1980, 44-47).

Koch sees access to online databases freeing reporters from over-reliance on officially sanctioned sources (Koch 1991). Drawing on the writing of Chomsky that highlights the systemic limitations of journalists' independence, he argues that, although the technology will not remove the economic and social constraints supporting the editorial status quo, for those who seek accurately to describe current events in a broader context, online information changes relations between journalistic writer and editorial subject. This effect is of a "doubling" of the information base, giving a duality that heretofore has not existed in most news narratives. The reporter can cover not only what an official said – which is often the limit of the story – but simultaneously what others may have said or written on the matter (Koch 1991, 131, 132).

Access to experts is a related dimension of the new news reporting which Pavlik sees as balancing the effects of ill-resourced 'vanity publishing' such as that of Matt Drudge (Pavlik 1999). Even if much online news remains repackaging of content originally produced for other media, and the speed of the technology results in hurried judgement, the transformation of news has begun, and new media have made news content ubiquitous. Pavlik centres

new and emerging technologies in his understanding, but he decries the ability that telecommunications and helicopter transport gave to TV networks to interrupt children's viewing with live footage of a Los Angeles man who went on to commit suicide (Pavlik 1999, 56), as does Rosenberg, who says that stations cut to the scene because they could and their competitors for ratings could, not because of any journalistic need (Rosenberg 1999).

Pavlik hails the success of the financial news site TheStreet.com, where the immediacy engendered by fast-refreshing stories and continuous market data have won it a strong subscription audience. Pavlik also sees audiences migrating from almost exclusively local communities to communities of interest. He says that this is evidenced in the dropping by *The New York Times* of the subscription charge it had imposed on foreign readers (US domestic access was free). The shift is, apparently, self-financing, with expectations that the loss in revenue will be made up by higher advertising rates based on a bigger audience (Rosenberg 1999, 58). In an email debate with Gitlin, *TheStreet* editor Dave Kansas discusses the question of speed in Internet reporting (Gitlin 1999). News agencies and financial market reports have acted with speed before the Internet era, but the wire service information was kept to a privileged elite. Internet speed does, however, present challenges for journalism, which online must combine the timeliness of television with the depth, accuracy and context of print. Gitlin, however, sees the Internet as exacerbating the failure of US cable television, in a regression from 'news lite' to 'news liter', and says that *The Dallas Morning News and The Wall Street Journal* let standards fall in their coverage of the Monica Lewinsky story in the rush to publish unsubstantiated rumours online.

The collapse in standards in journalism in coverage of the Lewinsky scandal is, according to Carey, at least in part due to technology, combined with the lust for audience ratings that he condemns as a betrayal of journalism's role in defending democracy (Carey 1999). He argues that, as the same technological system comes to underlie all of society's institutions, they are trapped in a

system of high-speed interaction that threatens their stability and integrity. The cultural reality within which the media unfolded was one of entertainment and a spectacle of prurience and indignation. Cunningham provides a more specific analysis of how the new 24-hour news network, traditional media and the web feed each other in a continuous cycle (Cunningham 1999). He says that this speeded up news cycle is creating problems for accuracy, but is also creating a snowballing effect, in which everyone chases 'The Big Story', such as the Lewinsky affair or Presidential candidate George Bush taking cocaine. The Lewinsky story was the first US national story where the power of the Internet and non-stop news held sway. He reports that media organisations preparing for the 2000 presidential election campaign vowed to carry out extra checks to ensure accuracy before publishing stories.

Cunningham also details how the Internet is changing reportage, not only in terms of increasing audience numbers online, but also in deepening coverage as news organisations prepare for the election campaign. CNN Interactive's AllPolitics site will broadcast debates and other events live. C-SPAN has expanded its site, creating a comprehensive archive on the candidates going back to 1997. It has also created a searchable video archive and is marketing the database to other news organisations, including AP. The Washington Post has joined forces with Congressional Quarterly to create a "politics supersite." Readers will be able to enter their zip code and get information on local contests — from who the incumbents are to their voting records and interest-group ratings. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution is engaging in co-ordinated coverage with other newspapers in the Cox group, to produce Cox Campaign 2000. Among the site's interactive features is a space for publishing reader essays in response to the journalists' political commentaries. Added to these features, widespread reader access to archives will mean that newsrooms are under more pressure to 'get the context right.'

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Houston, a former web journalist, expresses disillusionment with Internet news because of its debilitating speed effect (Houston 1999). Houston, who resigned from Fox News Online, says that, although the web demonstrated its capacity for in-depth coverage and analysis, its audience and the economies of both television and newspapers moving online meant that they gravitated towards soundbites in which speed was the essential quality. He argues that the combined technologies of television and the web determine this direction, and he doubts the ability of online journalism to control it. The high-tech, youthful editorial team produced in-depth multimedia features and analysis, including a report on federal subsidies received by Florida sugar barons, which included a database of their Political Action Committee contributions to congressional campaigns, a video from the Congressional debate about their subsidies, and a state-by-state tally of every representative's vote set alongside the value of the sugar donation he or she received.

While such coverage might seem to reflect one of the principal strengths of web reporting, free of the space restrictions of print or television, low audience results meant that the journalists' work switched to providing shorter stories and breaking news. As newswires, adept at speed, themselves became a direct source for consumers of online news, broadcast and newspaper companies found that they had no option but to republish their services, with little attempt at differentiation. Web reporters recycle television content, which provides the bulk of their information, and in any case the web, says Houston, is gravitating towards television.

MSNBC producer Dube relates a contrasting experience (Dube 1999). He began his career in online journalism, but left, disillusioned at the reality of "shovelling stories from the (New York Times) print edition onto the website" and thinking it "doesn't feel like journalism." However, he found himself more dissatisfied in print journalism, which he described as "cheating the readers" and returned to online publishing where he stresses the ability to

add multimedia and database elements to stories, as well as interacting live with readers.

3.8 Return of the partisan

Arguing for a more engaged and openly partisan form of journalism, Katz challenges the notion of objectivity (Katz 1995). He describes objectivity as "the antithesis of moral media", and makes the argument that this core value of mainstream media undermines discourse and understanding in a fragmented society. Instead, he puts forward a case for a place for journalism as a provider of depth to sectoral perspectives, rather than as an overseer detached from the realities of diverse groups in society. Katz advances the view that so-called objectivity is a component of the commercial stance of large-scale media, which is incapable of more than tepid reporting for fear of giving offence to any section of a mass audience. In support of this thesis, he describes how reporting of the O.J. Simpson trial was impeded by political correctness, self-censorship and myopia concerning the irreconcilable differences between specific racial perspectives of the trial, while concentrating on a sensational point-scoring narrative.

Later, eulogising Paine, Katz views the Internet as holding the potential for a return to Enlightenment values and aims, and in particular Paine's "universal society" and kinship of mankind (Katz 1995). The net, he says, is the 'bastard child' of the father of journalism, because of its universality and tolerance of diverse perspectives, values which the traditional press have abandoned.

Katz notes Paine's aim of writing democratically in plain language that everyone can understand. This, he claims, is the language of the Internet. Paine's activism today would take a different form. To get any attention in the newspapers or on television, his argument would not suffice – " … he'd have to march, blockade, or burn something. Maybe he would try to get through to a radio talk show or Larry King Live. But if he had a computer and a modem,

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he could instantly spread his message. Anyone online can recognize the idea –
suddenly in circulation again – of countless ordinary people participating in
public opinion, their ideas 'expansible all over space.' "

Much of the discussion on big media claims to objectivity concerns the role
of advertising and its role in media economies. Rothenberg theorises that the
growth of mass media advertising has been fuelled since the early 19th
century by the inability to pinpoint the effect of advertising. (Rothenberg
1998). In what Rothenberg calls the 'Knowability Paradox', the advertising
industry has exploited this confusion to urge clients to buy ever more
advertising. As agencies became more profitable, more media were created.
The more advertising and media there have been, the more they have shaped
the culture they saturate. He portrays so-called objectivity in news reporting as
springing at the start of this process from publishers' desire to draw the
largest audience with the least offence. Additionally, "pseudo-events" such as
news conferences, press releases and other planned "stunts" were concocted
to fill print space and broadcast time as advertisers pandered to a growing
middle class.

Evidence has grown that advertising audiences are not engaged, and despite
its inefficiencies, direct marketing in the US has grown to represent two-thirds
of all marketing communications spending because it is accountable. Now,
the Internet, a "knowable" medium from an advertisers' point of view, will
further undermine mainstream brand advertising, as evidenced by Proctor &
Gamble's announcement that it will pay on click-through, and not on a CPM
basis. The Internet will "wipe away marketing and media as we know them".
Conglomerates will lose their oligopolistic control not merely by direct
competition from new media, but by a fundamental shift in the economies of
advertising-based media. For content, this may mean more diversity, but at a
price. Marketers, says Rothenberg, will spend only as much on a given venue
as their returns justify, and the balance will have to be paid by the consumer.

Others, however, emphasise credibility and trustworthiness, concepts that may be difficult in practice to separate from objectivity. Grossman describes a media jungle, a mix of oligarchy and anarchy, in which big conglomerates will compete with a swarm of self-publishers, such as Matt Drudge, whom AFP chose as one of the top 10 most influential media people of the century, or Amazon.com book reviewers (Grossman 1999). Professional standards may fall when the floodgates open to reporters without training, broadcasters without credentials and pundits without editors, but that has already happened in tabloids. Consumers will have to sort out the coherent and credible from the fraudulent and demented, and this environment will therefore favour professional credibility. However, this very credibility has been falling in the US (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 1997). A majority (56%) says news stories and reports are often inaccurate, up more than 20 percentage points since 1985, when a similar majority (55%) said news organisations got the facts straight.

Dennis says the way for news to survive is to return to its essential public service function (Dennis 1992). He records a blurring of information and entertainment functions in television news, both in its production and in audience perception. This also applies to newspapers and newsmagazines, with special sections, more 'soft news' and other features aimed at capturing either upmarket or youth readers. In the context of the flood of information in the 1990s, newspapers and television news need to become more thoughtful "sense-makers" for local, regional, national or other appropriate markets. Now, everyone can be an editor, but people need to know what it is they are not getting – the values the news media bring, distinguishing the significant from the trivial, delivering ordered quality news rather than aimless quantities of information. Dennis outlines five precautions that news organisations must take. Broadly, these include being more open about themselves, targeting demographic groups more explicitly, instigating feedback channels, including local press councils and "databases" wherein people's concerns can be lodged and made public, overtly promoting press

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professionalism, and attempting to address the public interest, even if there is no clear agreement on what this includes (1992, 21-23).

This theme is also elaborated by Evans, who says that cyberspace, with its instant news and excitements, will change print, but not destroy it. "What will still be required in the next century, in a more complex society, is an organising intelligence to catch life on the wing, to satisfy curiosity, provide an accessible record, uncover relevant truth, and tell ever busier people what is significant and what is not. In short, good journalism" (Evans 1999).

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the aims of the research and the means employed to achieve them. In general terms, the study aims to describe whether and how the Internet has altered, is altering or may alter the information environment in which Irish news media operate. It seeks to do this by charting the current condition of Internet news, by observing and outlining changing patterns effected by the Internet of news distribution and consumption, and by garnering the insight and opinion of journalists and news publishers.

4.2 Irish net news in practice

4.2 (i) Beyond scrolling headlines

The Internet has brought an apparently sharp expansion in the number of outlets for news in Ireland. Searches of the most developed Internet directories relevant to Ireland revealed 64 such sources. This count is not definitive, as there may have been outlets not listed in online directories, or some sites may have been started between the count and the filing of this study. Also, taken alone, this figure is potentially misleading, for example because many sites present syndicated and therefore largely duplicated content rather than a unique addition to news output. The detailed survey of Internet news sources was undertaken to reveal more meaningful patterns; to establish the essential characteristics of each publication, to gauge the degree to which Irish Internet media incorporate Internet-native publishing features, and to compare practices among the various sectors, such as traditional media migrating online and new media online. The results are set out in Tables 4 and

5 in order to show clear distinctions in the behaviours of groups of online entities.

The survey was compiled over a number of weeks in May and June 2000. However, it was finally updated on August 28, and therefore must be interpreted as a snapshot of a fast-changing environment, rather than an attempt to describe in detail the continuing development of the sector. It also implies a necessary distinction between what might be termed "professional" news sources, i.e. organisations in the business of news distribution, and other potential sources of news, such as increasingly important official sites as well as activist and public relations sources. This distinction reflects the fact that, while it refers to external developments concerning the Internet, the core concern of the study remains professional journalistic and publishing practice, as indicated by its choice of interview subjects.

4.2 (ii)Sub-categorising online news

Within this set of Internet news and information outlets, broad sub-categories were set out as follows:

National news media – traditional general news media with a national distribution or profile, both print and broadcast

Regional and local – This category principally concerns traditional provincial newspapers, but also local freesheets with significant news content

Ex-patriate and Diaspora – while to native Irish eyes such publications may present a curious refraction of events, they are newly accessible in Ireland and cannot easily be excluded from the Internet's sphere of Irish news. They are also in a special position in that they have sprung from geographic necessity but are now available to a domestic audience by virtue of the technological conquest of distance

Internet – this describes Internet-native entities which might be thought of as new competitors for audience attention, and which might be expected to be most technically adept at exploiting Internet-specific media capabilities. The

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Newshound site is included here, despite its apparently amateur status, because of its frequent and consistent updating and its concern with general news

Radio – includes stations other than RTE which offer a news service

Other – specialist publications with significant national profile

4.2 (iii) Features tested: how 'online' is the news?

The following features were tested on each site, with a view to testing the degree to which news sites have migrated to Internet publishing models, with particular reference to interactivity and depth of coverage. While no single site to my knowledge sports each and every feature listed here, many sites, particularly highly regarded sites such as the Guardian's newsunlimited. (www.newsunlimited.co.uk) carry a high number of them. Taken together, many of the features tested apply the logic of a new medium to content.

> 1. Links – As the defining characteristic of the World Wide Web, the presence of absence of hyperlinks can help in indicating the degree to which a news source regards itself, or want to be regarded, as a true Internet vehicle
>
> 2. Content – volume as a rough test of the significance of the offering
>
> 3. Journalists' emails – a test of actual openness to reader response
>
> 4. Discussion areas – does the site want others to exchange their views?
>
> 5. Opinion polls – a chance to express an instant opinion, but a confusing signal given its use as a knee-jerk gratification or entertainment
>
> 6. Update frequency – the degree to which a site has responded to the Internet's facility for publishing without deadlines. (This test does not imply a value judgment on whether or not that movement is desirable)

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7. Multimedia – the level of use of video, sound or animation in a pre-broadband setting

8. Expansion of content – whether the site makes use of the net's unlimited space

9. In-depth reports – related to 8, but tests specifically whether there is an attempt to provide a deeper understanding

10. Syndication – reveals whether a site buys in its news

11. Aggregation – reveals whether a site depends on and references other media

12. Production standards – a rough measure of the professionalism of the site's construction and presentation, but not of its editorial practices

13. Email story forwarding

14. Print-friendly variations

15 Email editions – with 13 and 14, above, an indicator of the degree to which the site exploits some additional net facilities

16 Archive – whether individual issues or instalments are available to the audience, allowing the reader to form a deeper understanding of a story topic

17 Search – whether such archives are searchable, adding to the depth of a site's offering

18 Personalisation – indicates whether the site permits the reader to pre-select or self-edit

4.3 Changing patterns

Much has been made of claims that the Internet will transform communications and media relations forever, and prominent in this vein of thought is the aspiration for a more democratic and inclusive media regime. Set against this is the large body of critical work that addresses the need for reform of media systems that promote the dominant hegemony of western society. Trends towards still greater media concentration have been

accelerated, rather than thwarted, by the supposedly unruly and ungovernable Internet (Hickey 2000) and the commercial colonisation of this new territory has become one of the principal pre-occupations of the business world, as the Internet becomes 'mainstream'.

But set against the drift towards the Internet as a mass medium, amenable both to balkanisation (Mansell 1999, 13) of audiences by marketing criteria and to the dumbing down of traditional electronic broadcast media, is the Internet's continued ability to facilitate interaction and reader power. There remains an inherent ability in Internet technologies to subvert the message and the form of the message as intended by its broadcast-model originators. This ability is represented in increasingly sophisticated tools for publishing, pre-setting media receptions, self-editing, re-publishing and advancing critical views. Some of these tools, and the radically different media readings that they permit, are reviewed in Chapter 6. They are not individually put forward as definitive or conclusive elements supporting an argument that the Internet is somehow untameable: rather, what they represent is an illustration of how the net continues to develop, within a now highly commercialised framework, technologies that can be used to create different world views.

It is this characteristic, the Internet's process of continuously refreshing and increasingly sophisticated support for independent thought, rather than the features of any one technology discussed (all of which are claimed as revolutionary by their promoters), that is the real focus of this observational element of the study.

4.4 Interviews

4.4 (i) Thinking about a new culture

The series of 15 in-depth interviews with journalists represents the core of the study's methodology. It was decided to carry out this research in this way because of the author's background as a print newspaper journalist, which

gave rise to a perception of the potential issues the Internet may raise around news and news organisations. These concerned journalists' enthusiasm for or distrust of the Internet as a democratising force; acceptance or fear of Internet technologies as working tools; recognition of the relevance of the Internet as a viable publishing platform; and attitudes to the demands of reader interaction.

The interviews, conducted in person or by telephone, ranged from 90 minutes to half an hour, often with the duration governed by that ever-present reality in the lifeworld of day-to-day journalism, the deadline. Questions were emailed in advance to participants, so that their answers might be more deliberate, and so that they would be more inclined to address each question specifically, thus avoiding unnecessary overlap.

4.4 (ii) Questions and their rationale

In all, ten questions were put to interviewees, along with a catch-all to cover matters that may have been omitted in any individual's discourse. Each question was intended to raise particular aspects of journalism within the context of the Internet.

The questions, and the rationale for them, are as follows:

1) How has news delivery over the net affected the nature of your output?
This question is intended to elicit a response that indicates the interviewee's own priorities in their perceptions of Internet-induced changes taking place in news.

2) In what ways can online journalism have a different role to print or broadcast journalism?
Question 2 is intended to encourage responses that are not tied to the interviewee's current concerns with their own entity, and to yield a broader consideration of the Internet's potential beyond the pragmatic discourse of day-to-day journalism.

3) Are expectations of online journalism realistic?

This question addresses the counter-hype often expressed by journalists working in areas other than technology. This broad range of sentiment, frequently reflected in media coverage of the net, at its extreme includes views that the Internet is marginal, disreputable or good for nothing but the distribution of pornography and as a network for paedophiles and other criminals. At the other extreme of opinion, however, is the view that the Internet can help journalism rid itself of some of the constraints of traditional media, such as corporatism and pressure from advertisers, that maintain the hegemonic message of most established media. In general, the question allows the interviewee to be identified broadly with one or other camp. However, the question does not impose this interpretation on respondents, and so also elicits responses based on other, equally legitimate considerations, as in the case of one respondent who emphasised online publishing's potential as a source of employment.

4) The Internet lets the audience 'bite back' in the sense that they can email comments, engage in online discussions, and comment freely on the website, newspaper, or news bulletin. Should news publishing become a looped or two-way process, in which audience feedback helps shape output, or does news remain as far as possible an objective truth?

This statement/question is intended to confront the interviewee with the potential for greater audience effect in the newsroom, normally a busy environment with little time for individual responses to readers. In a world of mediated reality, journalists and news organisations continue to lay claim to the value of objectivity: the question opens that claim to scrutiny in the light of new interactive possibilities that may add to the value of a more explicit partisanship as much as any claim to absolute objectivity.

5) In what ways do you feel challenged or empowered by online publishing?

Question 5 hopes to discover in what ways new ICTs are considered 'good' or 'bad' for journalists and journalism, and the extent of awareness of Internet issues among journalists.

6) If journalism has a democratic function, in what particular ways, if any, can online journalism fulfil that role?

This question extends Question 5 to give it a specific focus. It was decided to make the question conditional upon agreement with the premise of a democratic function, in order to draw responses more grounded in that consideration. This was felt to be particularly relevant when interviewing journalists because, from the author's own experience, professional discourses among individual journalists tend towards the pragmatic and the normative rather than consideration of the fundamentals of the Fourth Estate.

7) How will new media bolster or undermine standards in journalism?

This question is similarly intended to add a specific dimension, if not already addressed, to responses to Question 5. Its purpose is principally to assess the response to concerns expressed in the literature, such as those concerning instant news and soundbites, but also to allow for the potential that certain characteristics of Internet publishing could enhance standards.

8) Who's got the core skills for new media – traditional journalists or new media types?

This is a simple question to discover the mood among journalists who may be perceived to have been overtaken by the speed of technological change. It also addresses the tendency of new media companies to hire skilled and experienced technical staff while employing inexperienced or trainee journalists. The question is intended to address the quality of new media, rather than narrow vocational rivalries. While it is recognised that 'new media types' might be interpreted pejoratively, it was not intended to have this meaning but to encompass the range of non-journalistic skills that new media may entail.

9) How does or will the physical presentation of online content impact on editorial material?

This question aims to discover how journalists perceive the technicalities of presenting their work meaningfully on the Internet. Principally, but not exclusively, this concerns the act of reading or viewing on screen.

10) What policy or regulatory measures, if any, do you think should be adopted in elation to online journalism?

Question 10 was envisaged as testing the appetite of journalists for a defined public strategy for the new medium.

11) What's your opinion on the following characteristics of online news (if these have not already arisen):
frequent news updates online
links to other resources online
publishing email address of reporter/writer with his or her piece
closer interaction with audience
other

This additional question was designed to cover, in short form, issues which were thought likely to have arisen in answers to previous questions, but which may have been omitted. It was included in particular to reflect the fact that some interviewees were not employed as online journalists. It was also decided that it might be of value to allow interviewees the freedom to add comments under 'Other'.

4.4 (iii) The interviewees

The aim in selecting 15 named interviewees was to arrive at a representative cross-section of journalists and publishers whose work appears online or who are engaged in editing or publishing such work. Not every individual interviewed is immediately identifiable as an online journalist: this reflects the fact that, regardless of their awareness or consideration of the change, many traditional journalists are now published in new media. It was decided that interviewing only 'pure' online journalists would provide a skewed impression of Internet journalism in Ireland, since much online content is produced by journalists who may not personally use the Internet. This decision is based on the aim of the study to focus on journalism and its environment on the net, rather than on the technicalities of online publishing.

The distribution of interviewees by publishing organisation reflects the pre-eminent position of ireland.com, both in terms of its audience position and as an expression of its highly developed web enterprise.

The majority of journalists and editors asked to take part in the study responded positively, with only two choosing not to accept an invitation to participate. In particular, the study failed to harvest any insight or opinion from Yahoo!, one of the country's biggest sites, in terms of audience numbers, and also very relevant because of its position as an Internet provider of Irish news directed from another country.

However, with this exception, the study succeeded in garnering the views of the following groups, with some individuals falling into more than one category: online journalists; those concerned with the online operation of traditional print and broadcast media; print-only journalists, both national and regional, whose work is nevertheless published online; technology journalists who have been accustomed to the debates and issues surrounding Internet generally; content aggregators and online publishers of syndicated content.

Karlin Lillington is a freelance technology journalist who works for The Irish Times in Ireland and for several other titles abroad, including Wired magazine, Red Herring, and the San José Mercury News. She is also editor of the Technology Section of online.ie

Katie Hannon is Political Correspondent for the Irish Examiner. As a print journalist with a national newspaper, her work is re-published by the newspaper on the Internet. She describes herself as knowing very little about the Internet.

Michael Cunningham is managing director of Volta Digital Media, a new media house providing services to corporate clients. He is also editor of netgains, Volta's email-format technology newsletter. He was formerly joint editor of The Irish Times's computing section, Computimes.

Emma Kavanagh is a publication manager at Eircom's new media company Rondomondo. Trained as a journalist, she has responsibility for the Doras directory and its associated content, which includes a newsfeed provided by Independent Network News.

Samantha Fanning is content editor, Dublin, at Local Ireland. Her brief includes editing and commissioning feature articles, while Local Ireland also features a daily aggregated news roundup.

Liam Ferry is the founding editor of the Irish Emigrant, which has been published as an email newsletter since 1987. He has been much-applauded as a pioneer of online publishing in this country.

Sammy Hamill is an assistant editor the Belfast Telegraph, one of the earlier and most-developed newspaper Internet sites on the island[21]. From a print background, he has been seconded to the new media division for a major review of the Telegraph's online activities.

Conor Pope is deputy editor of ireland.com (which incorporates The Irish Times online). Ireland.com is the country's largest and most successful news site.

Cliff Taylor is new media editor at The Irish Times, with responsibility for liaison between the print newspaper and ireland.com.

Fintan O'Toole is a columnist with The Irish Times and theatre critic with The New York Daily News.

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[21] Although the study was not intended to cover all Internet news published from Northern Ireland, it was felt that the Telegraph's high profile warranted its inclusion here. Similar reasoning prompted the inclusion of the Irish News in the observation study of online entities.

Luke McManus is the producer of RTE Online News, which aggregates content from the station's various news and current affairs programmes, as well as producing some deeper content itself.

Eugene McGee is editor of the Longford Leader, which is published online under the Unison label. He says he has little day-to-day involvement in the publication of the online edition, and that uploading content to Unison is a simple process.

Christina McHugh is editor of the Roscommon Herald, another Unison title. Again, she says that there is little local involvement in the product carried on Unison's site, other than the ranking of stories and the uploading of stories and pictures.

Fiachra Ó Marcaigh is Technical Editor at online.ie. He was previously co-editor of Computimes, the computing section of The Irish Times, as well as systems editor at The Irish Times.

Sheila McDonald is managing director and editor of Electric News. Formerly editor of Internet magazine .ie, she also writes a weekly Internet review column for the Irish Independent.

NEWS IN NEW MEDIA: IRELAND IN CONTEXT

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the development of Irish Internet media, in the context of illustrative discussion of the opening of the net beyond traditional media and the likely continued adoption of the net by Irish people.

5.2 Growth in the online population

5.2 (i) Following the global trend

Ireland has followed international trends with rapid adoption of Internet among the public, although take-up has not been as fast as its profile as an active player in the digital economy would suggest. Broad trends indicated that high growth was continuing in 2000, that problems of access were recognised by government, and that commercial and technological developments favoured faster and wider access.

Available reliable figures began very recently, but according to June 2000 estimates by consultancy firm Amárach, 25% of Irish adults – equivalent to 679,000 people – used the Internet. This compared with 10.5% in June 1999 (www.amarach.com), representing a greater than doubling of numbers online. In its later report, Amárach said that half of those online accessed the Internet from home.

 Nielsen NetRatings (www.nielsen.com) figures for March 2000 showed that just under 22% of Irish people had online access from home. This compared with 29% in the UK and 49% in the US (Nielsen/NetRatings 2000). The national uptake was lower than that of the overall percentage for western

Europeans, one quarter of whom were reported online in January, but with very wide national variations. Low average periods spent per session by European users were attributed to high access (IDC Research 2000).

Nielsen/NetRatings statistics for May 2000 showed a significant increase in the 'Irish Internet Population' over the previous two months. This increase, if constant, would represent an annual growth in the number of people online of 65%.

Irish Internet Population

March	April	May
692,967	712,741	777,590

Table 1a. Source: Nielsen/NetRatings June 2000

Importantly, however, at 44%, those in Ireland with home Internet access were less likely to make use of it, or to be part of the active Internet population.

Active Irish Internet Population

March	April	May
319,121	327,813	344,807

Table 1c Source: Nielsen/NetRatings June 2000

Nielsen/NetRating's analysis of actual usage showed that, of six nationalities, Irish people with Internet access were the least likely to be active in using it, and spent considerably less time online in much fewer sessions, features that may point to the need to address high access costs. The distinction between having Internet access and actually using it largely accounted for the apparent divergence between the Amárach and Nielsen figures. An earlier report by the Information Society Commission put the proportion of Irish people with Internet access at 33% (Anonymous 1999).

	US	Australia	Ireland	N. Zealand	Singapore	UK
Sessions per month	18	12	9	15	12	11
Time online/month	9:05:24	7:05:05	4:25:19	7:27:31	6:09:31	5:02:36
Active Usage	82.7 m.	3.5 m.	344,800	635,000	540,700	8.8 m.
People with Access	134.2 m.	7.0 m.	777,600	1.3 m.	1.7 m.	19.4 m.

Table 2 Average Internet Usage By Country, May 2000Source: Nielsen//NetRatings, June 2000

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Overall trends remained strongly positive. Consultants IDC (www.idc.com) predicted that over half of Europe's population could have Internet access within three years. It said there were 81 million online at the end of 1999, and this was expected to reach 215 million by 2003 (Volta 2000).

5.2 (ii) Uneven access

As seen, indications of strong growth in availability are not *per se* any guarantor of high Internet usage, and the issue of access poses strong challenges for claims of Internet universality and social inclusion, as highlighted by the Combat Poverty agency (Healy 2000). Amárach Consulting identified 28% of the Irish population as "anti–tech", describing them as uninterested in new technology and lacking confidence in their ability to use new technologies, with a 60% sub-group stating that they were unwilling to learn about new ICTs. Those belonging to this group were more likely to be female, aged over 45 years, and married, and were also more likely to be homemakers or retired. Amárach said 93% of "anti-techs" did not intend to get Internet access soon (Amárach Consulting 2000).

While net audiences have frequently been characterised as male-dominated, the trend for the latter period was towards greater participation by women. Female users had overtaken male users in US surveys, and, although in Ireland male users still predominated, the gap was narrower than in other countries. However, Irish women tended to spend significantly less time online than men, while this gap between genders in the US was narrower. The female majority of users in the US was placed within a trend of wider access generally by a study which found that over 50% of a sample of 55,000 Internet users were women – up 35% in 12 months – with especially strong growth not only among the young, but also among women over 55 (Media Metrix and Jupiter Communications 2000).

Country	Male Composition %	Female Composition %	Average Time Spent Per Month: Male	Average Time Spent Per Month: Female
Australia	54.87	45.13	8:01:41	5:57:08
Ireland	55.20	44.80	5:18:42	3:21:59
Singapore	57.57	42.43	7:23:38	4:30:18
New Zealand	52.33	47.67	8:46:29	6:00:07
United Kingdom	60.86	39.14	5:52:51	3:46:57
United States	49.25	50.75	9:54:57	8:18:26

Table 3 Internet Audience by Gender Source: Nielsen//NetRatings, June 2000

Similarly, British women began to catch up with male participation rates in 2000 (Harrison 2000) as part of the Internet's move to the mainstream, with higher uptake in lower-income homes (Richardson 2000).

Problems of access have led to official rhetoric addressing the need to promote higher levels of participation in the information society: in Ireland, the Information Society Commission called for action by the Government and the private sector actively to promote accessibility and to provide support for the less well-off in gaining Internet access (Information Society Commission 2000). This stance mirrored European Commission aspirations towards increasing online access, which were directly expressed in the eEurope initiative, one of the primary goals of which was stated as "Bringing every citizen, home, school, business and administration on-line" (EU Commission 2000).

Continued growth of the online audience could also be expected with the introduction of broadband technologies. In Ireland, cable operators Princes Holdings, a subsidiary of Independent News and Media, and NTL signalled their intention to provide high-speed Internet (Anonymous 2000; ntl 2000). Between them, the two companies had 570,000 customers. The ESB, meanwhile, said that it was monitoring tests by Electricité de France in powerline carrier technology. If feasible, such technology could provide critical 'local loop' access to households nationally, thus overcoming one of the most intractable barriers to Internet adoption (Volta 2000). These

developments in retail access have been accompanied by an expansion in connectivity between Ireland and the outside world, with the laying of the Global Crossing cable from this country to connect Europe to the US (Lillington 1999).

5.3 More audience for news?

While the Internet's continuing growth has become a well-worn official and commercial mantra, it clearly cannot be dismissed as hype. However, the degree to which news organisations new and old have benefited from this growth is the subject of some confusion. Within the broader context of multimedia and new ICTs, news publishing has been deemed to rank very low in commercial terms. The Enterprise Ireland and Information Society Commission Up-date of New Media Industry considered that growth areas in new media were "directly linked to the volume and types of content which the populations will interface with". It identified as the largest growth areas:

– advertising
– education and training
– interactive television
– entertainment software
– corporate web presence
– information systems and modelling (Farrell Grant Sparks 1999)

The report categorised newspapers and publishing as "other industries" which would be affected by new ICTs, and predicted that newspapers "will position themselves as sources of local news delivered through a variety of media – internet, interactive TV and paper". This would lead to "a convergence of the broadcast news desks and the paper news desks in local areas and regions" (Farrell Grant Sparks 1999, 25). If realised, such a development could lead to a rationalisation, centralisation and effective contraction of journalistic activity, rather than an expansion of reportage and debate in the public sphere.

However, news and news-carrying sites have performed strongly in audience rankings. Ireland.com was placed No. 1 in the most recent Irish Top 40 websites produced by advertising industry website New Medialive (2000). Ireland.com's 16,714,675 page impressions (pi) for March 2000 represented an increase of 63.9% (6,513,755 pi) on the figure for October 1999, and was almost double the stated number of hits for Ryanair.com. Web versions of other traditional news outlets also showed strong performance and high rankings, featuring RTE Online (4), Examiner (5), Belfast Telegraph (6), before a significant drop to Independent Online (15), Irish News (17), the recently established Unison (24) and the Sunday Business Post (38). However, the news v. others distinction cannot be rigidly applied, as many of the other sites listed also carry newsfeeds, or provide spaces for debate of public topics. The Top 40 among domestic users yielded broadly similar rankings, but with ireland.com at No. 2 and with a considerably lower home audience, at 5,850,136 pi, and Independent Online, with a much greater proportion of its users in Ireland, up to twelfth position, at 1,050,000. (See Appendix B).

The success of ireland.com has been singular, with the site claiming ABC-audited figures for page impressions growing 230% in the 12 months to March 2000. There was an increase of 9.5 million pi in the period, jumping from 7.2 million pi in March of 1999. The number of individual users of the site for the month rose to 1.16 million, up from 585,000 in March of 1999. The site was ranked fourth in terms of numbers of users of ABC Electronic-audited sites in Britain and Ireland, after BBC Online News, Interactive Investor International and Virgin Net (The Irish Times New Media Division 2000)

In an online survey of its users in September, 1999, ireland.com found that 65% were male, 39% were 25 to 34 years old, 63% had completed third level education, and 46% reside in Ireland (See Appendix C). The site's Media Kit (aimed at attracting advertisers) also reported the following findings:

* "ireland.com users are Young, Educated and willing to purchase over the Internet Of those surveyed, almost half reside in Ireland.
* 93% of our users have made contact with the site before and 8 out of 10 access the site at least once a week ...
* Almost 7 out of 10 users access the online newspaper regularly. Sports Extra, Business and the Free Email service were the next best ranked sections.
* The vast majority (78%) of users rated the site's range of information as excellent or better than average
* Almost a quarter of our users are involved in the IT/Computing industry
* Our users show a positive response to advertising with over half of them having clicked on a banner advertisement on ireland.com – The Irish Times
* Over half our users have already engaged in e-commerce with 53% of respondents stating they have purchased online. 64% of those who have purchased online have purchased books. The next most popular online purchases are music CDs, software and airline tickets" (Behaviour & Attitudes 1999).

Despite these indications of online success, at least for one news organ, traditional news organisations' sites were conspicuously absent from rankings of URLs accessed from Ireland, measured as a proportion of the active Internet population (Nielsen/NetRatings 2000), and remained largely absent from a ranking of domestic websites. In the latter, ireland.com was placed fourth in June 2000, with a reach of 12.7%, compared with top-ranked Eircom.net, which recorded 28.64% reach and a 'unique audience figure', i.e. number of discrete individual users, of 101,482 for the month (Nielsen/NetRatings 2000) (see Appendix D). (Note that the Medialive and Nielsen/NetRatings lists are not comparable, as they are based on different measurements – the former on total site traffic, and the latter on a survey sample of home users.)

In the more developed Internet market of the US, news was identified as Internet users' second most common activity after email, with one in three saying they read news "and information" every day, and 73% of those online expressing an interest in news on demand services (Frank N. Magid Associates 2000). But in Europe, traditional media organisations were seen to

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be struggling in the transition to new media, offering static, poorly focussed content that was seen as an extension of print, and lacking net-savvy staff (Carsten Schmidt with Emily Nagle Green 2000).

5.4 More news for the audience?

5.4 (i) Flattering to deceive

As Internet usage has grown, there has been an apparent increase in audience options for news consumption. Niceone.com, the Irish-based directory, listed online versions for seven national newspaper titles, 43 regional titles, 11 'online', six 'international' (such as The Irish Voice), and seven local (www.niceone.com/newspap.htm), although this listing had some dormant hyperlinks. This loose classification included sites which were little more than holding pages or gateways to commercial services, but the changing nature of the news environment was also reflected in the fact that various sites carrying news, but not describing themselves as news sites, were not included. These included ISP portals, directories such as Doras or Local Ireland, and online.ie. To ensure the fullest coverage of the survey, listings at Doras (www.doras.ie), Yahoo! UK and Ireland (www.yahoo.co.uk) and newsdirectory.com were also consulted.

As traditional news providers have moved to publish online, they have been met by new entrants to the news arena that may either compete with them, aggregate their content into more digestible or relevant formats, or buy news coverage from them. Expanded lists of online news outlets therefore have not translated straightforwardly into an expansion in news providers. Few of the new outlets are original generators of news or public affairs content. Some, especially ISP websites, e.g. OceanNet, Indigo, and IOL, are modelled as Internet portals and reproduce newsfeeds from more established sources as one element in a wide array of content. Others, such as Local Ireland or the Irish Emigrant (email newsletter), function as aggregators – sampling, prioritising, contextualising and condensing stories for readers. As news has

become more ubiquitous, it has not automatically become more diverse or provided opportunities for more journalism. These new manifestations of news are justified by their providers as being either an additional service to readers, a means to include the ex-patriate and Diaspora audience, or as "putting our own spin" on the news (see interviews in Chapter 7).

Table 4: Online Properties in National and Regional/Local Media

	Links	Content	Journalist emails	Discussion areas	Opinion polls	Update frequency	Multimedia	Expansion of content	Depth reports	Newsfeed	Syndication	Aggregation	Production standards	Email story forwarding	Print-friendly versions	Email edition	Archives	Search	Options to personalise
National																			
The Irish Examiner		Full	Yes (+chat)			Daily		Yes					Interm.				Yes	Yes	
Ireland on Sunday		Full				Weekly							Interm.					Yes	
Irish Independent		Full				Daily							Basic				Yes		
Irish News		Full				Daily		Yes		Yes			Advanced			Yes	Yes	Yes	
Ireland.com		Full	Some	Yes	Yes	Daily	Some	Yes	Yes	Yes			Advanced					Yes	
Sunday Business Post		Full				Daily		Yes	Yes				Advanced			Yes		Yes	
RTE News	Yes	Full				Contin.	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Advanced				Yes		
Belfast Telegraph		Full	Yes	Yes		Daily		Yes	Yes				Advanced				Yes	Yes	
TG4		Partial				Daily							Interm.					Yes	
Sunday Times		Partial	Some			Weekly				Yes			Advanced				Yes	Yes	
Regional/local																			
Unison		Full				Daily				Yes		Yes	Advanced	Yes			Yes	Yes	
The Clare Champion		Full				Weekly							Basic				Yes		
The Connaught Telegraph		Sample											Basic				Yes	Yes	
Derry People & Donegal News		Full				Weekly							Interm.						
Galway Advertiser		Full	Some	Notices		Daily							Interm.	Yes			Yes	Yes	
Inish Times		Partial				Weekly							Interm.						
Kerry's Eye		Partial				Weekly							Interm.						
Nationalist & Leinster Times		Promo																	
Limerick Leader		Full				Weekly							Basic				Yes	Yes	
Limerick Post		Full		Notices	Yes	Daily				Yes			Advanced	Yes				Yes	
Mayo Gazette		Partial		Contacts		Bi-weekly							Basic			Yes	Yes		
Munster Express		Full	Yes			Weekly		Yes					Interm.				Yes	Yes	
N. People & S. People		Full				Weekly							Interm.					Yes	
People Newspapers		Partial				Weekly							Basic				Yes		
Waterford Today		Full				Weekly							Advanced				Yes		
Mayo News		Full				Weekly							Interm.					Yes	
Roscommon Champion		Partial				Occas.							Basic						
Tirconaill Tribune		Full				Weekly							Basic						
Kerryman		Full				Weekly							Basic				Yes		
Kilkenny People		Full	Yes		Yes	Weekly				World		Yes	Advanced	Yes			Yes	Yes	
Tipperary Star		Full				Weekly							Advanced				Yes	Yes	
Clonmel Nationalist		Full				Weekly							Advanced				Yes	Yes	
Unison		Full				Daily				Yes		Yes	Advanced	Yes			Yes	Yes	
Western People	Yes	Full				Weekly							Basic				Yes		
Connacht Tribune		Partial				Weekly							Basic						
The Kingdom		Full				Weekly							Basic						
Sligo Weekender		Full	Yes			Weekly							Basic				Yes	Yes	

Table 5: Online Properties in Ex-Pat, Net-only, Radio-related and Other Media

	Personalisation	Search	Archives	Email edition	Print-friendly versions	Email story forwarding	Production standards	Aggregation	Syndication	Newsfeed	Depth reports	Expansion of content	Multimedia	Update frequency	Opinion polls	Discussion areas	Journalist emails	Content	Links
Ex-pat. & Diaspora																			
Emigrant							Basic					Yes		Daily				Full	
Irish Voice		Yes		Yes			Basic							Weekly			Some	Full	
Irish Echo				Yes			Basic							Weekly				Partial	
Irish World							Basic					Yes		Weekly				Partial	
irelandclick.com		Yes				Yes	Advanced					Yes		Daily	Yes	Guestbook		Full	
Irish Herald											Yes							Sample	
Irish Post		Yes	Yes				Advanced	Yes			Yes	Yes		Weekly				Full	
Irish-American Info. Service			Yes				Basic	Yes	Yes	Yes				Daily				Partial	
Net																			
online.ie				Yes	Yes	Yes	Advanced	Yes	Yes			Yes		Daily	Yes	Yes		Full	
Local Ireland		Yes					Advanced	Yes						Daily		Yes	Yes	Full	
Ireland Today			Yes	Yes	Yes		Interm.		Yes			Yes		Daily	Occas.	Active		Agg., feats	
netgains				Yes	Yes		Raw text	Yes	Yes									Full	
oceanfree.net							Advanced	Yes			Yes			Contin.		Chat only		Partial	
Ireland On-Line							Advanced	Yes			Yes			Contin.		Chat only		Partial	
Indigo							Advanced	Yes						Daily				Partial	
Doras							Advanced				Yes			Contin.				Partial	
Electric News		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Advanced	Yes	Yes					Contin.			Yes	Full	
Newshound			Yes				Basic	Yes	Yes					Daily				Partial	
Digifone Online	Yes						Advanced	Yes	Yes					Daily				Partial	
Yahoo!						Yes	Basic	Yes	Yes	Brit.				Daily	Active			Full	
Radio																			
98fm		Yes	Yes*				Advanced				Yes		Audio	Contin.		Yes		Partial	
fm104							Interm.							2 x day				Partial	
Other																			
An Phoblacht/Republican News		Yes	Yes	Yes			Basic							Weekly		Active		Full	
Foinse			Yes				Basic							Weekly				Full	
Irish Farmers Journal		Yes					Interm.							Weekly		Suspend		Full	
Hack Watch News							Interm.							Variable				Partial	Yes
Phoenix			Yes				Basic							Fortn.				Partial	

Tables 4 and 5 indicate features of Internet publishing and their level of adoption by the Irish news industry online. Sites were identified via Doras, Niceone, Yahoo! and Newsdirectory.com directories. They do not include sites listed but since unavailable, nor sites that apparently are no longer updated. In addition, news organisations that have no Internet news presence are not listed. Most notable among these is the Sunday Tribune. Full URLs for these sites are provided in Appendix E.

The sub-categories of publication also need to be qualified, once again reflecting the blurring of media boundaries that the Internet can engender. Simply to describe ireland.com as the online extension of a daily national news entity does not fully acknowledge its online nature: therefore its inclusion here must be interpreted as expedient rather than an indication of an absolute classification. Similarly, Unison could be said to belong in both national and regional camps, as it carries news from the Irish Independent, and the Irish Emigrant is distributed in print in the US.

Provincial titles the content of which were aggregated in the Unison site included: Anglo Celt; Argus; Bray People; Carlow Nationalist, Carlow People, Corkman, Drogheda Independent, Enniscorthy Echo, Enniscorthy Guardian, Fingal Independent, Gorey Echo, Gorey Guardian, Kerryman, Kildare Nationalist, Laois Nationalist, Leinster Express, Leinster Leader, Leitrim Observer, Longford Leader, Longford News, Mayo News, Midland Tribune, Nenagh Guardian, New Ross Echo, New Ross Standard, Offaly Express, Offaly Independent, Roscommon Herald, Southern Star, Tuam Herald, Tullamore Tribune, Westmeath Examiner, Westmeath Independent, Wexford Echo, Wexford People, Wicklow People.

As well as detailing the specific stages of development, in Internet terms, of various online news media, the organisation of the data allows some observations of the trends in the nature of Internet news publishing in Ireland. It can be seen that few of the inherent advantages of online media were being exploited by Irish news providers.

5.4 (ii) Interactive – links, mailtos, polls and bulletin boards

'Links' indicates hyperlinks from stories to other resources, such as archive stories, alternative sources, or in-depth coverage. Journalists' emails refers to the practice of including the author's email address as a 'mailto' within stories (Munster Express) or displaying them in a prominent and well sign-posted position (Belfast Telegraph). Discussion areas include message (or bulletin) boards, live 'chats' or guestbooks. It is arguable whether the latter two should be included here, as neither adds meaningfully to public debate, tending as they do to carry fleeting and ephemeral content. However, the presence of such features may indicate an openness on the part of the publication to further forms of interaction, and so they have been noted where they arise.

The absence of the use of links within stories is remarkable, especially in view of the approval voiced for this practice among journalists interviewed in Chapter 7, and the recognition of links as a strong interactive element in online offerings. It may be that consideration of the resources required to research links, as well as the perceived risk of directing readers away from one's own site, have held firm sway, with only two of the titles observed using links with any consistency, and both of these belonging to 'traditional' media categories. Certainly, there is no attempt to emulate the practice as applied by leading net news site CNN (www.cnn.com).

Other interactive elements are similarly muted. Online opinion polls are rarer than might be expected even in view of their limitations (ireland.com stresses that the device is not a serious attempt to gauge public mood). Full-blooded bulletin boards, where most meaningful reader-to-reader and reader-to-

publication interaction can occur, are also rare. (Some ISPs have in fact removed them where they previously thrived). Again, it may be that the cost of monitoring such areas, necessitated by a harsh libel regime, has discouraged their establishment. Nevertheless, where they occur – in particular at ireland.com, the Belfast Telegraph and online.ie – they are vibrant and often relevant.

5.4 (iii) Frequency

It is potentially misleading to impose an update frequency classification on websites that bend previously fixed editions or bulletin schedules. Many sites carry newsfeeds as well as regular updates. Where the breaking news element is significant, such a site is classed as continuously updated. Many websites of provincial newspapers gave no clue to the uninitiated online reader as to the frequency of update, in which case this would have to be guessed by reference to dates in the archive, if one was provided. Overall, the drift can be seen to be towards more frequent updates and, beyond that, to a continuous or 'wire' model.

5.4 (iv) Content level

'Content' refers to the volume of news and related material on the site, and is a broad indicator also of the variety of material available. For example, sites the only news or news-related content of which is an outsourced newsfeed are classed as having partial content. The test was applied relatively, rather than absolutely, so that a provincial title providing less content that a national entity could qualify under 'Full' while the national one might not.

'Newsfeed' refers to the provision of a continuously or frequently updated breaking news panel. These are often syndicated, as indicated under a separate heading.

In contrast, aggregation refers to the editing and representation of information from other media sources or already in the public domain,

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sometimes with hyperlinks to those sources. A good example here is the Doras newsfeed.

The experience of Internet publishing has not yet borne out expectations of a wealth of new sources of public information emanating from a supply side invigorated by the lowering of entry barriers, this despite the high profile of many of the new media players. The distribution of 'Full' content offerings across the categories demonstrates that it is 'old' media, nationally and regionally, that is providing most relevant news content on the Internet. For others, news (most commonly a newsfeed) is but one element in a mix of material often dominated by lifestyles and entertainment content, or has been included as the sole dynamic content element in otherwise static pages.

5.5 (v) New content
Expansion of content refers to the addition of related material of any kind to the news. 'In-depth' refers to the specific provision of background, contextualising or summarising features that expand on raw news.

Expansion of content generally and the provision of in-depth reports in particular can be seen to have been a feature primarily of the national traditional media. The regional press had been particularly inactive in generating Internet-specific content. This may reflect the "local notes" nature of regional publishing, as well as the possibility that many regional titles have made modest steps towards online publishing, motivated more by a fear of being overtaken than by an active desire to exploit its potential.

Newsfeeds syndicated from traditional media have been heavily favoured by online media, often as a cost-effective means of adding to a site's appeal. In this way, traditional media dominance of the arena has been even stronger than indicated by the 'Content' column, and online publishing can be seen to enhance rather than dissipate the reach of mainstream media. Syndication of longer articles and aggregation, also much-represented among the online newcomers, are variations on this phenomenon, but with similar outcomes.

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Traditional media have themselves made markedly little use of the technical facility to provide such syndicated and aggregated content from other sources, despite the potential of such a strategy for enhancing their sites and erasing some of the advantage of competing online entities. It could be argued, for example, that there is no reason why a provincial newspaper should not also use its website to provide national, international or specialist content.

5.5 (vi) Production standards

'Production standards' refers to the design and technical level of the site. It does not necessarily imply that a site is graphics or multimedia-rich: for example, ireland.com could be regarded as a graphically modest site, but it remains an advanced entity in terms of design and the variety and complexity of its offerings. (Nor does the heading serve as a comment on editorial standards.) The most salient feature here is the basic (sometimes, frankly, appalling) standards that apply in some regional newspapers outside the Unison fold. It could be argued that many such sites diminish rather than enhance the regard in which Irish regional titles have long been held.

5.5 (vii) Additional forms – forwarding, printing, email editions

Email forwarding and print-friendly versions are easily implemented features that add to the reach of the medium, and therefore might be viewed as an indicator of the degree to which publishers think of the Internet as a different medium, rather than as an extension of old formats. 'Email edition' refers to the option to subscribe to a periodic emailed update, thus avoiding the need to log on to the website every day or week. It is therefore another Internet-specific form of reader power via republishing, using a few-to-many platform to facilitate many-to-many communications. But despite their cost-effectiveness and utility, these features are largely ignored. It could be speculated that the failure to adopt these simple techniques could be linked to a lack of general technical awareness already indicated by production standards. However, this is mostly relevant to regional newspapers, and cannot be said to apply to nationals or online entities.

5.5 (viii) Archives and Searches

The 'Archives' column indicates the provision of dated back issues. The 'Search' column refers to the ability to search archives by keyword. It does not refer to site searches. Related features (because they aid navigation and facilitate searches for information) are the site map and site index, but these are relatively rare despite their apparent usefulness and ease of implementation.

The frequent provision of archives and searches stands out in contrast to the poor uptake of other online features, perhaps reflecting the reality of their being already embedded in the libraries and research processes of traditional media, so that the only apparent change is a technical one. Once again, however, new media can be seen to be the least enthusiastic supporters of such facilities, and Electric News emerges as the sole net-dedicated provider of archive material.

5.5 (ix) Notes on individual news titles

— An Phoblacht email newsletter is by paid subscription
— The Clare Champion is published from Ennis, Ireland's Information Age town
— The Search function on the Connaught Telegraph covers only sample uploaded material
— The Irish Examiner's discussion area is dominated by genealogy. The news and current affairs bulletin board held no messages. The discussions are stated to be moderated by the 'webmaster'. The Examiner requires users to register, and states that it will pass information to advertisers.
— Foinse's last update was July 30 (when checked on August 26, 2000).
— Although it has an active message board, the Galway Advertiser's Comment section does not share the facility to post messages directly.
— Ireland.com's email edition was in the process of being phased out, in preparation for a HTML-enabled version.
— The Limerick Post's bulletin board carried principally local notices when viewed. The chat area was empty.
— The Munster Express has a novel collection of interviews with 'ex-Waterfordians' living abroad and who read the newspaper online.
— The People Newspapers sites incorporates editorial from the Wexford People, Wicklow People, Carlow People, Bray People, Enniscorthy & Gorey Guardian, New Ross Standard.

— Although Saoirse is listed by Yahoo!, its emphasis is on historical articles and other resources, and it is therefore not included.
— The Sunday Business Post carries a daily update, with a 'Sunday's Home Page' and a 'Today's Home Page'
— The associated provincials Kilkenny People, Tipperary Star and Clonmel Nationalist allow readers to personalise their content, by choosing the categories they wish to view. All also boast a 'Breaking News' section, but this does not imply a continuous feed of headlines. In the context of regional coverage, breaking news translates into uploading a handful of stories between weekly editions.
— As can be seen, some provincial newspapers that run independent sites have also joined the Unison network.
— The Irish Emigrant (published since 1987) and its associated Professional Ireland have been primarily email-based publications. And netgains is published in email format only.
— The Irish Farmers Journal Discussion Forum was suspended "due to technical problems".
— The Irish Post uses moreover.com daily feeds to aggregate Irish-related links for its Breaking News section
— Ireland On-Line, which in its early days featured many discussion groups, now has none. The Users' Group is the only one listed, but this is defunct, and an online message explains that it fell foul of personnel changes after the take-over by Esat.
— Yahoo! Irish news is in a deep position on the UK and Ireland website. News on Yahoo! UK and Ireland is essentially UK news, with a further hyperlink to follow to Irish news, where content is provided by Doras, Electric News and Ireland Today, as well as BBC News and wire agencies.
— 98fm users can contribute to chats or to discussion forums. However, the latter are pre-set and do not include news or current affairs. It audio news is archived but was unavailable when tested
— Local radio stations providing basic news updates include:
  – Highland Radio
  – 95fm Limerick
  – Connemara Community Radio

It is clear that it is traditional media that have made the running in the field of online news in Ireland, and that when scrutinised online entities are seen to have been in some cases very conservative in the provision of volume of material and interactive opportunities. This indicates that it the infrastructure for the production of content that is apparently decisive, at least for the short term, in producing news online, and this carries strong implications for the possibility of the Internet engendering media diversity to include voices less

often heard. Nevertheless, the tentative but encouraging beginnings in Ireland for interactive features, where they exist, indicates a counter-balancing trend that may grow stronger.

CHANGE AND THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

6.1 Introduction

The Internet and associated ICTs have wrought a new medium or, perhaps more accurately, a new platform for media. This chapter examines some of the ways in which parameters governing the dissemination of and access to news have changed, or may change, traditional relations in the production and consumption of that public information. The Internet has seen the growth of so-called "self-publishing'" by individuals, communities and organisations; users have access to precise control of their choice of content; primary definers of news have direct access to the audience and vice versa; and media are subject to much greater third party scrutiny and criticism. It is not suggested here that these features in themselves constitute a simple transformation of media hegemony, but they do represent potential movement towards a dilution of the broadcast, few-to-many, model of pre-Internet communications.

6.2 Self-publishing

6.2 (i) A medium for dialogue

The ability to self-publish is inherent in web architecture. The first web browsers were intended to include a simple publishing option (Berners-Lee 1999). HTML, the basic computer coding in a web page, is undemanding for beginners, and even then the necessity to become proficient in it has largely been obviated, for all but purists who insist on text-based editing, with the introduction of user-friendly visual editors such as Microsoft FrontPage or Macromedia Dreamweaver, as well as many less expensive shareware options.

Microsoft's Windows 98 (the version of the PC operating system current in 2000) itself contains a web editing and publishing tool, FrontPage Express, matched by Netscape Communicator's Composer component. At the same time, publishing space on Internet servers is cheap or even provided at no extra charge to ISP subscribers.

Thus far, perhaps the most dramatic single manifestation of this lowering of the barriers to publishing has been the infamous Drudge Report (www.drudge.com) which broke the Monica Lewinsky story and which has been held up as an early warning of the destructive, gossip-mongering potential of the Internet (Hodgson 1998). But the ease of online publishing which the Internet bestows on its users has been also been reflected in the scale of the 'home page' phenomenon, an online expansion of vanity publishing, to the point that in 1999 Yahoo! paid $4.5 billion for GeoCities, a company that specialised in providing facilities for self-publishers (Krigel 1999). Many home sites have comprised little more than purely personal information uploaded by hobbyists or sports and entertainment fans, but others have been intended expressly to address public issues, and thus represent the genesis of a new critical and political communications sector. Yahoo! has experienced at first hand the clash between grassroots Internet culture and its corporate aims, with disputes over ownership of content and the volunteer-based structure of GeoCities communities, and companies offering home site publishing have fallen out of favour commercially almost as suddenly as they became hot property. (Hu 2000).

Whatever about difficulties in turning independently-minded web publishers into e-commerce sales leads, web publishing by groups and individuals has produced not only many personal sites of interest so limited that they could be described as the ultimate in niche media, but also political publications that do not fit easily into dystopian notions of a globalised and homogenised media. In the Middle East, a webmaster at Birzeit University describing himself "an activist using the web to report from 'on the ground' during the

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violent September 1996 confrontations in the West Bank" wrote "on the empowerment offered by the Internet and the realities of its global nature" and provided a gateway to further resources advancing the Palestinian case (Parry 2000).

There have been numerous accounts of so-called "guerrilla journalism" – sites operated in defiance of authoritarian regimes which have limited technical means to censor the net. Belgrade's Radio B92 (www.freeb92.net) is, as seen, well represented in the literature for famously turning to the Internet using mirror sites in the US and the Netherlands as well as the Balkans to continue broadcasting with tapes smuggled out of Yugoslavia; Arab site www.amin.net has provided a central exchange where journalists from undemocratic countries could post uncensored versions of their stories; Nigerian editor Babafemi Ojudi used his laptop as a mobile newsroom, filing from hiding places after his newspaper was suppressed; while less dramatically live cameras documented hold-ups caused by Spanish police at the border with Gibraltar (www.frontier.gibnet.gi) (Whitaker 1999).

In Ireland, an anonymous group calling itself 'Cogair' posted stories to internationally mirrored sites aiming to publicise political corruption and "to promote free speech and expose the cowardice of Irish media". Although the site was publicly opposed by the National Union of Journalists, and ran personal gossip stories that could not be verified, the group claimed that it had received hundreds of emails expressing approval, and only two negative responses (Licken 1997). The site was no longer active at the time of writing. Cogair represented a perhaps more radical development than the infamous Drudge Report, because, where Drudge is often entertainment-focussed, Cogair's explicit aim was radically to challenge the legal and media establishment.

Sites expressing views or reporting stories that do not find airtime or column inches in traditional media have begun to spring up not only in exotically

oppressive information regimes but in western democracies generally. Environmental activists have been prominent in making use of the net, and Internet communications have played a prominent role in the organisation of the new wave of protest by disparate groups focusing on issues such as debt and globalisation (www.globalexchange.org). On a more mundane and local level, Dirtydublin.com (www.dirtydublin.com) supports a litter law enforcement campaign.

Not all 'alternative' sites deliberately set out to challenge media hegemony, but among those that publish critical media perspectives have been the award-winning Adbusters (www.adbusters.com) , a Canadian-based website aimed at discrediting major marketing campaigns, and the Dallas Morning NOT News (www.dallasnotnews.com), claiming racist and anti-Muslim bias on the part of the Texan newspaper. Such online publications may not themselves garner mass audiences, but it could be argued that that is not the point: they provide a critical counterpoint to the dominant message, and can also feed into mainstream traditional media when picked up on by individual journalists competing for stories.

Internet publishing, untrammelled by cost considerations or by editorial controls, throws up a varied array of material. In common with most other ISPs, Ireland On-Line provides dial-up subscribers with no-extra-charge space on its web servers. Sites listed at Ireland On-Line's home page index included offerings concerned with personal and family, fan and tribute, hobby, sports, sports organisations, schools, local clubs and organisations, and activist. Among those that could be considered to have relevance in public affairs were:

- Cllr. Dan Boyle, Green Party (www.iol.ie/~dboyl)
- Noo Age Media: A Survey of Information Technology and Human Culture in the 21st Century (www.iol.ie/~jacknear/nooage.html)
- Irish Gift/Inheritance Tax (www.iol.ie/~jcashman)
- The Victims and Survivors' Trust (www.iol.ie/~vast)

Other Irish ISPs offer web space as part of their connectivity offering, but the value of placing a site in a diverse and unclassified home page list in itself may be limited, given the degree of persistence required on the part of the user to find the URL they do not already know. In contrast, on the prominent Doras Directory (www.doras.ie) sites with public significance have been listed two mouse-clicks away from the top page, on the same site navigational level as Government departments, state agencies, the main political parties, and local authorities and, in other categories, national newspapers and other news outlets. All other factors being equal, web browsers entering Doras are as likely, therefore, to navigate to shallowly situated activist sites as they are to reach an official source or an established media offering. Thus, the distance between the audience and marginal groups or their media is compressed online, especially when browsers are directed through neutral portals such as this.

Another significant way in which directory-listed sites differ from those on an ISP listing is that many of the former are hosted independently on organisations or individuals' own web servers or paid-for web space. Doras's 'groups & forums' category contained 79 sites on the most recent count (August 2000). These included:

- IMPACT Trade Union (www.impact.ie)
- IOWC Orange Watch, an anti- Orange Order site, (www.iowc.org)
- Not included in this Doras category, but linked from the above site, is the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition (www.garvaghyroad.org)
- Ireland Uncensored, commentary on Northern Ireland (www.westwindnet.com/ireland)
- Irish Online Election Database, an apparently non-commercial site providing analysis of Irish election results (election.polarbears.com)
- Immigration Control Platform (www.immigrationcontrol.org)
- Eire Now, another anti-immigrant site (www.esatclear.ie/~eirenow)
- East Timor Campaign Ireland (www.freedom.tp/ireland/etisc)
- Culling of Pike on Lough Mask (members.xoom.com/-samotrutta/ThePikeCull.html)
- The Pat Finucane Centre for Human Rights and Social Change (serve.com/pfc)

- Save the Good Friday Agreement Coalition (www.members.-tripod.com/savetheGFA)
- Irish Republican Web Action Committee, an anti-Good Friday Agreement site (www.freespeech.org/irwac)
- Offaly Pro-Life Campaign (www.homepage.eircom.net/~offalyprolife)
- Times Change political and cultural journal (www.homepage.-tinet.ie/~higher)
- Anarchism and Irish Politics (www.geocities.com/CapitolHill2419)
- Pro-Life Ireland Galway for Life (www.galwayforlife.ie)
- Dail Eireann (sic), a site conducting online polls and promoting direct democracy (www.dail-eireann.com)
- The Case for the Establishment of a Central EU Causebook (www.cyberia.ie/~twinkle) – this site, though apparently unofficial and hosted on a cybercafé server, is linked from the Department of the Taoiseach and the Advisory Committee on Telecommunications (www.irlgov.ie/taoiseach/press/).
- Irish Online Election Database, an apparently non-commercial site providing analysis of Irish election results (election.polarbears.com)

It is notable that many of the sites listed in this category dealt with issues concerning the conflict in Northern Ireland and that a large proportion of these formed a sub-category of sites apparently aimed at an Irish-American audience and were located on US servers. Issues arising from the conflict were represented to a much greater degree than in mainstream media in the Republic, but it is perhaps reasonable to speculate that as Internet adoption grows in Ireland this effect on the online agenda may wane.

6.2 (ii) Blogging my world
A later variation of self-publishing is the creation of a personal or group newsfeed called a weblog. Among the most high-profile of these is the influential technology Slashdot weblog (www.slashdot.org), which is posted by technology buffs, but the San Jose Mercury News has also carried one for several years (Rosenberg 1999), and The Guardian Online also publishes a weblog in a rough online equivalent of its 'Editor' print supplement.

Weblogs covering media, along with commercial sites covering the Internet, have been described as "metajournalistic referrer sites", and their influence in

directing traffic to other sites is considered important (Poniewozik 1999). The Blogger website (www.blogger.com) provides a free, easy to use facility for individuals to use an online system easily to upload frequent updates, with the catchphrase 'Push-button publishing for the people'. But Blogger's large directory of weblog sites (www.blogger.com/directory) reveals that most of the contributions belong firmly in a culture of frivolous personal musings and navel-gazing that is so characteristic of the Internet.

A further enhancement of the weblog, however, allows users to filter and re-publish newsfeeds on their sites, using an online tool at Newsblogger.com (www.newsblogger.com). Newsblogger says it provides stories from more than 1,500 sources in 304 categories from which website operators can choose. (These categories had already been available to web masters and developers at moreover.com, which aggregates news from around the web). All that is required on the part of the 'publisher' is web server space and the time to choose which headlines they want.

Although the level of online publishing carried out in this way and addressing itself to issues of public concern has thus far been modest, it can be seen as a significant addition to the dimensions of news media. It is a truism that much of what is published in weblogs is inane, misinformed, or irrelevant, and that worthwhile projects are often confined to a ghetto of technology coverage. However, more refined new tools such as the Newsblogger represent an evolution from the Internet's emphasis on allowing a massive volume of publishing, to sorting and ordering information online, a process which has also begun to take root among readers.

6.3 The DIY editor

6.3 (i) Working around the professionals

Regardless of the web's facility to do so, not all people using the Internet are likely to be moved to become publishers. However, it is also unlikely that all

Internet users will wish to receive their news from a single online entity, and already portals and dedicated news services have begun to offer readers the ability to disassemble, filter and order, i.e. edit, the news according to their preferences. This ability in the hands of the reader progresses the debate on the relative power or passivity of the reader to a new level. The reader is no longer faced with a deluge of information that requires no response or on which he or she can at best impose resistant readings, but, entirely beyond such considerations, the reader has become his or her own editor.

It remains a matter for argument whether this ability to produce a 'Daily Me' news digest, rather than be confronted with the breadth of coverage that traditional media have offered, represents a nightmare vision of readers narrowing and hermetically sealing their perspectives, developing deep knowledge but wide ignorance, or on the other hand the empowerment of the audience in wrenching control of their worldview from publishers. But the power to exercise that choice may be what the news audience, in particular the Internet news audience, wants. In a US study, 58% of the general population and 67% of online users said that they would make better decisions than news editors in selecting news of interest to them (Frank N. Magid Associates 2000).

6.3 (ii) Email and narrow-casting

The simplest mechanism by which the Internet facilitates news editing by the audience operates by means of subscription to email newsletters. The number of email users in the US has been estimated at 122.6 million, and there were over 100,000 email lists, newsletters and publications at the beginning of 2000 (Nielsen/NetRatings 2000). It has been claimed that "E-mail publications have more topics – they are the ultimate 'narrow-casting' vehicle. E-mail is 'viral' – it gets passed from user to user and word can travel at the speed of light on the Internet. E-mail publications 'go to press' faster and 'lead-times' are much shorter" (PennMedia 2000). Prominent among Irish email newsletters are The Irish Emigrant, Nua Internet Surveys, and Netgains, and

major media entities such as The Irish Times also provide email versions of their publications.[22]

6.3 (iii) Pick and mix browsers

Web-based news selection, a technological response to the data overload that characterises the Internet, provides still finer control over the content that arrives on the user's device. One of the earliest such systems, which have come to be known as 'metabrowsers', is Quickbrowse (www.quickbrowse.com), devised by former freelance journalist Marc Fest. Quickbrowse automatically retrieves reader-specified web pages and reconstructs them as a single web page which can then be viewed by calling it up on the web, or which can be delivered by email. Other metabrowsers include CallTheShots.com (not yet operating), Octopus.com, OnePage.com, OpenPage.com and Yodlee.com (still in development at time of writing). CallTheShots.com claims that its service will "incorporate favorite pieces from disparate sites on one page, help to decrease your download time and delete your search time, while delineating your personal view of the world wide web" (www.calltheshots.com).

At its most basic, a metabrowser can, for example, deliver as a single page the front pages of the Irish Examiner, the Irish Independent and The Irish Times, while those interested in, say, technology could specify a mix drawing on the many excellent but differently flavoured specialist sites. Some metabrowsers can choose not only a single web page from a site (including passworded sites), but discrete elements within each page, and can also delve beyond the a site's top page to 'deep links'. Octopus.com (www.octopus.com), which has an extremely simple interface, lets the user drag and drop pages, sections or headlines within a target site, and combine them with elements from other sites.

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[22] Ireland.com said this was still being distributed but was not available to new subscribers because it was being phased out to enable the introduction of an improved HTML version.

Figure 1

Figure 1 shows a page dubbed 'The Irish Tex', which strips promotional content, advertisements, breaking news, sport and other sections from The Irish Times and The Irish Examiner, and presents them untitled, unbranded and undifferentiated by source in a single view, while retaining hyperlinks to the source material. Users can also add their own graphic elements or HTML code. The single apparent technical drawback is the increased download time necessitated by connections via Octopus to multiple sources on the net.

Going a further step, Octopus.com then invites the user to 'publish' their unique, hybrid take on the world to a directory for all to see. The development of this degree of control has raised further fears for the rights of authors and publishers and has been thought likely to be resisted by technical means as well as through legal sanctions (Frauenfelder 2000). But whatever restrictions are imposed in civil or computing code, the spirit of independent re-publishing is embedded in the net. Zatso.com, which specialises in relaying television news online, encapsulates this ethos in a mixture of commercial hype and radical empowerment when it greets users with what to some

traditional journalists must offend as an absurd heresy: "Welcome to Zatso, where you decide the news."

6.3 (iv) A process, not a technology

Personalisation technologies such as metabrowsers are unlikely to remain static in nature or invulnerable to obsolescence. In the recent past, push technologies such as Pointcast and Internet 'channels' that required readers to pre-select news sources from which content would be 'pushed', or dispatched automatically to their PCs, failed to change the nature of news delivery, despite high expectations. Now, metabrowsers have been perceived by some as having the potential to replace portals such as Yahoo!, MSN or ireland.com, which have themselves enjoyed a status as the key to winning mass audience on the net by simplifying information choices for users. But where portals carry fixed links and options, sometimes with commercial influence, and therefore could be said to adhere more closely to a broadcast model by constraining the potential of hypertext, by contrast, metabrowsers allow the reader great freedom in designing their diet of information (Granit 2000).

Content aggregators – sites that offer a blend of content from a variety of sources – attract audiences based on the human knowledge and judgment of their editors, in a relatively linear extension of the role of traditional journalists. But metabrowsers allow users to define directly the parameters of their personal editorial preferences. Technically, because any user can now aggregate content to their own specific tastes, via user-friendly software, the aggregator site that attempts to collate material of interest to an audience, however narrowly targeted, has been superseded. Many will be more comfortable with the human communication of an organ like the Irish Emigrant, but the outcome of the apparent tension between these two modes of news viewing and publishing is likely to be determined, as with previous technologies, in their incorporation into commercial models, and in social, cultural and professional contexts, and this is indicated by the fact that some

of the metabrowsers already have added pre-selected options, along with online banking and other facilities for users. Nevertheless, even as they are assimilated into the commercial domain, it is difficult to envisage how the radical potential for reader power delivered by infinitely configurable metabrowsers can be suppressed within existing legal and technical frameworks.

6.4 Voices off

6.4 (i) Lifting the lid on the audience

Interactive media can be placed conceptually between the one-to-many, or broadcast, model, and the idealised notion of pure many-to-many communications of the Internet. Neither extreme exists absolutely – Letters to the Editor in (some) newspapers and magazines, Questions & Answers-style programmes on television, and radio phone-ins clearly provide some degree of interactivity in traditional media, along with the user's ability to construct their own viewing or reading pattern, while the success of portals such as Yahoo! globally or ireland.com nationally and within the context of an Irish Diaspora translate the broadcast model onto the net.

But the facility and immediacy of Internet interactivity has been a new departure in cool media, and one felt not alone by exclusively online entities, as, for example, emailed listener contributions have begun to feature in radio chat shows. Net-enabled interactivity has varied in online news from minimal (www.independent.ie) to the extreme openness and immediacy of an editor facing his public in a demanding live encounter, such as those staged by The Guardian with Editor Alan Rusbridger on December 22, 1999 and March 29, 2000, when he debated the newspaper's polices and values in text exchanges (each session lasted an hour). Email, threaded discussion groups and live 'chats' can be managed and edited, resources permitting, by media organisations, but the Internet has provided readers with other means to

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comment and contribute without reference to the wishes and policies of traditional publishers.

6.4 (ii) Newsgroups

Usenet comprises thousands of individual, independent, threaded discussions on specific topics relating to public policy, computing, hobbies, sex, and fetishes. A count on the news server news.iol.ie found over 40,000 such groups, but in 1998 there were said to be at least 65,000 groups Internet-wide hosting 10 million posts by 1.2 million people (Brown 1998). Groups can often be empty, however, and some are created by commercial information services.

While some are moderated to varying degrees, those in the alt. (alternative) category, in which any user can set up a group, have no such restrictions, and their content can often reflect this, whether it be bizarre or simply incoherent. However, the system is easily searchable so that intelligent, deliberative contributions can be found among the 'flames' (abusive postings) and irrelevancies, while a strong technical feature of newsgroups is the ability to order messages in discussion threads, so that an exchange in which several people may be engaged remains meaningful to newcomers. This is in contrast to technologies supporting live exchanges, such as Internet Relay Chat, where conversations tend to be shallow and ephemeral, often of extreme simplicity, with little meaning other than for those directly engaged in them.

On Usenet, as well as being threaded in a way that clarifies the progression of a discussion, messages are frequently cross-posted to related newsgroups, creating new connections and meanings for readers.[23] Irish-related newsgroups recently (July 2000) active included:

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[23] A graphical representation of how newsgroups inter-connect with one another, and the relative strengths of those connections, can be seen at netscan.research.microsoft.com.

- ie.politics,
- uk.current-events.n-ireland
- soc.culture.irish

These groups carry interesting debates focused on current topics in Ireland, and a significant number of contributions come from people living in Ireland. Newsgroups remain a minority interest, possibly because of the extra effort required to set up an account, and because of their text-based format. In March 2000, 11,322 individuals posted 734 messages to soc.culture.irish, with an average message length of 30 lines. There were 10,695 replies by 568 people, and 5,771 cross-posts to other newsgroups (Smith 1997). While worthwhile discussion certainly can be found in Usenet, the relatively low numbers of people, even within the Internet community, who take part in and are aware of such debates places a question mark on the medium's significance in the arena of public affairs. This failure to attain critical mass was reflected in the commercial repositioning of Deja News, originally intended as a web-based (and therefore more popular) access route to Usenet, into a consumer-oriented portal (www.deja.com) (Brown 1999), although Deja still provides newsgroup access, along with Talkway (www.talkway.com) and Realize (www.realize.com). Nevertheless, the existence of a platform such as Usenet still offers an outlet for rational debate that can qualify mainstream media's approach to issues.

6.4 (iii) Feeding off 'old' media

While newsgroups are effective forums for debate, albeit for a motivated minority, new modes of discussion have emerged that provide the same facility to post messages, but which can target particular websites. Thus, they can combine the freedom of newsgroups with the relevance and ease of use of the web interface. Comment is integrated conceptually and graphically with site content, but is outside the control of the site's authors, editors and developers. Two prominent systems that exploit this synergy are Third Voice and Gooey.

Third Voice provides users with a window in which to post threaded observations. A voting system allowing users to support a posting is aimed at improving the quality of debate, but many postings remain irrelevant or abusive, and instances of constructive discussion are rare. Postings are likely to be found at high profile sites such as Microsoft's (www.microsoft.com) and The New York Times (www.nyt.com) but none could be found on an Irish website. Although it has yet to impact here, Third Voice has been a controversial addition to the communications possibilities of the Internet. Developers have written HTML code to stop it superimposing itself on their sites, and opponents have formed the group Say No to Third Voice (www.saynotothirdvoice.com). Internet groups such as the Electronic Freedom Frontier have hailed it as an enhancement of free speech (www.eff.org) (Dibbel 1999).

Gooey, in contrast to Third Voice, allows a site's users to post live comments, so that individuals viewing the same website can communicate in real time. But user numbers remain low. In 1999 Gooey claimed 30,000 users, a tiny proportion of the Internet population, with an even smaller number – 1,500 – claimed as the most Gooey users online together at any one time (Brown 1999). But in January 2000, Gooey claimed half a million registered users, and technologies such as Third Voice and Gooey have been given optimistic growth paths, not least because they provide advertisers with detailed information on the online habits of users (Brown 1999).

It is important here to recognise the distinction between the survival and success of individual technologies and the innate social actions that they describe. Push technologies are no longer in fashion, or at least it is not fashionable to refer to them in this way. But they represented a step towards a technologically-based system "to exercise learning and decision-making autonomy" (6 1999). Rather than representing in any sense a large media consideration now – they are not about to threaten The New York Times or MSNBC – systems such as Third Voice and Gooey demonstrate the potential

openness with which media may have to contend as Internet adoption grows, even as the technologies change, driven by social forces taking advantage of technical possibilities rather than the latest Silicon Valley wheeze.

6.5 Closer to the source

6.5 (i) New links for verifiable news, or, 'And if you don't believe us ...'

General access to primary news sources, including the primary definers as outlined by Hall (Hall 1978), on the Internet marks a further departure from the traditional role of the journalist. News outlets online have been found to be more credible when they closely detail sources in stories (Sundar 1998). But, where before information was mediated exclusively through publicity departments and newsrooms, previously difficult-to-access information is available at source on the web. Now press releases and other information can be uploaded directly to the web by public bodies and by business. Although current access rates mean that this unmediated (or, more accurately, less mediated) form of news consumption is unlikely to be of crucial or even significant import in the short term, the practice is likely to expand and the Irish and other national governments have embraced it as an official means of communication. Specific instances of the Internet as an emerging source medium have included the publication of the Starr Report (www.access.gpo.gov/congress/icreport/) on the Whitewater/Monica Lewinsky affair, the Zobel ruling in the trial of Louise Woodward (www.lawyersweekly.com/ – subscription required), the announcement of his engagement by Michael Douglas (www.michaeldouglas.com), where along with viewing later offerings and subscribing to an email newsletter, readers can post questions to Douglas; and, more recently, the announcement on the 'official' Harry Potter of the casting for the film based on the character (harrypotter.warnerbros.com). The trend towards celebrity entertainer websites has also extended to Ireland, with U2 setting up an online offering (www.u2.com) and inviting subscriptions to an email newsletter.

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6.5 (ii) A gathering tide of direct information

In Ireland, accessible sources of public information now include the Government website, with its links to Departments and offices and carrying an archive of press releases, Oireachtas records (www.gov.ie/oireachtas/), including those of committees such as the Committee of Public Accounts, the Garda, (www.irlgov.ie/garda), the Courts Service (www.courts.ie) – as yet without direct court reports, the Flood (www.flood-tribunal.ie) and Moriarty (www.moriarty-tribunal.ie) Tribunals[24] and the Bloody Sunday Inquiry (www.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org.uk), which is on even terms, at least measured by technical access, with the Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign (www.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org.uk). Now, what separates the journalist from the citizen, apart from the requirement to be present to be able to write an entertaining colour piece, is the skill and inclination to analyse events at such important public proceedings.

However, there is as yet no evidence that the principle of web publication by public bodies has been or is soon to be accepted as orthodoxy: many bodies have made modest progress in this respect: local authorities, the source of many news column inches, have sites where citizen information tends to be absent or poorly presented despite the Internet's apparent aptness for this democratic purpose (www.gov.ie/cocouncils.htm). But with, for example, all major political parties now having regularly updated website, the practice seems established. The emergence of this ability to bypass media organisations, or at least to moderate their previously exclusive privileges, along with the new accessibility to traditional news media's own online archives, provides readers with points of reference for the interpretation of stories. This "doubling", this time of the audience's and journalists' information alike, (Koch 1991, 132) may help challenge the concept of news as the simple relaying of 'facts' from otherwise unreachable sources.

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[24] Into the planning process and payments to politicians, respectively.

It is not yet claimed that any one of the practices or technologies outlined here in themselves can impact on the nature of relationships that have defined news for most of the last century. But the accumulation of this variety of interactive features of Internet media suggests that the accretion in reader power will not readily be reversed, and that journalists will have to become accustomed to the *a la carte* reader who can criticise at will, who has much more access to 'the facts', or at least the sources contributing to those 'facts', than heretofore, and might, given the inclination, become a journalist too.

WHAT JOURNALISTS THINK

7.1 Introduction

This chapter reports Irish journalists' responses to some of the issues that the Internet raises for their profession. This is a leavening: perhaps the most effective antidote to heady Internet rhetoric is the collective insight of working reporters and editors who face the daily task of actually producing and distributing content for the public arena, as can be deduced from some of the observations and opinions presented here. However, often within the natural scepticism of the journalist there is at least a recognition of the potential of the Internet. Section 2 provides a ranking of the issues identified by interviewees, as well as a guide to the topics considered most important by each one. A number of common themes emerged from the interviews, and these are delineated in Section 3. Section 4 sets out the detailed, but necessarily heavily edited responses, of interviewees. Note that, in order for them to be more meaningful, observations and comments are ordered under the most appropriate question heading, rather than where they occurred chronologically in the course of the interview.

7.2 Common concerns

7.2 (i) Issues journalists say matter most

Ranking of issues	Total
Skills	13
Feedback	12
Immediacy	9
Standards	9
Story Length	9
Defamation	8
Depth of Coverage	8
Diversity	8
Hypertext	8
International Reach	8
Text	8
Frequency	7
Asynchronicity & Archives	6
Bulletin Boards	6
Niche Audiences	6
Trust in Media	5
Enabling the Work	4
Additional Services	3
Multimedia	3
Objective Verification	3
Accountability	2

Table 6: Journalists' Ranking of Online Issues

Table 6 provides a broad ranking of issues and concerns surrounding online news publishing that were emphasised by interviewees, or that when explicitly raised in the interview questions, elicited a greater response.

The strongest overall response, in which respondents logged definite or strong opinions, was on the issue of the place of journalistic skills in the news arena in new media. Naturally, journalists can be expected to be partisan in defending professional territory, and the issue is directly raised in Question 8.

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Nevertheless, its ranking reflects a unity of outlook among the range of journalists, from mainly traditional media to online-only. A significant strand in this set of responses related to standards, in particular the poor appreciation of some websites of editorial demands, and the problems caused by a perceived propensity of new media concerns to recruit young, inexperienced journalists.

Feedback from the audience also featured strongly among the group, and most responses in this area related to email, which was generally seen as a positive feature and identified by several respondents as being more immediate and user-friendly than Letters to the Editor, and by some as being largely intelligent and constructive.

Immediacy, frequency, story length and depth of coverage in online news also featured strongly in interviewees' opinions. Respondents, especially those in online-only entities, tended to group these properties closely. In general, all except soundbite story length were to some extent seen as positive features of online news coverage, although there were reservations about the related frequency of updates and inflated story counts in breaking news in an Irish context. Bulletin boards, on the other hand, held mixed appeal, and this is reflected the strongly divergent opinions given in responses to Question 4.

Closely linked to the issue of bulletin boards, and one of the main reasons given for not providing them, for directly controlling their agenda, or for moderating them carefully, was the fear of liability for defamation. There were remarkably consistent references to defamation risks under Questions 4 and 10, with the latter otherwise yielding few firm opinions. It is clear that journalists regard Irish libel law as the variable most likely to constrain full and accurate coverage and debate of public issues, but that they do not view the Internet's technical capabilities as a means of overcoming this. Further, Christina McHugh made the important point that, rather than providing new freedoms, the Internet could stifle coverage even further, for fear of damages

claims inflated by the global potentially global distribution of a contentious story.

In spite of such fears, most journalists felt that the Internet could provide more diversity, and, while there was a realistic appreciation of the marketing advantage of major brands, niching, whether by locality or by subject area, was identified by six of the interviewees as providing a viable means of maintaining a publication's identity, adding alternative perspectives, or simply surviving online. Some of the observations that alluded to niching also related closely to the international dimension in Irish online publishing, a clear case in point here being Liam Ferrie's Irish Emigrant. To some extent, it is surprising that this aspect received only moderate attention from the interviewees as a group. However, this could also be interpreted as an indication that the international audience, perhaps the first audience to be targeted in Irish Internet publishing, has been integrated to such an extent that it is now taken for granted and is therefore less visible.

There was a high consciousness of the importance of text in online media, especially among the more technically-oriented respondents, who might have been expected to dwell more on multimedia such as streaming video or virtual worlds and their potential in the expected expansion of connectivity to broadband capacities. However, multimedia received relatively slight attention, in contrast to the enthusiastic endorsement of online text, and the general welcome for hypertext, where opinions ranged from its being viewed as transforming relations between reader and journalist, to its demotion as little more than an addition to a battery of communication tools.

The asynchronicity of online news received relatively little attention, despite the frequent emphasis on this feature by promoters of online media. Again, it is possible that this is regarded as a given. But the staying power of online media was raised by a significant number of interviewees, in terms of its facility for archiving, and for threading story development in a way that

previously had not been feasible except in the most condensed way. The permanence and accessibility of online records was also referred to by those who raised the issues of readers' new ability to view objective source data with relative ease, and as a factor in establishing media accountability. Trust in media arose largely in the context of Questions 7 and 8, where respondents said that information overload would cause people to seek out established and reliable media operating to professional norms, and that the role of journalists would thus be enhanced, confirming the emphasis on the continued and more necessary function of gatekeeping that has been recorded elsewhere (Singer 1997). Within that set, some of the respondents saw the emphasis in the role of journalists shifting from providing information to providing order, interpretation or identification.

While relatively few expressly identified the Internet's freedom from space restrictions as providing an opportunity for additional media services, it is perhaps significant that the three interviewees who did so, thus addressing the strategic concerns of new media, act in managerial roles.

Finally, while the term has become hackneyed through its overuse in technology, it is interesting that several journalists said that the Internet "enabled" their work, i.e. that they could not work they way they do, or their roles would not exist, without the Internet.

7.2 (ii) Individual responses arranged by issue

Table 7: Details of Relative Emphasis on Issues of Online Journalism

Relative emphasis on issues of online journalism	Karlin Lillington	Michael Cunningham	Cliff Taylor	Katie Hannon	Sheila McDonald	Luke McManus	Eugene McGee	Christina McHugh	Fintan O'Toole	Conor Pope	Liam Ferrie	Emma Kavanagh	Samantha Fanning	Sammy Hamill	Flachra O Marcaigh	Total
Immediacy	*	*		*	*					*	*	*	*		*	9
Frequency	*		*			*		*		*			*		*	7
Story Length	*	*	*		*		*				*	*	*		*	9
Depth of Coverage	*		*		*	*			*			*	*	*		8
Asynchronicity & Archives	*					*			*		*			*	*	6
International Reach		*				*	*	*	*		*		*	*		8
Enabling	*								*	*	*					4
Diversity	*	*			*		*		*		*		*		*	8
Niche Audiences			*		*		*	*	*		*					6
Feedback	*	*	*		*		*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	12
Bulletin Boards		*				*	*			*				*	*	6
Objective Verification		*	*	*					*							4
Accountability		*							*							2
Trust in Media		*	*						*			*			*	5
Access	*			*		*		*				*				5
Standards	*	*		*	*	*					*	*		*	*	9
Skills	*	*		*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	13
Additional Services			*				*						*			3
Multimedia		*									*		*			3
Text	*	*		*		*					*	*		*	*	8
Hypertext	*	*		*	*			*	*			*	*			8
Defamation	*		*			*		*		*	*	*			*	8

Table 7 provides closer detail on the distribution of responses. Where an entry occurs, this means that the participant gave the subject significant attention and had definite views on it, whether or not they endorsed a particular opinion. So, for example, a subject would register as having a developed view on immediacy of news delivery over the Internet, regardless of whether they considered this 'a good thing.' It can be seen that those with direct online experience expressed more views on the impact of online dissemination, while those who are largely print journalists tended to have opinions on a narrower range. This was to be expected, and several in the latter category, even though their work was published online, emphasised that they were not experts in online publishing. But that is not to say that those with a high level of significant responses were not exclusively online journalists. Similarly, not all online journalists gave strong responses on all or a wide range of issues, especially where their professional priorities lay in actual production of content and their perspective was therefore more pragmatic.

7.3 Responses of the participants

Question 1: How has news delivery over the net affected the nature of your output?

Interpretation of this question varied widely, eliciting responses that ranged from people being fundamentally enabled to do their work, to protests that online publishing had not changed anything. However, the most frequent response concerned the immediate, continuous nature on online news, and with it the allied ability to add depth and context.

Technology journalist Karlin Lillington placed the net as fundamental to her work. "It basically has enabled my output! (laughs) The fact that the net exists enables me to do the job that I do because it means I can be located anywhere, I can research articles anywhere, I can contact people easily anywhere, and I tend to be talking to people within that industry ... people

who work in technology and therefore see it as a normal channel of information."

Her work on the web had not forced her into writing very short pieces. "I tend to not write for some of the kinds of publications which might run very short, concise writing that's direct and condensed ... web-friendly." Instead, she said, she wrote for Wired, which took longer articles, and she referred to Salon as having "come out of the frustrations of print journalists in San Francisco who found that the print outlets where they worked wanted them to dumb down the content."

The international nature of Internet publishing was the first feature stressed by Michael Cunningham. Accountability was greater too, because of the ease of response by email. In addition, stories would come out of organisations ... "that wouldn't happen in phone culture or letter-writing culture" ... and he cited the case of a news story concerning password security fears at a leading Internet provider. The market in journalism had changed: a commissioning editor could use a writer "and never hear the sound of their voice", and freelance journalists had the opportunity to access an international market. The effect on deadlines was dramatic: "The kind of stuff I do nowadays: ... it's published and it's online ... far quicker than a radio broadcast." The immediacy available to him in editing the output of news for Volta was something "that traditional newspapers are still trying to get to grips with."

Although her work was routinely published on the web, Katie Hannon saw journalistic fundamentals taking precedence over the means of delivery of news: "(It has affected output) very little really. That's the truth." Although the Internet had improved research and allowed faster writing of stories, "as regards (whether) my stories this year (are) the same stories I would have written five years ago, the Internet hasn't made much of a difference." Print was still the primary medium for her work, and she did not see this changing

significantly: "A story is a story is a story, and I think it'll be written and presented in much the same way."

Cliff Taylor said Internet activities had begun to change the output of The Irish Times organisation (as distinct from the newspaper) "fairly significantly". Most fundamentally, from being a once-a-day company, "readers and net users particularly are more demanding now, so it's changed the nature of our output in that it has become continuous ...". The Internet also allowed room for a lot of add-on services, and he referred in particular to a planned service allowing daily checks on fund prices.

Sheila McDonald said that as a former print journalist, working online offered her "a fabulous opportunity to report news as it is happening." She said that she and other journalists found that immediacy "immensely satisfying."

Luke McManus said that the Internet had changed RTE's news output "not one bit, unfortunately." RTE's online news was turning out content geared around radio and television and "turning it into something suited to the Internet." The online office was not in the newsroom, and RTE had seen no "strategic re-alignment to take account of the web". However, it was hoped that the section would be moving to the newsroom in the future "and that might see an improvement." There was a growing awareness in RTE of the need for digital publishing skills. RTE Online had "made the leap" to publishing from a database, and this would also be important for digital television broadcasting. "Because we're feeding our stuff into a database it means that we're able to repurpose it very easily." While RTE had to concentrate on its core offerings in news and current affairs, based around pictures and sound, it was "important for journalists to consider multiple platforms." Text was the primary means of communication on the web, because of its efficiency. Even if applications read out information in audio format to a listener "it's going to be driven by text in a database for a long time."

"We publish our paper and then we put the paper on the net," said Eugene McGee. The newspaper took precedence and there had been no concessions made yet to the net, and "we haven't had time yet to sit back and think about it." The Longford Leader would shortly have the option to update the paper every day on Unison. This would facilitate putting up GAA results at the weekend and publishing photographs for which there was no room in print. However, regular updates would raise staffing problems and would probably need a day's work by a journalist each week.

Christina McHugh said the fact that the Roscommon Herald was incorporated in the Unison website "doesn't affect us at all". The print edition was produced as before, and then material selected for the web. Not all the content of the newspaper was uploaded. It was hoped that online content would encourage people to subscribe to the print edition "seeing as online is a free service". The web content could change in response to overseas demand, but it remained to be seen how that could bring commercial returns. She also raised a concern that, rather than expanding coverage, Internet publishing could result in more conservative decisions. For example, the Roscommon Herald had set a policy of abstaining from reporting court cases online. "It hasn't been tested yet as to whether you can be sued for more damages because it's all gone worldwide."

Fintan O'Toole said the Internet affected his output very substantially. It had made it possible for him to travel and work in America and access Irish news online. "I don't think I could have continued to write a column for The Irish Times if it had not been for that." The number of emailed responses from online readers, at 20 to 25 a day, was remarkable, and similar to the level of response to the print edition. In the case of an article he had written about the World Bank, "the vast majority of the response that I got on an issue like that was neither from Ireland nor from Irish descent, but from – you know – heads in Seattle. That's a dimension that is completely new …"

Conor Pope said that ireland.com was now producing 60 to 70 "shorter, punchier" breaking news stories each day. "What the Internet has done is it has given traditional print newspapers the opportunity to reclaim ground lost to radio and television over 50 years ago in terms of breaking news." Breaking news on the Internet would not replace detailed reporting, however. It was an "additional output".

Samantha Fanning said the immediacy of news on the web meant that simply putting the news out "first thing in the morning" (i.e. as a daily newspaper would) was "cheating people". News editorial that was printed as opposed to published on the web was now referred to as "pre-recorded material". "You're much more aware of how dated the information becomes. If you put up a feature as opposed to a breaking news story, if something changes over the course of the day, the onus is on you then to go in and update it."

Sammy Hamill said "not a great deal" had changed after the introduction of the online edition six years ago. However, the Belfast Telegraph was currently undertaking a review and part of it was "looking at that very point and seeing whether it should be different". The beauty of the Internet was that you had the opportunity of doing much more expanded coverage. "Again, that's one of the things we're looking at. We have expanded coverage, but should we have more?" In-depth reports such as a section on the Patten Report on RUC reform were read "by the academic people" but he added that "in letters you find the most unlikely people referring to it". "The point is it's there if you want it: you couldn't really do it in a newspaper, and even if you did would you keep a copy of the newspaper?"

Liam Ferrie said he had always been conscious of the need to be very concise. "Don't get into any colourful stuff – get the message across in as few words as possible." All the material was published on the web, "but I'm still writing it as an email newsletter". Because email lacked the ranking order and visual spread of a newspaper, it was more difficult for readers to locate stories of

Michael Cunningham said a major factor here was the fact that the Internet encouraged more entrants to publishing, with self-publishing and vanity publishing a feature of the Web. "We also have specialised media beginning to develop in the techie area," he said, citing Electric News and Hackwatch (www.hackwatch.com), an "incredibly opinionated" technology site put up by independent communications expert John McCormack. Direct access to sources was also transforming relations "The big reader liberation is that a reader now can find a news story ... he or she can go to the company's press section and find (say) a Baltimore Technologies press release and realise it's not even rehashed on the news site. This was exposing "a lot of traditional journalists (who) are lazy and not processing and editing and finding out extra information and asking questions".

Katie Hannon said the Internet might surpass print because of its potential for an "instant update" whereas print "will always have that time lag". The net was also an important recorder and verifier of fact. "That can be really important," she said, citing the case of Bertie Ahern's Sunday Times interview in favour of IRA decommissioning. The newspaper's report of the interview was disputed but, "the Times had put the transcript of the interview on the net, and it showed that he had said exactly as the story (had reported)". That facility would enhance the role of a 'paper of record' and "it would also take away from editorialising by news reporters".

Cliff Taylor said online journalism brought the newspaper organisation into "almost a news role that's more familiar to a broadcasting organisation ... I think the change from print journalism will be much greater than the change for broadcast journalists, because they (the latter) tend to have the kind of newsgathering and editing facilities that are much more akin to what would appear on the web". As well as continuous news services, the goal for The Irish Times was "to try and get the paper and the website playing off each other in terms of offering complementary services rather than competing services" and the immediacy of web publishing was one means of doing this.

Sheila McDonald added to the idea of a broadcast-like service enhanced by analysis and the "back story", commenting that online media differed from print journalism in that it "becomes even more entrenched in people's routine. It's not just something they consult at breakfast time: they might look at it twice or three times a day".

Online journalism combined the time pressures of broadcast journalism with the high editorial standards of print "without the luxury of one deadline every 24 hours", said Luke McManus. Speed and convenience were "what the web is about" but context was also "a very important aspect of what the web can do" and something "that broadcast journalism is notoriously bad at". RTE Online planned a guide to the Dáil which would not only give TDs' biographical details but also link the reader to a politician's previous policy positions. This was a very powerful, if "very labour-intensive", application which could also be applied to digital television.

Eugene McGee said online journalism's role would depend "on whether we pitch the online stuff for a foreign audience or Irish people abroad, or whether we want to include local people, and I'd say we won't want to include local people for the obvious reason that it might affect sales". However, experience elsewhere appeared to indicate that the Internet would not have a negative effect. He said he hadn't a clue about the size of the online audience. At this early stage, "we're just happy we have a site for people around the world".

Christina McHugh said local news would not be different on the web. People were still looking for death notices, sports results or county council reports. "It's a community thing ... all people who are logging on to a local newspaper want is local news. They're not looking for major investigative pieces, they're not looking for the major breaking national or international news."

"What (online journalism) does is it allows readers access to a lot of your documentary sources," said Fintan O'Toole. Verbatim transcripts of, say, the

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Public Accounts Committee or the Haugh judgment in the Haughey case were available to interested readers, and were linked from The Irish Times. This was "both bracing and liberating". It was a very important check on the journalist, who previously enjoyed privileged access to information and whose reports "were inevitably influenced by our own perceptions". The existence of such easily accessible records "frees you from the simple purveyance of information and ups the ante in terms of what added value you are giving ... You have to be able to make more connections for people, and I'm actually very happy about that ... it pushes us further into saying 'This is what we think about it but you're in a position to make up your own mind because we will now link you into the information.' ". The Government website's search mechanism was a powerful democratic tool. Accessing records previously would have taken days but now took hours. "I use that all the time." The Public Accounts Committee site was "terrific". He could see verbatim reports the next day and write articles based not on other journalists' work but on the primary source and this was important for analysis of such stories.

Conor Pope identified immediacy – "I really think that is the big thing" – and interaction, commenting that there was far more interaction with readers by online journalists.

Emma Kavanagh said that online readers were impatient for fast updates, and this drove the continuous news process. News was also being pushed at general users who had not necessarily logged on for news. This was a departure from previous patterns in which users bought a newspaper or deliberately switched on the television news. It was perceived that users liked news "and therefore you have a whole host of people offering it," not just the ireland.coms and RTE Online". News could be an "all-encompassing package" of multimedia elements; online archives formed databases that were much more readily used for background than print or broadcast archives; and news was being personalised through the use of devices such as dropdown

lists at sites like moreover.com – although there was still too much to choose from.

Samantha Fanning said that online journalists were more involved in the publishing process. "We're sourcing ... we're doing our own technical end of things; you're more involved in how (your work) is presented. If you are doing copy for the print medium or for broadcast, a producer or an editor or sub-editor is going to have control over how that's presented."

"We like to see the roles being very similar," said Sammy Hamill, "in that the same responsibility and the same quality (are) being brought to the Internet." The only constraint in publishing on the Internet was, "Can you hold the audience's attention?" This was a big change, but many of the qualities and disciplines of print journalism, such as deadlines, applied online. "When we're working on it we want to go online today, not tomorrow or the day afterwards."

Online journalism had the advantage of immediacy over print and of asynchronicity over broadcast, said Liam Ferrie. However, the crucial difference was its reach over distance. "It can reach people who wouldn't traditionally have been able to get the news that I'm giving them." From 1987 to 1995, "I was delivering news that (the audience) couldn't get any other way".

Fiachra Ó Marcaigh said the Internet had "the immediacy of broadcast, but the longevity of print". The fact that viewing was through a screen meant that texts were necessarily shorter, but this did not take from depth. "You can present 400 words on a topic, but you can link a couple of thousand for the person who wants background information or the evolution of a story." In the print world, only someone who felt very strongly or was fanatical about a subject would keep clippings tracking a story.

Question 3. Are expectations of online journalism realistic?

Responses here tended to relate mostly to the viability and adoption of the Internet and online news, on which subjects were cautiously positive, while others interpreted expectations as referring to journalistic concerns of, for instance, quality of work or freedom to publish.

"Oh, in some ways there aren't enough expectations of it," said Karlin Lillington. "I think that an awful lot of it is still quite flabby; a lot of it still tends to be the Drudge Report kind of journalism where somebody could create a site and throw a lot of garbage onto it." Online journalism was experiencing resistance on a "trivial level" where it came to acceptance and accreditation for events, she said. Serious online journals such as Salon had not been credited with breaking stories, or had been pilloried for doing so, as in the case of the Henry Hyde story.

Michael Cunningham said that the 'shovelware' approach of many Irish newspapers indicated that the potential of the Internet was underestimated. This showed "incredible disdain for a particular medium with its own problems and possibilities ... " Adding hyperlinks to text was "doing the work for the reader", providing a thread of meaning, and was something that traditional news sites should do. Broadcasters had huge amounts of material passing through their newsrooms that was unused. Multimedia would be martialled more as bandwidth problems decreased. Nevertheless, there was a lot of "dotcom" hype about. For news publishers, the reality remained that "there is only so much news an organisation can get through physically" and many new services were repackaging services from others, although they were providing news in a more usable way.

Katie Hannon said that if the expectations were that the Internet would take over from traditional media "I don't think that's going to happen". Although Internet news would expand "people are always going to want to have the feel

of newsprint in their hand". Internet would never be the sole medium "by which people tap into journalism".

Cliff Taylor said expectations were not realistic. "The Internet is not going to be all things to all people." The Internet as it developed would take on the characteristics of a mass market, but The Irish Times needed to establish what area it could serve in that market. It could not compete with wire services such as Reuters or PA "probably not even in the Irish market". As the upmarket, authoritative news source, "we have to find some way of translating that onto the Internet".

Luke McManus pointed out that revenue expectations for RTE's online news had been exceeded, although it was difficult to cash in on the international audience and in particular for news "because you really can't accept any sponsorship". However, revenue raised from advertising and content licensing had "massively exceeded expectations". He stressed the distinction between selecting items for corporate customers and writing content for them. "I think that is a fair way of doing it ... Writing specific news for people, you can get up to all sorts of sticky issues ..."

Eugene McGee said online journalism was "here to stay", would expand, and would become "more live". Expectations among media outlets had been low so far. The Longford Leader was an independent regional newspaper but it would have been difficult to reach an online audience without joining the Unison scheme and benefiting from the size of the Irish Independent's audience.

Christina McHugh questioned whether there were exceptional expectations in the context of local news. She said this could change with increased Internet adoption, but stressed that the net was still a new concept in Roscommon, with a low take-up so far.

"If knowledge is power then the capacity of individuals to access that power does have the potential to make a contribution to the kind of politics that I would like to see emerging – participative politics," said Fintan O'Toole. He said he believed this despite the problems of access and the Internet's equal openness to "lunatics and nutcases and propaganda" because "I don't think that people are stupid". The technology, combined with (legal provisions for) freedom of information allowed people to monitor primary sources of information that were being created by people in power, "almost in real time". Fears of massification and media concentration assumed "a passive public", but the Internet was an "active culture". Civic groups would set up their own gateways and established media which would feel competitive pressure to report on their concerns.

Conor Pope drew a parallel with the "unbelievable" development of television. Expectations of the Internet were even greater. People talked of video on demand, and unlimited broadband access. "It'll probably happen."

Emma Kavanagh said that the immediacy, volume of news and depth of related information were expectations that were being met already. Once these were being delivered by leading sites such as CNN, people would expect them on others. However, expectations that were not so achievable online were accuracy and thoroughness.

Samantha Fanning said online media would not threaten print. She said the take-up on online newspapers in the US was quite flat in the context of high adoption rates for Internet generally.

If the question related to opportunities for journalists, Sammy Hamill said, then expectations were already being realised, "with people being recruited at quite a healthy rate at the moment". However, apart from somebody like Matt Drudge, "I'm not sure that there are many famous Internet journalists yet. So, whether you'll have people who are well known in that sense I don't know".

Liam Ferrie referred to the potential for anonymous publishing in the context of political and judicial scandals. "I think that's realistic but I think it could be abused too," he said.

Fiachra Ó Marcaigh said the Internet cut the cost of entry to publishing, and increased the difficulty of censoring unpopular points of view. He said an attempt by him and others to set up a fanzine after they had left school had been frustrated by the costs, "whereas nowadays the relative cost of getting a bit of web space and getting something up there is almost nothing". Minor groups and those denied access to the media could publish. Sinn Fein's use of the web, before any other Irish political party, "went back to the days when they were barred from the airways". Some of the views, such as those of far right groups, that were put forward might be objectionable, but the Internet had brought a diversity of voices. It was a fact of life that websites of any kind had to have "a massive budget for marketing to be heard above the noise". But the higher profile of mainstream entities did not take away entirely from the value of publications aimed at communities that would seek them out.

Question 4. The Internet lets the audience 'bite back' in the sense that they can email comments, engage in online discussions, and comment freely on the website, newspaper, or news bulletin. Should news publishing become a looped or two-way process, in which audience feedback helps shape output, or does news remain as far as possible an objective truth?

This question threw up a divide between those who saw integrated audience participation as transforming the nature of the communication of public affairs, and those who perceived a need for public comment to be strictly moderated and/or compartmentalised in presentation. Those journalists who tended to prioritise feedback also tended to question the objectivity of news media. A common thread was the need for journalists to help order and interpret in a more chaotic information environment.

Karlin Lillington questioned the concept of objective truth in news. She said most journalists would find it "extremely intimidating to have the kind of interaction that online coverage can allow". However, she said this openness could also protect journalists, and she related how, because of exposure to debate on the Internet, the head of a large online company had been forced to apologise to her after he had harshly criticised her for a story which she had written about the organisation. She criticised journalists who said that they did not want to respond to readers' emails, saying , "you're serving customers who are readers and you can be strongly opinionated but just to pretend they don't exist – you know, they're the people paying your salary".

Michael Cunningham said news publishing had always been looped, but "the loop is much more intense with the web-originated publications". Structured conversations via discussion boards provided a much better system than the "argie-bargie" of live chat rooms. Discussion boards built up content over time, and, even if some writers were uncomfortable with it, this gave rise to a "triangular equation – you've got the reader, the writer and the text". Some entertainment sites such as football365 were a new form of publishing in which readers contributed significantly. "It's not so much loop of reader talking to writer or publisher as reader talking to other reader." As journalism increasingly blurred the boundaries between news and comment, external input was needed: "The more you let the reader into the loop the more you're likely to get to that truth."

Katie Hannon expressed her opposition to the 'Liveline' (the popular RTE Radio 1 chat show) approach to journalism. Although she said bulletin boards and similar devices had value, "the notion that readers or other net users get the same sort of platform as the original news story would obviously be very dangerous ground". Feedback, which was also part of the print journalist's experience was useful, "but the notion of it becoming part of the story itself – I think that's a very dangerous road to go down".

Cliff Taylor said interaction was very important and pointed to The Irish Times's recently launched daily poll in association with the breaking news service in which about 1,500 people a day voted and readers also wrote in "responding to each other". It was an extension of the role of Letters to the Editor "but with immediate responses" and was "answering a demand". However, moderation posed a dilemma. Letters to the Editor were authenticated "but online if we try and get people to register are we going to kill the whole thing off?" However, he said, "I don't think (interaction) should affect the way we approach the news". He said this would form another part of the zeitgeist to which journalists responded.

Online journalism way changing "the way people get their news", said Sheila McDonald. "One of those is that they're getting their news more from their colleagues by way of feedback, online discussion forums and things like that." She referred to the ability of users to put questions directly by email to company bosses on CNBC shows. But, she declared, "I'm anti-loop." She said it was legitimate for audience members to correct factual errors, "but if you hand the microphone to the rabble then signal-to-noise goes way up … there has to be one voice nominated to speak and that should always be the journalist. If there is going to be feedback or a loop on a site it should be as marginalised as possible. We do not intend to have any such thing on Electric News".

Luke McManus saw the value of objectivity being enhanced: "As the noise level rises more people are interested in something that's trustworthy and objective. I don't think it's ever going to descend into a babel." There was little interactivity on the RTE site, and this reflected the problems that open online discussion would raise for a national broadcaster. Such a feature would need management and raised the threat of libel liability. Although there was "a lot of interactivity in sport", providing it in news would raise the need for a moderator. It was a resources issue that forced him to choose between hiring a journalist and hiring someone to look after a discussion forum, and, "I'd go

for the journalist every time". Online discussion tended towards "silly arguments" and he was more in favour of receiving reader communication in emails – "the de facto standard on the Internet".

"While there would be scope for people to send emails on the same basis as Letters to the Editor, that would be as far as I would be prepared to go," said Eugene McGee. "I think the legitimacy of the printed word would be damaged if it was a free-for-all ..." He would consider setting up a bulletin board system but this was in the context of communications for and between readers abroad. It would need to be moderated and so raised more resource issues.

Christina McHugh said feedback from any source was vital to a local newspaper and to a large degree helped guide its direction. However, she did not distinguish between Internet-based and other forms of feedback in this. She said she "would certainly be open to the concept " of having a discussion forum on the site, but raised the problem of verification, pointing out that the newspaper did not print letters "unless I have a telephone number and the name of a contact". She concluded, "How far down the road we'd take it, I just don't know."

Fintan O'Toole said the question posed a false dichotomy because no one believed that "we're not involved in a process of very sharp value judgments being made all the time ..." Response via the Internet was therefore an important part of forming the journalist's process of seeking the truth. "There is an engagement: it is a two-way process." Much of the response that he received to his work was informed response, and the volume of it was a lot higher than his experience in print. Almost any column would evoke 20 to 25 immediate email responses. "You begin to think of yourself as being part of much more of a dialogue." As newspapers moved away from the basic task of simply reporting the news to "hierarching" of stories and "signification" it was possible that media outlets such as The Irish Times "may become the

focus for political cultures to operate around or through". Newspapers were already "more partisan than we acknowledge" but in this scenario partisanship would be much more explicit. Media in future would rely less on institutionally validated authority and more on an authority that came from a continuing relationship of trust with a public "that believed that if you say it you have some decent grounds for saying it and it's not coming out of the ether. It's not virtual journalism".

"You have to be very careful with this," said Conor Pope. "The content in newspapers has to remain an objective truth. That's the role of the newspaper ... you cannot just report news that the public wants to read." At the same time, newspapers could benefit from two-way communication. The audience could participate in making the news, but newspapers would still have to make their own judgments as to what was important. "You can't give that away. You can't do it by plebiscite." Similarly, newspaper discussion forums had to be moderated, unlike, say, a football fans' forum which would be no-holds-barred. "We have a responsibility to our audience. We have to make sure that things that are said on our website aren't either abusive, insulting, racist or wrong." Ireland.com moderators (who were journalists) frequently had to intervene "because the vast majority of people aren't really aware of how draconian the libel laws are". People had been accused of being alcoholics. "If that sits under our banner then we get sued". Of reader email he said: "When you get emails directly into your email box you read them and you will almost always respond to them. Traditional media outlets don't do that." The Internet had enabled a greater democratisation. "It's not just us sitting in our ivory towers saying 'You must read this,' and I think that's probably a good thing." [25]

Emma Kavanagh said it was hard to visualise interactivity becoming so ingrained that it would shape output ... "that people would be that sure to

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[25] Ireland.com's interactive elements were suspended in September 2000. An online notice said this was to allow site maintenance.

reply ..." She herself tended to opt out of interactive elements on websites, and preferred to remain anonymous. "I'd much rather sit down with a group of friends and discuss what my feeling (on a topic) was, rather than post it." She related this question to the presentation of content, saying, "It's really important that the two remain distinct ... you have your story area and then you have your user feedback or comment box and they're actually kept quite distinct". Users would be passionate and sometimes unthinking, their material would be unedited and riddled with errors. "If it were to become any more integrated ... the main news would be jeopardised."

"That's the real power of the Internet," said Samantha Fanning. But, if people still tended to take 'printed' material as gospel, "there is a danger that somebody's opinion could be taken as part of the news". The news consumer wanted a clear distinction and didn't want bulletin boards "interrupting". It had been the practice to provide writers' email addresses on Local Ireland but this was no longer the case "because we're trying to channel everything". Stories on Northern Ireland always got a reaction "particularly because our audience is America". The biggest problem for Local Ireland was to "guess what the audience is". She said this was done through market research and server statistics, but also through email reaction. The breakdown of Local Ireland's audience was two-thirds US and one-third 'other', with "a fair proportion" of the latter in the UK. It was a "fine line" trying to serve the US market. "If you pander totally to the US market you alienate the Irish market ... you will have no standing and you will not be taken seriously as a reputable news provider."

Sammy Hamill said, "It should be a looped thing, and very much is ... it's so easy to respond." But he added, "I'm not saying that that should shape (the news) in any shape or form ... There's no reason why the two things have to be in conflict." Readers didn't have "to go and find a stamp" but could respond instantly. When political topics were on the agenda, chats did not descend into 'flaming' sessions. "You had a lot of people who were extremely

well informed; you had some who were very badly informed. That's life: it's a reflection on the newspaper itself, I suppose."

"I don't encourage chat rooms or anything like that," said Liam Ferrie. This was because of his experience of the poor and sometimes abusive quality of discussion in his experience of in-company online environments in the 1980s, when he worked for Digital. Newspapers could edit and select letters for their print editions "but there's a feeling that if it's on the Internet space is unlimited – you can publish them all". One was always conscious of feedback by email and it was a means of maintaining objectivity. He had been "ticked off" in an email recently for expressing an opinion on a news story, "so this coming week I'll try and report the news as it is".

Fiachra Ó Marcaigh said absolute objectivity was probably a myth. Many journalists were middle class (manifested for example in lack of coverage of Dublin's inner city drugs epidemic). "I certainly don't think that the fact that you get a bag full of cranky emails should take away from the way in which facts are reported but the immediacy of feedback in online journalism can help to inform rather than unbalance the objectivity of a journalist's output." The biggest threat to objectivity came much more from commercial pressures applied either transparently or very subtly. But Internet media were not automatically democratic. "It does rely on the online publisher giving space and prominence to other points of view."

Question 5. In what ways do you feel challenged or empowered by online publishing?
Timeliness and time pressures featured strongly here, as interviewees readily interpreted the Internet's pace as a double-edged issue. But the very newness of online publishing, while seen as exciting, was also viewed by some as raising the need to adapt, whether now or in the future. Overall, the responses here tended to emphasise the possible negatives for journalism and journalists, but many of the interviewees did so only as a qualification of positive aspects already alluded to.

The pressure for fast reporting was the principal challenge identified by Karlin Lillington. "You tend to have to put something up without having the time to perhaps research accuracy in some of the ways you're allowed to when you have a couple of hours before the deadline looms." Reader feedback was empowering (although she didn't get as much as she had expected, even from readers of Wired). She also highlighted the facility for deeper research that the Internet provided.

Katie Hannon said that she did not feel empowered by online publishing in any way. "I feel challenged in the sense that this is something you know so little of and that you have the sense that there is maybe a boat pulling away from the shore and you're … thinking 'Am I missing this?' " She was conscious of more and more people going to work in 'dotcom' companies, and the need perhaps to take a course to learn about the Internet. "But really, as regards how (it affects how) I do my job every day, it doesn't."

Cliff Taylor said journalists now had the opportunity to operate across a much wider range. With more voices competing for time and attention, in addition to commercial pressures, the influence of Irish Times journalists was "going to be challenged a lot more". But newspapers would still "make judgments for people. They don't have time to spend three hours on the Internet". And, while specialised sites such as financial or sports services were a threat, newspapers' "browse value" would remain and they would have to strive to surprise people and engage them.

"Online journalism brings a wire model to everybody," said Sheila McDonald. It was impossible to compete with wire services but "we're the first team of journalists to cover technology as a wire in Ireland exclusively … we're niching". Practices were being learned and codified on an ongoing basis in this new environment: "It takes time to learn". She said online journalism could provide better coverage than broadcast by offering hyperlinks and archive searches.

Luke McManus said: "Running a seven day a week, 7am to midnight news service – soon to go 24-hour – with four journalists and myself. That's challenging!"

Eugene McGee said it was gratifying that people from Longford could read the newspaper around the world, and it was rewarding as a sports columnist for the Irish Independent to get email responses from around the world. However, the challenge for the Longford Leader "hasn't been faced yet". "We will have to do more than just putting up excerpts from the paper. We should avail of the facility to do other things."

Christina McHugh said that so far the web edition was a side issue in journalistic terms, so was not seen as a challenge. Nor was it technically difficult to submit stories and pictures. "We just log in and transfer the file (to Unison). We have no input after that." She did not feel that she was surrendering editorial control. She had control over the prioritisation of stories on the Unison pages, although not over the precise layout of the site.

Fintan O'Toole said journalists faced an enormous challenge. "We're fighting for our lives. We're fighting for relevance. We're fighting for the notion that what we do still matters and that ... we are providing a practice of using information which is grounded in some kind of integrity, in a set of rules and structures which we are happy to account for." New media would remove the mystique of journalism and "place a premium on journalists' intelligence" so that they could provide meaning.

Conor Pope said it was empowering that "we're doing something that's never been done anywhere". All journalists at ireland.com felt they were part of something in a way that perhaps journalists in traditional media didn't. "They just feel like they're working for an institution, whereas people here feel they are making an institution." The traditional hierarchical nature of newspapers was avoided. "I think it's far more democratic than traditional organisations.

Nobody here is old enough to expect anything different ... people have the opportunity to have their say."

Emma Kavanagh said expectations of immediacy and volume of information put pressure on journalists, and this was why news organisations had set up operations that were separate from the traditional organisation "because it is a different thing". Online journalists didn't cover news "first-time". They were more like selectors and editors and were challenged in the sense that they had to convey the story in a shorter format. There was also pressure to generate revenue – "to start making money out of things" – and this could put constraints on content and raised the prospect of "advertorial". People needed to know what they were getting – to "know if they're going into a space that has been bought by Jurys or Aer Lingus ..." If a site was struggling commercially, there could be pressure to make its content "more mainstream or sponsorship or advertising-friendly". Hers was one of the few allusions to concerns over a blurring online of the distinction between editorial and advertising. She also said that, while there was an expectation of interactivity in online media, uncertainty over legal liability for material in feedback areas was a serious challenge.

Samantha Kavanagh said the very newness of new media was challenging, because of a lack of recognised standards. "You can say we've found this and we've discovered this and we've researched that, but hopefully in a few years time there will be a very definite mindset and people will know the difference between writing for screen and writing for paper. She referred to the Los Angeles Times revamp in which the screen was split to accommodate two different patterns of reading.

"I've been a journalist for 20 years and I don't see any difference between print and online – only in the sense that you can expand in what you're doing," said Sammy Hamill.

Liam Ferrie referred to "the fact that I can put this out without having to get the imprimatur of The Irish Times or the Irish Independent ..."

Fiachra Ó Marcaigh said that extra competition, reader interaction, access to "a vastly greater range of information sources that both the journalists and the readers have" empowered both journalist and reader. Both would gain "if people play to its strengths rather than treat it as something that's going to upset the relatively established balance between journalist and reader ..." Journalists were still needed because of the volume of information that was available, though journalism's role was reversed: knowledge, selection and presentation skills were now more relevant than the provision of information that one couldn't get elsewhere. "In an information-besieged world I think the role of gatekeeper, filter – somebody who will stand over the authenticity of something and tie it into its context and history – is probably more valuable than ever."

Question 6. If journalism has a democratic function, in what particular ways, if any, can online journalism fulfil that role?
Ownership, accountability and diversity were identified as areas within which the Internet could have an impact. Against this, some respondents saw Internet media's potential democratic role as a straightforward extension of pre-existing media, but without specifying inherently democratic qualities in online publishing. The overall thrust of responses here was towards an increment in the democratic potential of media, but with a minority explicitly stating radical potential.

Karlin Lillington distinguished between trends such as merger activity , as represented by the AOL Time-Warner merger, "which could mean huge media conglomerates deciding which stories you should see and what format they should take" and increased diversity on the web. "On the other hand, (the Internet) enables the niche market, the small people ... the small

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organisations, to have access to an audience and I suppose lets everyone have their say." Audience access to new media remained a barrier. "It's primarily a white, middle-class medium delivering white, middle-class news."

Michael Cunningham said that journalism had "an intensely democratic function" but the question of accountability for online journalism was still being worked out.

Katie Hannon said the Internet would have a role as another arm of the free press, but the question of access was problematic. "Until the net goes into every household and becomes more a part of everyone's life ... it's not the powerful tool in the game that The Irish Times or the Indo or the Examiner currently are." She also raised the Internet as possibly posing a threat to democracy. "You could subvert as much as you could support."

"Interactivity that has been enabled by technology is bound to be a factor in influencing the paper," said Cliff Taylor. In addition, he said, "the fact that people will have other points of reference" would mean established outlets would have to fight harder in terms of maintaining their influence.

Sheila McDonald said, "One of the most exciting potentials is for niche sites maintained by committed people." However, "without journalistic best practice your site would never be sticky enough to survive".

According to Luke McManus, global availability of news from Ireland over the Internet "has got to be something that improves democracy". He dismissed the notion of electronic town halls as "a bit Swiss". "Everyone voting every couple of weeks – I don't think it's going to happen in Ireland." Information on the Internet was free and "in a sense that's a democratic thing too, even though it has to be said that the Internet in this country is still a fairly bourgeois phenomenon ..."

Eugene McGee said a democratic function may not be as relevant if one assumed that most Internet readers were abroad. He said that, while the Longford Leader was "open to everybody" the difficulty for minority perspectives was "getting the traffic onto your site. Somebody from a way-out political or religious organisation may put stuff up on the Internet but how do they attract people onto the site? You could live in glorious anonymity on the Internet".

Christina McHugh said a local web publisher could cover "more in-depth, more investigative stories" to fulfil "a different type of need" but she emphasised that this did not impinge on her current situation, especially given the link to Unison.

Fintan O'Toole said that the new ease of access to information "is vastly more democratic". For online media, gatekeeping was still there, but now it needed to be made explicit, and the public should be given access to media processes, just as they should be given access to government processes. "We're going to have to say, well, if you want to see the minutes of our news conference, here they are, they're online ..." Whether that would ever happen raised questions of ownership and interests, but The Irish Times, to maintain its position as a disinterested source "is going to have to do it".

Conor Pope said online newspapers fulfilled the democratic function of journalism "far more efficiently". They reached an audience that perhaps print wouldn't reach by catering to the younger market.

Emma Kavanagh asked, "How many people in the world are excluded because of lack of a PC or lack of money or lack of technical ability of lack of a phone?" Nevertheless, Internet ideology was democratic and its two-way nature "empowers people".

Samantha Fanning said that the Internet could have a democratic effect in terms of increasing the number of news outlets, and as news sites moved

away from the idea "of putting their sister publications up there". Online news could have an immediate effect, as in the case of the Starr Report going online. Concentration of media globally was "frightening", but the fact that traditional media had histories that underpinned their philosophies gave them the edge over new, unfamiliar competitors.

Sammy Hamill said the question didn't mean a great deal. "Everyone who works for a newspaper is governed by the policy of that newspaper, policy being set by the editor ... So it's not really anything to do with democracy, and the Internet doesn't make that any different."

Liam Ferrie said online journalism allowed a broader range of views to be heard. He referred to the near unanimity of Irish media opinion on the O'Flaherty affair and commented; "I suspect that if more people had an opportunity to say something about it at an earlier stage then you might get a broader range of views on it. The existing world of journalism seemed to create a rollercoaster on that one." However, "people with names and people with money" had come on the scene, "so for somebody who has a view that wants to get it heard, it's going to be as hard to get it heard on the Internet in the long run as it is today in the newspapers".

Question 7. How will new media bolster or undermine standards in journalism?
Pressures on accuracy, soundbite coverage, unethical reporting, shoddy work, and lack of training and experience were key issues raised here. Answers to this question also related strongly to those given under Question 8.

Karlin Lillington said the immediacy of the net put news organisations under pressure to deliver accurate information quickly. As the perceived importance of online media grew, they "will come under greater scrutiny and you'll have to be more responsible and you won't have all the really shoddy journalism of a Matt Drudge". But "breathless stories" at the net's expense in print media sprang to some extent from the older medium's fear of new competition.

"A lot of traditional publishers are treating online media as a thing you bolt on to a newspaper," said Michael Cunningham. "The people within the new sections don't have a proper synergy with the newsdesk and the older, more experienced journalists." Standards, on the other hand, increasingly would be enhanced by the reader's ability to decide that a story was "guff" because of access to original and alternative information sources.

Katie Hannon saw new media as potentially undermining standards by "pandering to lower common denominators".

Cliff Taylor said that, while the pressure for immediacy created dangers, "I think it's just a new medium; I don't think it creates new issues ..." Time pressures and pressures on accuracy were found in other media. The newspaper would also have to find new ways to write about events "in a colourful or witty or engaging way or in a way that takes an angle on them so that it isn't just straight Who, Why, What, Where and How".

Sheila McDonald said writing, proofing and editing standards could go down as "we are forced to do the best we can inside 22 minutes". Electric News had realised the problem and in response was now planning to hire a dedicated sub-editor.

In addition to the pressure of speed, Luke McManus identified as a problem the "fast-tracking of people into the business", which gave rise to a lack of experience. "We could do with a wise old head around the place," he said. Interactivity also served as a quality control. Errors could and had been corrected in the archive. Direction in such matters were usually taken from senior newsroom editors. He said that this was a positive thing in most instances, but there had been occasions when they had refused to change stories.

Eugene McGee said "I couldn't see a full-page feature being reproduced on the Internet on travellers or refugees or something like that." You either maintained standards or you didn't – "It doesn't matter where you are".

Fintan O'Toole said standards could be enhanced in simple ways: for example, journalists would not be able to repeat themselves as much because readers now had access to the archives. There was a whole set of checks and balances out there that hadn't been there before.

Conor Pope said there was a serious threat that standards would be seriously undermined because of inaccurate reporting online by entities such as the Drudge Report. He said ireland.com, which was now reporting stories independently of The Irish Times, had a policy of verifying by telephone any information it found on the web. "We haven't got many things wrong."

Emma Kavanagh said that journalists had always had to combine speed with thoroughness, but "if everything has to be updated every 30 seconds, it's really fruitless. It's just not worth it". Doras's rolling news had about 15 stories a day, but there was pressure to find more for syndication clients such as Yahoo! The prioritisation of stories needed to be addressed. "Very often on the bigger sites the priority is the last updated story ... so you could end up at the top of the list with this really crap story. So you need to have somebody to say 'No, that can't be there' ".

"You're writing faster and tighter," said Samantha Fanning. "It's fantastic. I mean you're churning the stuff out ... But the flip side of that is that you're losing a lot of background material. You're making people feel that they have to consume their information in tiny little soundbites."

Sammy Hamill said that the net "as it exists at the moment" probably undermined standards. He said this related to Question 8: "We very much see it as being a role for traditional journalists, where you bring those disciplines and standards and quality ..." The web was "all jargon – I don't think that

helps anyone, certainly not on a newspaper site". He said the Telegraph didn't yet provide breaking news online, but commented that the demands of tight deadlines were "no different from any other newspaper. You do that offline or online. It's being able to do it well under any circumstances".

Liam Ferrie met the question by reference to poor standards in traditional journalism, such as commercially successful UK tabloids.

This was one of "the thorniest issues around", said Fiachra Ó Marcaigh. Those who adhered to high standards were obviously worried that the difference between what they did and the activities of entities such as the Drudge Report "might get blurred". However, a similar scenario had pertained with the sudden growth of newspapers in the early 20th century. Over time, the market had become segmented and no one now would mistake the output of the New York Times with that of the National Inquirer. "The fact that the Drudge Report and The Irish Times Online are both published online is about all they have in common." A much more insidious problem was the bending online, on the basis that "it's only the website", of the separation of editorial and commercial that had been well established in print. Standards could also suffer through the recruitment "because they understand this computer business" of younger and less experienced people.

Question 8. Who's got the core skills for new media – traditional journalists or new media types?

Perhaps not unexpectedly, there was near unanimity on this issue. The role of traditional journalists was endorsed with confidence and sometimes surprising force. Within that consensus, however, some interviewees made greater acknowledgement of the need for technical skills, albeit of a rudimentary nature and without superseding the importance 'old-fashioned' journalism. Again, there was a significant crossover between this question and Question 7.

Karlin Lillington said that a combination of the two was ideal but that "only now are proper hybrids emerging". She identified as a weakness the influx of "young people with very little experience of real world journalism finding that new media allow them (in) …" Too many older journalists were terrified of new media: it was amazing that The Irish Times's newsroom had only one computer connected to the Internet.

Michael Cunningham said that "a reporter is a reporter" but "in terms of editing and revising and sub-editing", traditional journalists had the necessary skills, whereas traditional designers often had difficulty understanding web norms. Where traditional journalists were lacking was in an understanding of information architecture, and here the skills were more akin to those of a librarian. The attitude to words of many people working in web design companies was "atrocious".

"The basis of journalism doesn't change, no matter where you're producing your copy for," said Katie Hannon. "The same skills are required: you have to know how to get a story, … how to research it, … how to present it, and you tweak those skills slightly for whichever medium you're working for. But a good magazine journalist is a good newspaper journalist is a good e-journalist." It was recognised that writing on the net was very poor "and editing is appalling, because techie types … it's not that part of their brain that's operating at full whack!"

"I think the challenge is to bring the two together," said Cliff Taylor. Those with technical skills and familiarity with the environment "don't have the core newsgathering and verification skills … So I think what we need to try and do is to bring our core newsgathering skills to the web without destroying spontaneity and flexibility".

Sheila McDonald: "Traditional journalists. Full stop."

Luke McManus said the roles in new media were editorial, technical, sales and marketing. A blend of skills was appropriate – one journalist at RTE Online also had system administration and web skills – but new media types would find themselves squeezed in the future, as skills deepened and narrowed.

Eugene McGee said that younger journalists were the "new kings" and he would favour job candidates with web publishing experience. However, technical skills were "only a bonus". "If an employer doesn't rate (a job candidate) as a journalist or as a good writer they are not going to take them on."

"The process is there, tried and tested, for local news," said Christina McHugh, "so local journalists will know what demand is there ..." However, journalists needed to be better trained "in how the whole system works" in order to maintain control. Referring to changes in copyright law (the Copyright and Related Rights Act 2000) she said journalists were in danger of losing control of their content on the Internet, and in some cases might not even be aware that they were being published on the web.

Fintan O'Toole said traditional journalists were "still very much at the core of it. It's still basically the same kind of business". Clarity was at a premium as information proliferated. Some new skills were needed outside journalism, "in terms of things that need to be done for journalists", such as archiving, for which institutions had responsibility.

Conor Pope was emphatic that it was very easy to learn new media skills, but "almost impossible" for someone without a journalistic background to pick up the editorial skills that were required.

Emma Kavanagh said traditional journalists were central. Roles would change, with increased emphasis on contextualisation and prioritisation as the quantity of news increased. "There's just such a big sea of information ... there's just so much (news) there now that people really will go back to the

few tried and tested people to get some sort of reality check on what exactly is news." The impartiality of the traditional journalist was always going to be required, as were the roles of verification and news agenda setting. "You can have content management tools until the cows come home but you have to have a journalist in there actually selecting." Journalists would need new skills, however, to ensure that they remained technically savvy.

New media was "a whole new scene", said Samantha Fanning. "Good writers, fast writers, snapshot writers, headline writers, sub-editors. I found writing for radio helped a lot." But she said online media offered limited opportunities for journalistic creativity. In the context of Local Ireland's activity as a news aggregator and provider of topical features, she said: "You're not recreating the wheel here. You're trying to put it all in one place and represent it as objectively as possible. I think people are discovering now that there seems to be that boredom factor for online journalists ... they realise it's not what they thought it was ... I think they probably need to come up with another word for it ... you're a content producer."

Sammy Hamill said a newspaper site would be "governed and regulated and controlled like its offline equivalent". He did not see new skills being required.

Liam Ferrie said older journalists might have difficulties but there could be exceptions, such as Emigrant columnist Cormac McConnell, who initially had been "shy of Internet and email".

Fiachra Ó Marcaigh said that traditional journalists needed to reassess what they did in the light of the strengths and weakness of the new media. But one could see in some of the output from people whose skills were more technical "a crying need for old-fashioned skills". Attempts to build "informational, journalistic-type sites" without journalists had largely not succeeded, whereas some journalists had taken on projects that at first glance seemed more suited to the technically skilled. Although both sides had some learning to do, "There are some things that are second nature to anybody with experience in

journalism that seem to be something of a challenge to a lot of the more technical people in new media".

Question 9. How does or will the physical presentation of online content impact on editorial material?

Screen resolution (directly or indirectly), story length and the importance of text in new media were the principal features of this part of the discussion. Multimedia, in contrast to what one intuitively might have anticipated, received little attention. Similarly, although hypertext is the technical basis and proclaimed *raison d'être* of the web, this did not significantly inform responses here. Most of the interviewees were more concerned about the formatting of text and the ordering and prioritising (or not) of stories.

"Most people do not want to read an article the length of The Irish Times's Weekend story or, God forbid, the Guardian Saturday Interview which looks like it could be three or four thousand words," said Karlin Lillington. The concession made for the medium was brevity: stories had to be cut back to short, snappy units with a rough limit of 400 words on a page – "a pretty small article if you're talking about coverage of a tribunal or a political assassination or a tragedy in Mozambique ... you're not really giving much information to a reader". New media also lacked the satisfaction of thumbing through the pages of a newspaper: "God forbid that I should be limited to a selection of boxes that I tick!"

Michael Cunningham said that both email and the web had the problem of being read on-screen, so material had to be shorter. "You have to be a lot more accurate with words. You notice that traditional journalists and their subs are really sloppy and the copy is very, very drawn-out." Online writing was "much more like a radio script. You have to use bullet points and chop the information into nuggets". Email had given rise to a new form of article – the email interview, in which journalist and interviewee exchanged emails over

time – and this had proved a very satisfying form in which to work, as well as leading to informed writing because it demanded prior research by the writer. Writing in pure text for email was an art in itself that was totally underestimated, he said. The email newsletter was a particularly useful format for news delivery: "An email newsletter is an amazingly functional, clean, crisp, low-bandwidth … 'Here are the news headlines' from, say, the Financial Times. And then I go to the website." Working in new media was, he said, "a lot slicker" than the "clunky" processes of print journalism. The flow of copy through editing processes was similar to those of print, but "there isn't enough emphasis on sub-editing".

Katie Hannon compared the problems of web presentation with those of teletext services with a view to "making it easy on the eye" by means of basic rules of text presentation.

Cliff Taylor said the web was a different medium that needed shorter, snappier stories "but with the ability to get a lot of background if you need to". This was more than links to material off the newspaper's site – it also included "the intelligent use of background material. You're offering a package that's tailored for the web. You're not just slapping up what's happening in the paper".

Sheila McDonald said Electric News's output was "time-ordered" and it was difficult to show online the kind of story hierarchy that was indicated by the printed page. This, she said, made an argument for newspaper sites to display an image of the print version layout.

Luke McManus pointed out that broadcast journalists did not write headlines but "writing headlines is one of the big things we do here …". There was also a requirement for one-line story summaries. Readers could follow the thread of stories backwards to get context. It was important to provide users with "as many options as possible".

Eugene McGee said there had been difficulties with the Unison system for prioritising stories. He had accessed the site while on holiday to find that "the lead story was some under-14 football match". Unison was planning to revamp the system and the format would be changed significantly to one "more like the New York Times or The Irish Times".

Christina McHugh said Unison's presentation of the Roscommon Herald was OK but was critical of the fact that "everybody's (newspaper) looks the same".

According to Fintan O'Toole, the more sensitive, less hierarchical nature of online presentation didn't impose as obvious a categorisation "that screams at the reader that this is important and this isn't". This might feed back into print by "making us think about it a bit more". There would be a lot less raw information in newspapers as it became directly accessible and "summary journalism" would become a lot less important. Investigative journalism would have a whole new importance: a new story would have a huge premium. The emphasis would also be on analysis, commentary and good writing.

Conor Pope said The Irish Times's distinctive use of large display photographs in print could not transfer to the Internet because of bandwidth restrictions. Presentation of information also had to be re-evaluated because of the way in which people read online. A 1,500 word piece could not be presented in the same way as in a broadsheet newspaper. In addition, readers could leave the page at any time. "They're not bound to it: they haven't paid 95p or £1 for their newspaper so they're completely free to leave, so you have to make the thing slightly more interesting than traditional newspapers have ever had to do." Broadband delivery would mean that in 10 years time "we will be able to go out and do our newsfeeds standing on the steps of the Four Courts ... (multimedia) is the really big way the Internet is going to change the presentation of news".

Samantha Fanning referred to the Eyetrack study (Lewenstein, Edwards et al. 2000). "It was text! They all ignored gifs (images) ... people still looked for text." Text was more powerful than video or virtual newsreaders. A new way of writing was required, however. "One paragraph, one sentence – I mean the old idea was one idea, one paragraph. That's out the window! You put all your effort into the first six or seven words because the chances of them making it to word 22 are very remote." Writing became more descriptive and more visual, and headlines were more literal. In contrast to print, "The most boring headline is the one most likely to get someone to follow it". Local Ireland had a 'design and usability' department to consider presentation issues. One effect was the simplification of typographic schemes, with fewer typefaces and size variations. The model was "pretty much (like) Wired".

Sammy Hamill said Belfast Telegraph stories were published online exactly as they were in print, though the site had other elements. "The Telegraph Online is a mirror of the offline edition. In other words, it's a matter of record." He also referred to the Eyetrack study and commented, "In some senses it's a better medium to read".

Liam Ferrie said the email articles in the Irish Emigrant would run to a tenth of the length of some newspaper articles. Condensing and rewriting stories so that they carried core information and were easily read was exacting and time-consuming, and often many revisions were required.

Fiachra Ó Marcaigh said that the lower resolution of computer screens compared with paper made for shorter stories and "more digestible chunks". A story was also likely to be "multi-layered" with a headline and summary built in so that it could fit a WAP telephone or be shown in full on a PC or printed out. Because online readers tended "to scan rather than read in great detail" features such as subheads and highlighted words were very relevant. Online features also fed back into traditional media – ireland.com was now running polls that were reported in The Irish Times's print edition. He also

said polls were entertainment and as such could not be considered to have any "democratising effect". Text would always be a feature as "one (of the ways of getting information) that comes most naturally to us", even after the introduction of broadband technologies. "There are only so many places you can send a camera to ... Recording, storing, editing and presenting video is a lot more intensive and expensive." Of the tendency towards aggregation online, he said McLuhan's concept that all new media feed on old ones was relevant. But online-only magazines such as Slate and Salon produced original content and there would be a balance achieved over time. "What aggregation means for online.ie is that we don't have to go and cover the courts every day. Over time, we will be able to pick the issues on which we can contribute the most ..."

Question 10. What policy or regulatory measures, if any, do you think should be adopted in relation to online journalism?

The overwhelming response here favoured *laissez faire*, with no strong call for special response regarding the Internet. Either the market would operate to uphold standards, already existing frameworks would apply equally to the Internet, or discriminating readerships would require online media to avoid excesses. However, several interviewees expressed strong views on the need for reform of the Republic's libel law, as it applied to all media, while others emphasised media ownership and concentration of media generally, rather than new media in particular. The notion that the Internet is in itself inherently inimical to central control featured rarely, and where it did it was seen as a technical characteristic rather than one providing the basis for new media activities.

Karlin Lillington expressed concern at the prospect of further legal controls, saying that, coming from an American background in which free speech was protected, she was "shocked at what you can't say," in Irish media because of libel law and the lack of a legal framework for press freedom. The Internet

introduced "really difficult questions such as what does it mean to publish something". Publication had previously been a formal process, but on the Internet "a comment made in a chat room or on a bulletin board suddenly becomes a published item ..."

Michael Cunningham said "the laws of the land don't simply stop operating" when it came to policies concerning links to undesirable websites or to defamation. Nevertheless, standards and practices needed to be worked out in relation to responsibility for content, the definition of who was the publisher of a comment in a discussion board, and the fixing or editing of archive materials. Broadcasting regulation could, he said, be overtaken by the ability of websites to distribute video and sound feeds. "That kind of journalism is very, very different when you have no need for a licence." He described as "atrocious" the provision of the Copyright Bill giving publishers web rights over journalists' work.

"We don't have any regulatory body for traditional media," said Katie Hannon, "so it's debatable whether we should get a special category for online journalism". Standards would depend on individuals running websites: "I'm always very nervous of the idea of a press council ... we're looking for a free press here and it does smack of somebody deciding what's allowed ... I'd be reluctant to suggest any regulatory body until I saw that one was absolutely necessary."

Cliff Taylor said there was a strong argument for control of "more perverted stuff on the web," although this would be difficult to achieve. In relation to Independent News and Media's interests in vertical sectors of the communications industry, including cable and Internet, he said the Competition Authority would have to look "at what the Indo (the Independent group) does in terms of future take-overs ... as a factor in media dominance".

Sheila McDonald said there was no need for a special case for online media, as "the best policies from the print world will carry over".

"There are a lot of problems in national journalism in this country and the web is the least of our worries," said Luke McManus. These included "racist tabloids", libel restrictions, and the difficulties faced by the media criticising politicians and judges.

Eugene McGee said that he didn't see any need for special regulation for the Internet. "If it's in the paper it should go online," he said. He questioned whether those who controlled communications technologies could feasibly control access to content, because anyone could reach a URL on the Internet.

Fintan O'Toole expressed scepticism "as to whether any regulatory process would actually work very well anyway". The main role of government now was "to put as much online as possible" and the Irish Government had been fairly progressive in this regard. It was too early to tell what the Internet's effect would be in relation to content. Competition law "certainly needs to apply and you don't want abuse of dominant positions ... but I would be inclined to let that play out for a period before making any definite moves on it". The key question was not how the media behaved but how the public behaved. "My feeling is that ... the public anyway will tend to revolt against a feeling that it is being manipulated and that its options are being led in certain directions. Maybe that's naive but I think there are lot of possibilities out there to allow that to unfold without moving very strongly." The key questions were still to do with media ownership and cross-media ownership. "That's much more important at the moment without thinking how it will impact on the Internet."

Conor Pope said that it was inherent in the nature of the Internet that it was not regulated, yet it was important that journalistic standards be maintained, so one might hope for "some sort of self-regulation". State control would be very difficult to implement: for example The Irish Times had servers in the

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US and Britain as well as in Ireland. "There's so much dross online in Ireland and all over the world that to make yourself stand out you've got to ensure that the product that you provide is quality. I think that's better than any sort of regulation."

Emma Kavanagh said that, while it had a democratic culture, the Internet lacked standards. She was concerned that standards would be developed by bringing online publishers to court in test cases. Doras was in close contact with its lawyers "and to a certain degree winging it" because of grey areas in many issues. She said that what she would like to see "is not a rulebook imposed from on high but some sort of ongoing discussion, a roundtable or commission or forum that would try to ratify some (policies)".

Samantha Fanning said that the idea of regulation "opens up a can of worms". She said that the changes in copyright law would most affect individual producers of digital content, and freelancers in particular. Any publisher wanted control of syndication, "but as somebody who also submits, I don't like the idea of that".

Sammy Hamill said that "all the things that apply to normal newspaper publishing" also applied to the Telegraph Online. Total freedom of speech did not apply to a newspaper site. "You apply the same standards and the same regulations."

Liam Ferrie raised the Hugh O'Flaherty[26] story and the Anthony Cawley[27] story in terms of their effects on the individuals concerned. He said libel laws should be relaxed and "they (the media) could then go after the ones they need to go after".

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[26] The former Supreme Court Judge at the centre of a controversy over his nomination to the board of the European Investment Bank.

[27] A convicted rapist who committed suicide after intensive media coverage including a radio ad calling him 'the beast'

Fiachra Ó Marcaigh said regulation had always been bad for journalism. Ireland's "draconian" defamation law should be the focus of those concerned about the public interest and journalism. People would need to become more sophisticated in their assessment of media. Where previously the investment required to publish operated as a "kind of warranty of good intentions", now that publishing cost virtually nothing new yardsticks needed to be developed "and I'm pretty sure they will be".

Question 11: What's your opinion on the following characteristics of online news (if these have not already arisen): frequent news updates online; links to other resources online; publishing email address of reporter/writer with his or her piece; closer interaction with audience; other:

Frequent updates: **Despite its being a major feature of many news sites, interviewees were for the most part cautious in their assessment of the value of this feature, especially in the context of Irish news.**

Karlin Lillington said frequency of news updates was "the great strength of online media … but most online publications are still finding their way". She said very few organisations were succeeding in "thinking through the information and getting it up online", and singled out CNN as having the right approach. Few European newspapers were doing it well. Many outlets merely offered 'shovelware.'

"That's been a gimmick and a disaster for most Irish sites," said Michael Cunningham, although RTE, because of its Aertel (teletext) asset, had a much better sense of rolling news. In any case, rolling news in an Irish context was "a bit of a false god … the idea of having loads and loads of news throughout the day maybe is a myth".

While she would be interested in national or international news if she were an online reader, "the amount of news stories happening in a county like Roscommon is very limited", said Christina McHugh. Courts, meetings, "whatever" occurred within a cycle, so the weekly model fitted best.

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Fintan O'Toole said the impulse to publish quickly could prove dangerous, especially as what appeared in type, as opposed to oral delivery, had the appearance of authority. It also made it more important to be conscious of the pack impulse that sometimes led news coverage.

Emma Kavanagh said frequency shouldn't be overstated, and that rolling news shouldn't be done "for the sake of doing it". Nevertheless, "the brilliance of the web is that it can be up there straight away".

Liam Ferrie said the Emigrant provided basic information and there were very few occasions when its audience wanted instant updates.

Links: **Where they had not previously addressed this question, most journalists responded to the prompt with enthusiastic endorsement, most regarding hyperlinks as a fundamental component transforming online media – despite the scant attention they received under Question 9. Worries about the potential for links to direct readers away from the site were also expressed. Pressed on policy regarding controversial links, most interviewees tended towards a common sense approach of treating each case on merit, but others felt that a consistent policy needed to be adopted.**

Karlin Lillington described the question of linking as "a battleground for eyeballs". Hypertext "moves like your mind moves" but the problem with it was the risk of losing the reader. Technical responses to this problem, such as framing other sites, risked annoying the reader, and there was uncertainty over issues such as 'deep' links referencing material within other sites. The practice of aggregating summary headlines and stories with links to original content was still "quite grey".

Michael Cunningham said hypertext links were a great strength of online media, and compared a decision to leave one out to censoring a photograph. He said common sense should prevail in such decisions.

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Katie Hannon described hyperlinks as "manna for heaven" for journalists researching a story, describing the process of following links as being "sent on a path with little arrows telling you the next thing you need to know before you go writing up your own story". By not putting in a pointer to an objectionable site "you're censoring the story" One would make those decisions "as you go along. They wouldn't all be perfect but they would follow some sort of ethical standard in your own head, I guess".

"We tend to put relevant ones in," said Cliff Taylor, who gave the example of business stories carrying links to the website of the company being covered. "That obviously takes them off our website, though." The issue of links to questionable websites was a worry, and although the aim was to apply their own standards, there was no guiding policy. "It's something you have to be careful with ... I don't think there is a formula really."

Sheila McDonald said readers had asked for links. "We do try to include them ... we try to keep them to the end of the story so that they read the story before clicking and leaving the site."

Although RTE News online did not have external links, Luke McManus said he liked the idea. However, there was pressure "from the commercial people" not to provide links for fear of directing people off the site. Another difficulty was the possibility of dead links. "It creates a whole new level of content management problems." He said the issue of omitting a link depended on whether making a link informed the reader. He said the question of offensive links was hypothetical. If the information on the site was relevant, "then you'd be in a quandary".

Eugene McGee said the Leader did not have links yet, but that they were planned. "I mean, that's one of the great things about it," he said. Links would be "very important". He would decide on individual links to questionable sites. "If they were within the law we would put in the link but if they were pornographic obviously we wouldn't."

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Christina McHugh said links helped users. One would have to have a guiding policy because the newspaper had "a certain amount of responsibility" for the linked site, and as editor she would need to vet it. The question of linking to objectionable sites was parallel to printing a Page Three model, something a local newspaper would not do. "If somebody wants to say 'censorship', that's fine." It could be argued that local newspapers already practised censorship in their selection of stories, she said.

Fintan O'Toole said news providers had to take editorial responsibility for links and that therefore he was uncomfortable with the notion of ad hoc decisions in this regard. Until we developed some sort of consensus on the question "my tendency would be towards a more minimal approach". Links should be confined to providing sources of information, such as verbatim records of speeches by, for example, the leader of Youth Defence, and if this was not available "without also being exposed to a great deal of other influences" then there needed to be an active policy of putting the information on your own site. This meant one was taking editorial responsibility and that created open questions, but these were not fundamentally different questions "from the ones that we face every day anyway."

Conor Pope said there should be more links on ireland.com. "They're the beauty of the Internet." If the newspaper's product was good enough, it would not lose readers through linking: "They'll come back". It was easy to have an opinion or to make a conference presentation on the question of linking to undesirable sites, "but of course we wouldn't link to any kind of porn site or any site that advocated hate". This was censorship, "but do you really want to give one million users an entry point to some site advocating the slaughter of black people or refugees?" Ireland.com didn't have many outside hyperlinks at present, so there wasn't a formulated policy on it. If a story itself was about such a site, the reader would find it anyway, "we're

going to tell them it's there and if they want to find they can, but it's not our role to link to them".

Emma Kavanagh said her journalists' work in selecting and providing "decent, relevant" links was an important service to the user. Words within articles were hyperlinks, and even if the journalist did not have time to go into something in depth, the reader could explore such links. "No two users will have the same experience on that article (unless) they read the article from top to bottom and don't follow any links." The risk of losing readers through links was an added impetus to make Doras more interesting. Putting additional related links at the bottom of an article also gave the reader an incentive to stay until the end of it. Doras was commissioning market research that would use focus groups to shed light on such issues.

"The ideal obviously is to link everything," said Samantha Fanning, but this was not practical. Local Ireland concentrated on putting links in features, as these were designed to provide more depth. Whether links were placed in copy or at the end of a piece was a bone of contention, she said, and related to whether the link was a 'pop-up', i.e. opened a new window on the viewer's screen, or took the viewer out of the site. She said her preference was for early sign-posting of related links: "In an ideal world that's what we do." The issue of linking to undesirable sites had not yet arisen for Local Ireland, she said, and there was no formulated policy. "But if you're in the world of providing information you can't sit back and say, 'No, you can't actually have that link'." She pointed out that almost every website was covered by a disclaimer of legal responsibility for its links.

The Telegraph currently put both sponsored and unsponsored links at the bottom of stories, said Sammy Hamill. This didn't change the nature of the text fundamentally. "It's all about making things easy. People who use the web like things to be as easy as possible." The links were not put in by journalists but by "techie people". To suggest that hypertext changed the

nature of the relationship between writer and reader was "hogwash". "You're only helping the reader ..." He said the Telegraph would not link to a site belonging to an undesirable group. One couldn't generalise in any way, he said. However, in the case of a paramilitary site that was the subject of the story, it was "almost certain that we would carry the web address. Whether we would actually encourage you by providing the link, I doubt".

Liam Ferrie said that the Emigrant did not supply links. Its stories were summaries, and "if someone is interested enough we're sure they'll know where to go". Researching links would also require be time-consuming. The business newsletter provided (unpaid) links to commercial entities covered and this, he said, was out of "patriotism" more than anything else.

"I think it's a bit like swearing: is it justified by the context?" commented Fiachra Ó Marcaigh. Journalists needed to be responsible about which sites they linked to. The question was whether the link would inform or merely offend, though it was "difficult to give an across-the-board approach".

Email address: **Inclusion of email addresses was regarded positively by all. However, differences emerged over whether journalists should regard themselves as being obliged to correspond with readers by this means, and whether a central gateway for email feedback should be operated, facilitating management of responses.**

Karlin Lillington said publication of email addresses put responsibility on the writer to decide whether to respond to messages. "People don't send a letter to the editor expecting a reporter to give them a note back ... (but) I don't think there's any point in putting an email address in if you're not going to answer them." It was stated policy at The Irish Times that every piece had the email address of the writer attached and that writers respond to messages.

Michael Cunningham recognised the possible burden on writers who "put their head above the parapet" but concluded that, on balance, the practice was good, and journalists should be accessible.

Katie Hannon referred to colleagues getting story leads by email. "I've always loved getting mail anyway ... even really nasty ones with red biro all over your face but that (email) is even better."

Cliff Taylor said of the practice, "I don't think either the newspaper or journalists yet realise the power of that." Demands would increasingly be put on journalists to interact with readers and "a lot of them will be uncomfortable". Journalists already had to interact via telephone, he said, but he added that they might not always have time to answer emails.

Sheila McDonald said each byline on Electric News was a 'mailto' link. It was a tool for receiving feedback and story leads and the need to respond "hasn't been burdensome for us, not yet" because of the relatively small audience. She raised the possibility of re-directing reporters' emails to a single address so that one person could manage the flow. "There's always room to intermediate."

Eugene McGee said he planned to put email addresses on some stories, although he "wouldn't see much point" putting them on an ordinary news story. At present emails came in to a single address which was used mostly for commercial purposes, but when reporters' addresses went online, reader replies "would be going out uninterrupted" to individual journalists. Staff would not be required to answer messages: "I think moderation has to be applied."

Christina McHugh said the Roscommon Herald did not publish email addresses of reporters and would have to consult journalists before changing the practice. She normally dealt with complaints and "I don't like putting journalists in the position where they have to answer ..." It was a decision for

the individual journalist. Responding to emails was the newspaper's as distinct from the journalist's responsibility.

Fintan O'Toole said he got far fewer crank and anonymous responses by email. A substantial part of reader reaction was made up of messages pointing out aspects of stories to him, or suggesting reading on subjects. He always tried to respond to emails but felt that the more the practice developed the more impossible it would become. In contrast to his enthusiasm for email, he said he had never joined a bulletin board discussion on ireland.com because he felt he didn't know the "etiquette" of such conversations. He did not accept the argument that writers had a right not to have a published email address. Although there may be practical problems, in principle email addresses should be published. If necessary, a journalist might spend one day a week dealing with correspondence or taking part in a discussion group. "I don't think we can go on culturally putting ourselves forward as the arbiters of accountability and not being accountable ourselves." Now that the channel was available in the new medium, the expectation among readers was increasingly going to be "If you can tell me your views I can tell you mine".

Conor Pope said that people who were getting email responses were pleasantly surprised at the feedback. "It's not like giving out a personal telephone number" and people were not obliged to respond to or even read emails. The decision on whether email addresses were published for individual journalists lay with print editors at The Irish Times.

Emma Kavanagh said she was in favour of giving writers' addresses but didn't do so "for their sake". Because they were freelancers, they were paid to write an article, "not to follow up emails after it".

Samantha Fanning said that it "didn't make sense" to have email links to writers of news, but they were more relevant to features. With millions of people accessing the site, which had a "vast amount of information", she received a lot of emails but it was "easy to filter through". However, news

elicited comparatively few messages because of its "dip-in, dip-out" nature on Local Ireland. Emails were always answered within 24 or 48 hours. "That's the nature of a website – you're putting yourself up there as an information resource. You have to actually respond."

Sammy Hamill said main feature writers on the Telegraph had published email addresses in the print edition, but "straightforward" news stories did not carry them. However, all staff email addresses were available online. Most emails received were intended for publication, but inquiries and objections were answered as far as possible.

Liam Ferrie said replies to the Irish Emigrant were directed to him, and he would answer messages such as those concerning editorial policy. He would pass on the message if it concerned a particular reporter. There was no set policy with regard to email, and some reporters had published email addresses while others had not. Time was a problem, and per day he would receive 10 or 20 emails that required an answer. "My policy is to answer everything; the fact is I answer very little."

"A 100 per cent good thing" said Fiachra Ó Marcaigh. "Time was all news and even a lot of opinion was anonymous and then firstly opinion and then news got bylined. Publishing (a byline address) is a way of standing over what you've written." His experience was that time spent reading and responding to emails was more than justified. He said his last-ditch argument with those who were opposed to the practice was that it was "easier to deal with a nuisance email than with a nuisance phone call".

Closer interaction with audience: **As with bulletin boards, the concept of journalists and editors having direct, live interaction online with the audience raised noticeable differences among respondents.**

Karlin Lillington said interaction would bring more accountability to print media. Media organisations had public responsibilities that went beyond other

commercial concerns, so balking at having another way of being available to "the people who are your customers in the broadest sense, to me just seems so bizarre". Journalists were in a privileged position, and "to say that people shouldn't be able to contact you just goes against everything that journalism is about".

Michael Cunningham referred to "a sense in some newspapers that you didn't meet your readers". Journalists should not treat this as a headache, because "it's something that readers have a right to and it is making media more accountable – because media are very powerful".

Most people "wouldn't have the luxury of the time" to sit around chatting online to readers, said Katie Hannon. She described as "incredible" the concept that an editor of would spend time in live sessions.

Eugene McGee said he would not enter a live online meeting with readers. Email would be a useful facility, but he also was recognised on the street. Such interaction was easy for him, as he was from the newspaper's area and he was a recognised figure (due in part to his sporting career). However, he said "there should be a degree of aloofness between local reporters and people they are reporting on if you are to have objectivity. Otherwise you are at the beck and call of the public".

Sammy Hamill said correspondents occasionally took part in themed discussions in the online edition's live chat room. The Editor had not yet taken part in such as session, but "he has volunteered". Newspapers had had very little experience of interaction up to now. Their only experience had been through readers' letters but now the response was instant.

Other: Most of the additional responses here addressed commercial aspects of online publishing:

Karlin Lillington said the economies of new media still needed to be worked out. People did not pay for content and there were problems in acceptance of Internet advertising. Newspapers were developing sites "because they have to", for fear of losing their stake.

Cliff Taylor said online publishing raised issues for newspapers "in terms of how they organise their journalists": whether they set up separate teams for online and print, and how editorial control would be exercised.

Sheila McDonald stressed that creating content was expensive. "They're voracious, these sites ... it's exceptionally difficult for offline properties to create an online version that maintains the same standards ... because they cannot just take the same journalists and double-job them ... they have created a huge act for themselves to follow."

Sammy Hamill said the Telegraph made money – "not a lot, but the potential is there for it to be a strong arm of the newspaper". He said the new media division was an integrated part of the newspaper. Attitudes were changing as Internet adoption grew. Where before the online edition was seen as perhaps taking from the print edition, now the two were viewed as complementary.

Liam Ferrie said the Emigrant did not cut and paste stories from the Irish press. They were always rewritten "and I put my own touch to them" and exclusives were always credited. He also pointed out that the Irish Emigrant was often read in print.

CONCLUSION

8.1 Media's new layers

8.1(i) A new culture of news

The Internet has given rise to new forms of content delivery that have the potential to change news generally, but has also altered the conditions and relations surrounding the creation and consumption of news. In technological terms, the net can be described as a many-to-many medium, a revolutionary departure from the one-to-many or few-to-many nature of media forms that preceded it. But this model does not sit easily with news as we understand it – the reporting, analysing and explaining, by trusted people and organisations, of real events and issues that are of common public concern. The Internet, at least in part, has also been characterised as anarchic and ungovernable, and is likely to harbour the potential for these qualities even as it moves to the media mainstream with higher rates of adoption. Conventional news media, by contrast, have been organised through hierarchies and long-standing institutional practices, with careful selection and construction of stories for mass consumption. This study has attempted to reach an understanding of how the technological potentialities and cultural values of the Internet can be reconciled with the heretofore highly centralised and stable organisation of news, and to assess the degree to which this process has impacted in Ireland.

8.1(ii) Flexibility and power

More fundamentally than producing discrete new forms of editorial content, such as continuous newsfeeds or emailed newsletters, new ICTs have created a transformed information communication environment in which all news entities must function. This is not simply a matter of additional choice, the

ever-present catchword associated first with cable and now with digital television, nor does it relate only to the likelihood of fragmentation of the audience, even though the net is an ideal platform for audience targeting. If the Internet demonstrates its ability to encompasses all media that preceded it, from text to video, we have seen that it also adds new conceptual layers that mesh across a wide range of already existing ideas: it is the coolest of media, it raises the prospect of new media institutions, it at least in part reconstitutes the space for unfettered rational debate, it alters relationships with news definers and the state apparatus, and it is simultaneously capable of interaction on an individual scale and of displaying the qualities of broadcast. Whether its radical potential is to be suppressed or is capable of suppression is still an open question.

The Internet has also already demonstrated its ability to provide audience power, and an increasingly sophisticated ability to dictate in granular detail the terms under which news is accessed, adding a new, active dimension to reception. The option to configure this central social relationship, and the process of continuous development of the means to do so, potentially takes the audience far beyond the realm of alternative and individually nuanced interpretation of fixed texts.

It can be argued that, armed with the wherewithal to select from an array of sources, the reader can reflexively construct their own view of reality according to their knowledge and trust of individual outlets – even if those outlets are honestly or blatantly partisan – thus creating the opportunity for a less compromised public sphere.

To the side of media's traditional boundaries, the net has introduced the potential for official and business organisations to reach news audiences directly, bypassing journalists or imposing new rigours on them by virtue of access to external references. Self-publishing is also a feature of the culture that has also taken root. And news sites themselves have felt the need to

incorporate interactive features, most notably bulletin boards, that progress the idea of reader input far beyond the stage of Letters to the Editor. In all of this complex web, relationships with and between media and the rest society can be inter-connected by hypertext.

While many-to-many news remains to some degree an oxymoron, news as it has been conceived of for much of the last century must take account of the new environment of news source abundance and public access to competing and subverting meanings. The study's survey of Irish online news reveals that, with a few exceptions, there has been little movement towards a full-blooded Internet news sector. The implementation of Internet media features, including interactivity, has been low, pointing to the extension of broadcast logic onto the Internet rather than a preparedness to treat the new media platform on its unique terms. Such logic has not been confined to older media organisations, with some of the least interactively endowed sites being those of ISPs. Nor among most has there yet been an appreciable increase in news content, with the dominance of traditional producers and the modest offerings of newcomers pointing to cost and resource issues.

A possible next step is the closing of this division between content-rich old and interactive new media, achieved through partnerships that go deeper than supplying newsfeeds. For example, the Unison service, itself built on the most traditional of media, would not require a massive input of resources to establish genuine interactivity to form the complete Internet news vehicle. And ireland.com and the Belfast Telegraph demonstrate, at least in part, what a traditional provider can achieve on its own, given a culture of openness to readers. These online titles, unheard of a decade ago, are now successful media entities and the focus of new development effort within their organisations.

8.1 (iii) Journalism on the turn

While the current picture of Internet news reflects the overwhelming pre-dominance of the stable model of traditional media, development towards the Internet and other new ICTs is unlikely to stop. Therefore, the views of journalists on what Internet news should become are relevant. Ten years ago, the questions asked of journalists would have had little meaning (except for Liam Ferry and perhaps one or two others). But journalists in 2000 display a strong appreciation of the role of the Internet in their work, whether they simply acknowledge the need to publish on the net as a competitive or defensive strategy, or regard it as transforming or having the potential to transform their relationships with their readers. Given the strong pragmatic orientation of many journalists, whose working lives are inescapably governed by close deadlines, those interviewed showed a strong willingness to consider the broader implications of new media, and some of those actively engaged in new media with significant content shared some of the democratising evangelism that has characterised the net elsewhere, and were keen to give voice to the idea that news media can be more open and accountable. None of the journalists interviewed argued that their work would remain completely unchanged, although a common theme was that, in an environment of data overload, their central roles of gatekeeping and contextualising would be enhanced rather than diminished.

If Internet news in Ireland has so far not manifested a significant departure save for by a handful of news providers, it has shown that it has the potential to do so. In a reflection of the global trend towards the concentration of news, Irish Internet news has thus far displayed a strong tendency to replicate commoditised news in many places but in a limited number of forms. But this is not an inevitable outcome if online publishing moves towards deeper integration in the new Internet universe, pushed perhaps by higher adoption rates, lower barriers to entry for potential competitors, increased user sophistication, and pressures from foreign English-language titles.

What news do we want?

With the technical potential in place, the future shape of news as a discourse with an ever-reachable alternative view – a 'doubling' – depends in large measure on whether Internet features assert themselves in the culture of news consumption, which ultimately relies on the sophistication and education of the audience or audiences.

The logic of a global oligarchy of big-budget media organisations distributing information to a mass audience is a powerful one, especially in news, but established news providers can no longer rely on being the sole authoritative connection to the real world. How soon and to what extent this fosters a more open regime for the free and serious debate of public issues depends on whether audiences, in Ireland and elsewhere, show a willingness to adopt the new critical tools that the Internet offers, or vote with their browsers to see the Internet as another mass medium platform.

DEFINITIONS AND GLOSSARY

Anonymous remailer: a program for relaying email messages to conceal the identity of the original sender

CMC: computer-mediated communications

Democracy: The term here means more than literally rule by the people, or direct democracy. Barnett provides a specific and comprehensive definition that divides the term into components which draw out the relevance of new media:
knowledge and understanding
rational-critical debate
participation
representation with accountability (Barnett, 1997)

ICTs: information communication technologies

Mailto: a link from a web page that prompts the users email program to create a message to a predefined recipient such as a reporter

MUD: Multi-User Dungeon, a text-based platform for elaborately imagined virtual worlds.

MOO: MUD-Object Oriented: a more technically sophisticated variant of the above

New Media: digital platform media, specifically Internet

Readers, viewers, users, audience: each of these terms is in some way deficient in denoting the nature of individuals or groups who navigate the Internet. They are not passive readers, not are they simply viewers, as that term implies an emphasis on images; to say they are users implies an exclusively instrumentalist approach, and an audience carries the baggage of broadcast. However, in order to avoid a semantic tangle, I have used these words relatively freely as the context allows.

Netizen: an Internet 'citizen'

News: The term is used here to denote the reporting, interpretation and discussion of public affairs, rather than to distinguish it from comment as 'hard' content

Portal: a site such as Yahoo! that sets itself up as a media gateway to the Internet

Shovelware: new media slang meaning content from traditional media published in new media without regard for Internet considerations

Spammer: Internet slang for someone who sends junk email, usually using dedicated software

Well: Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link, the pioneering San Francisco online community (see www.well.net)

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

About us

The Philosophy of the Sunday Business Post

Dublin , Ireland , 2000

The Sunday Business Post, Ireland's financial, political and economic newspaper, has grown out of, and continues to develop according to, a clearly defined set of guiding conditions, principles and goals:

Independence

We seek to uncover the reality of what is going on in the world of Irish business and politics; to do this honestly demands a complete independence of expression. We report what we find and do not say what PR releases and political handlers would like us to say.

Support for business

The well-being of our society depends to a great extent on the success of the spirit of enterprise that characterises our economic system. The Sunday Business Post supports those who seek to create wealth in our society, and it aims to foster a climate favourable to the advance of the business ethic in Ireland .

High journalistic standards

We have built, and we intend to maintain, a reputation founded on the credibility, thoroughness and fairness of our editorial coverage. There has never been, and there will never be, any attempt either to hide or to be economical with the truth.

News, not views

We believe in the neglected but still essential value of reporting the news, of recording and communicating the facts, events and developments of the commercial life of the country. You do not need us to tell you what to think. We keep comment to a minimum; when we do comment, it is labelled as such.

Accountability

This is to be understood in two senses. First, we wish to be accountable to our readers for what we print. If we get something wrong we are not afraid to recognise it and to put the record straight. The second sense of this principle of accountability relates to our role in the life of the business community in this country: our support for business cannot be unconditional. The business community has a responsibility to the society in which it operates. The Sunday Business Post is ready to expose abuses of power and privilege wherever they occur.

Appendix B
New Medialive web rankings

TOP 40 IRISH WEBSITES WHICH ACCEPT ADVERTISING
(Based on Page Impressions Per Month)

Updated 12/06/00

Rank	Site	PIPM	Tracking System
1.	ireland.com*	16,714,675	ABC Audit
2.	Ryanair*	8,726,503	Webalizer
3.	Oceanfree.net	5,200,000	DART
4.	RTE Online	4,785,000	WebTrends
5.	Irish Examiner*	3,270,576#	pwebstats
6.	Belfast Telegraph	3,247,277#	Real Media
7.	Virtual Irish Pub	3,100,000	In-house
8.	eircom	2,500,000#~	Real Media
9.	Local Ireland*	2,273,046	ABC Audit
10.	PaddyNet	2,200,000#	WebTrends
11.	Ireland On-Line	2,140,000#	Real Media
12.	Sharewatch*	1,820,000	Vadmin
13.	Buy and Sell	1,558,101	Real Media
14.	Indigo*	1,522,309~	Real Media
15.	Independent Online	1,500,000	WebTrends
16.	Golden Pages*	1,426,340#	MSSA
17.	Irish News	1,264,520	Marketwave
18.	Northern Ireland Network	1,189,172	Webilizer
19.	Jobfinder	1,004,078	ABC Audit
20.	Car Buyers Guide*	1,002,018#	Audited by Clik Int.
21.	iVenus	973,555#	In-house
22.	Stockex	970,742#	Esat
23.	Entertainment Ireland	844,065	MHSS
24.	Unison	810,000#	WebTrends
25.	Doras	800,000#~	Real Media
26.	ClubIreland	754,773	Webilizer
27.	eNet Media	750,000	WebTrends
28.	WOW	650,000#	WebTrends
29.	Top Jobs On The Net*	605,271	ABC Audit
30.	Ticketmaster*	590,912#	WebTrends
31.	Kompass	565,321#	Wusage
32.	MotorWeb*	550,000	WebTrends
33.	Jobs.ie*	528,666#	Wusage
34.	NiSearch	485,792	Webilizer
35.	Widemouth*	479,112#	Web Stats
36.	IFTN	400,000	WebTrends
37.	P45	380,000	WebTrends
38.	Sunday Business Post	320,000#	WebTrends
39.	98FM*	318,169#	WebTrends
40.	Autopoint	302,007	WebTrends

TOP 35 IRISH WEBSITES WHICH ACCEPT ADVERTISING
(Based on Page Impressions Per Month)
DOMESTIC TRAFFIC
Updated 12/06/00

Rank	Site	PIPM	%	Tracking System
1.	**Yahoo Ireland**	15,000,000	100%	IMS
2.	**ireland.com**	5,850,136	35%	In-house
3.	**Oceanfree.net**	4,940,000	95%	DART
4.	**RTE Online**	2,536,050	53%	WebTrends
5.	**Eircom**	2,000,000#	80%	Real Media
6.	**Ireland On-Line**	1,926,000#	90%	Real Media
7.	**Buy and Sell**	1,480,196	95%	Real Media
8	**Indigo**	1,292,745	85%	Real Media
9.	**Irish Examiner**	1,173,156#	36%	pwebstats
10.	**Sharewatch**	1,092,000	60%	Vserver Pro
11.	**Golden Pages**	1,069,755#	75%	MSSA
12.	**Independent Online**	1,050,000	70%	WebTrends
13.	**Car Buyers Guide**	991,998#	99%	Audited by Click Int.
14.	**Entertainment Ireland**	801,862	95%	MHSS
15.	**Jobfinder**	793,160	79%	ABC Audit
16.	**iVenus**	778,844#	80%	In-house
17.	**Doras**	660,000	80%	Real Media
18.	**WOW**	604,500#	93%	WebTrends
19.	**PaddyNet**	462,000#	21%	WebTrends
20.	**Top Jobs On The Net**	460,006	76%	ABC Audit
21.	**eNet Media**	450,000	60%	WebTrends
22..	**Ticketmaster**	449,093#	76%	WebTrends
23.	**Ryanair**	436,325	5%	Webalizer
24.	**Kompass**	429,644#	76%	Wusage
25.	**Widemouth**	388,000#	81%	Web Stats
26.	**Jobs.ie**	370,066#	70%	Wusage
27.	**MotorWeb**	357,500	65%	WebTrends
28.	**Unison**	324,000#	40%	WebTrends
29.	**Local Ireland**	318,822	14%	ABC Audit
30.	**P45**	304,000	80%	WebTrends
31.	**Virtual Irish Pub**	279,000	9%	In-house
32.	**Autopoint**	274,286	91%	WebTrends
33.	**Stockex**	223,271#	23%	Esat
34.	**Muse**	188,000	80%	Real Media
35.	**Techcentral**	186,420	78%	DoubleClick

Notes:
These figures are a guide to the level of page impressions being achieved by Irish based sites that accept advertising.
Every effort has been made to include all relevant sites and to validate page impression data.
Other than ABC audited figures, all other figures marked # relate to either April or May 2000. All other figures taken from previous list. A certain amount of domestic traffic comes from .com, .net and other domains based in Ireland, but can not be recorded
effectively in log reports. In many cases, the domestic traffic figure is higher than stated.
Note: Comparisons between Nielsen//NetRatings and above figures are not valid.
Nielsen//NetRatings are based on a representative co-operative panel of at-home Internet users.
New Medialive figures are based on total traffic figures to a website over a 1 month period.

Appendix C

Extract From The Irish Times Media Kit,
http://www.ireland.com/about/mediainfo/webedition/index.htm

User Demographics:
      65% of our users are male and 35% are female
      39% of our users are 25 to 34 year olds
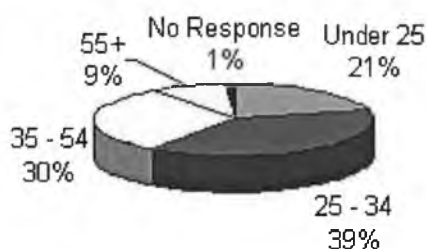   63% have completed third level education
      46% reside in Ireland

Profile of the male user on ireland.com
47% reside in Ireland
38% of our male users are aged 25 to 34 years 33% have a third level degree and 31% have a postgraduate degree
44% earn over £35,000 54% have clicked on a banner advertisement on ireland.com 59% have purchased online 94% of those surveyed had accessed the site before

Profile of female user on ireland.com
44% reside in Ireland 41% of our female users are aged 25 to 34 years
31% have a third level degree and 32% have a postgraduate degree
21% earn over £35,000
46% have clicked on a banner advertisement on ireland.com
41% have purchased online
92% of those surveyed had accessed the site before.

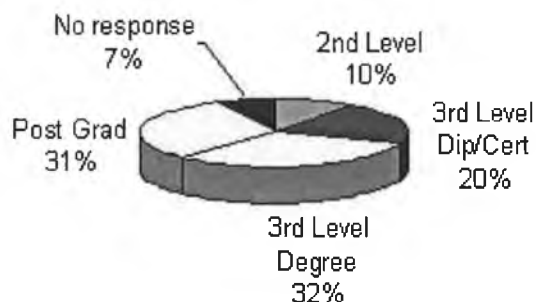### Age Profile

Gender

Education Level

Country of Residence

Appendix D

NIELSEN/NETRATINGS

Top 10 Websites by Domain
June 2000
@ Home

Rank	Domain	Reach % (Active)	Time per Person
1	msn.com	46.24	0: 26: 01
2	yahoo.com	44.02	0: 29: 06
3	passport.com	30.42	0: 09: 36
4	eircom.net	28.64	0: 16: 17
5	yahoo.co.uk	27.34	0: 11: 07
6	microsoft.com	23.15	0: 04: 46
7	altavista.com	20.21	0: 07: 52
8	iol.ie	16.46	0: 07: 55
9	geocities.com	16.45	0: 07: 06
10	oceanfree.net	15.92	0: 21: 37

Top 10 Irish Websites by Domain
June 2000
@ Home

Rank	Domain	Reach % (Active)	Time per Person
1	eircom.net	28.64	0: 16: 17
2	iol.ie	16.46	0: 07: 55
3	oceanfree.net	15.92	0: 21: 37
4	ireland.com	12.73	0: 15: 28
5	indigo.ie	12.52	0: 04: 23
6	esatclear.ie	8.69	0: 07: 26
7	rte.ie	7.13	0: 08: 14
8	buyandsell.net	4.54	0: 05: 16
9	24hour-online.ie	4.46	0: 09: 54
10	eircom.ie	4.08	0: 03: 26

Average Usage
June 2000
@ Home

Number of Sessions per Period	9
Number of Unique Sites Visited	17
Time Spent per Surfing Session	28: 32
Time Spent per Month	4: 25: 03
Duration of a Page viewed	00: 46
Active Internet Universe	354,187
Current Internet Universe Estimate	819,182

Source: Nielsen//NetRatings
http://www.nielsennetratings.com/

Appendix E:

Survey titles with URLs (web addresses):

National
The Irish Examiner http://www.examiner.ie/
Ireland on Sunday http://www.irelandonsunday.com/
Irish Independent http://www.independent.ie/
Irish News http://www.irishnews.com/
ireland.com (inc. Irish Times) http://www.ireland.com/
Sunday Business Post http://www.sbpost.ie/
RTE News http://www.rte.ie/news/
Belfast Telegraph http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/
TG4 http://www.tg4.ie/english/nuacht/
Sunday Times http://www.sunday-times.co.uk/news/pages/Sunday-Times/frontpage.html?999

Regional & Local
Unison http://www.unison.ie/
The Clare Champion http://www.clarechampion.ie/
The Connaught Telegraph http://www.con-telegraph.ie/Archive.html
Derry People & Donegal News http://www.donegalnews.com/
Galway Advertiser http://www.galwayadvertiser.ie/
Inish Times http://www.inishtimes.com/frameset.htm
Kerry's Eye http://www.kerryseye.com/
The Nationalist and Leinster Times
http://www.lowwwe.com/nationalist/index.html
Limerick Leader http://www.limerick-leader.ie/index.html
Limerick Post http://www.limerickpost.ie/
Mayo Gazette http://www.mayogazette.com/
Munster Express http://www.munster-express.ie/index.html
Northside People & Southside Ppl. http://193.203.153.193/news.htm
People Newspapers http://www.peoplenews.ie/
Waterford Today http://www.waterford-today.ie/
Mayo News http://www.mayonews.ie/
Roscommon Champion http://www.tinet.ie/~roscommonchampion[1]
Tirconaill Tribune http://www.tirconaill-tribune.com/
Kerryman http://www.kerryweb.ie/kerryman/default2.htm

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[1] All URLs re-tested on September 1, 2000, when Roscommon Champion returned a server error. The last successful test of this address occurred on August 26.

Kilkenny People http://polar.kirbycom.com/
Tipperary Star http://www.tipperarystar.com/
Clonmel Nationalist http://www.nexus.kirbycom.com/
Western People http://www.western-people.com/
Connacht Tribune http://www.connacht-tribune.ie/
The Kingdom http://www.inkerry.com/kingdom.htm
Sligo Weekender
http://www.sligoweb.com/weekender/index.shtml

Ex-pat. & Diaspora
Emigrant http://www.emigrant.ie/emigrant/
Irish Voice http://www.irishvoice.com/
Irish Echo http://www.irishecho.com/
Irish World http://www.theirishworld.com/
irelandclick.com http://www.irelandclick.com/
Irish Herald http://irish-herald.com/
Irish Post http://www.irishpost.co.uk/
Irish-American Information Service http://www.iais.org/

Net
online.ie http://www.online.ie/
Local Ireland http://www.local.ie/
Ireland Today http://www.ireland-today.ie/
netgains http://www.volta.net/
Ireland On-Line http://home.iol.ie/
Indigo http://www.indigo.ie/
Doras http://www.doras.ie/Doras.nsf
Newshound http://www.nuzhound.com/index.html
Digfone Online http://www.dol.ie/NASApp/DOL/Home
Yahoo! http://uk.yahoo.com/

Radio
98fmhttp://www.98fm.ie/home/default.asp
fm104http://www.fm104.ie/

Other
An Phoblacht/Republican News
http://www.irlnet.com/aprn/current/news/index.html
Foinse http://www.foinse.ie/
Irish Farmers Journal http://www.farmersjournal.ie/index.htm
Hack Watch News http://www.iol.ie/~kooltek/
Phoenix http://www.phoenix-magazine.com/