Kenix, Linda Jean. "The Modern Media Continuum." *Alternative and Mainstream Media: The Converging Spectrum*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011. 17–39. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849665421.ch-002>>.

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The Modern Media Continuum

Attempts at defining alternative and mainstream media

Alternative media have been traditionally very hard to categorize (Downing 2003). Historically, this difficulty emerged because alternative media have been so widely divergent in their approach and execution of storytelling and news reporting. In response to such conceptual struggles, some have argued that, in essence, those who say they are alternative simply are alternative (Albert 2006). In defining themselves as alternative, they actually create the parameters of what alternative media eventually look like. This is a useful approach for self-identification and helps to clarify processes of identity formation, but it does little to advance an understanding of media as an institution.

What defines a media as alternative within a particular moment of culture and time might be labelled mainstream within a different cultural time and place (Dowmunt & Coyer 2007). These definitions are not fixed and are part of the inherent subjective flexibilities within contemporary culture. Downing (2001) has argued that the label alternative is itself actually ‘oxymoronic’ (Downing 2001: ix) given that everything is an alternative to something else in the world. This is a rational counterpoint to those who continue to label a substantial portion of the media as alternative, but his suggestion is not based on the precept that there is little difference between alternative and mainstream media. Rather, his argument is that there are so many points of difference that it is difficult to conceptually manage.

Some have argued that the word alternative places too much legitimacy on the mainstream media by denoting somewhat of a secondary stature to a far more central – and therefore more important – mainstream press (Braden 2007). The term alternative may be denoting a secondary status, but one might argue that this classification resonates within a certain population of people. As Hall (1997) argued, the meaning of a text can only be fully understood after considering the dominant and oppositional readings present in culture. Many in society would celebrate a media labelled as alternative precisely because that media outlet purposefully exists outside of the mainstream. The so-called secondary status of alternative media is the reason that some individuals specifically seek out these publications. They view the possibility of being outside of the mainstream as a strength and not as a weakness. This secondary

status imbues an importance upon an alternative press because it is decidedly different from mainstream offerings – and is needed as an alternative.

However, the point that valence is embedded within these terms is an important one. The word *alternative* conceptually means something quite different than the term *mainstream*, whether from a dominant or oppositional perspective. There is an emotive distinction between these two terms. One might cognitively connect the term *alternative* with a myriad of metaphors that conjure unique and expressive responses. Whereas some may see *alternative* as secondary, others might associate the term with marginalized groups, protests, social movements or unconventional ideas. Still others may view the *alternative press* as ineffective, stale, incompetent or futile. Each of these associations brings with them their own set of affective responses. These responses are important to ascertain the many reasons why audiences associate and respond to media, not the least of which may be because audiences carry perceptions of media that may or may not have any basis in fact. These perceptions guide how audiences view individual media within an ascribed category. These perceptions might also contribute to the popular belief that *mainstream* and *alternative media* are mutually exclusive entities.

There has been relatively recent research trying to discourage the use of the term *alternative* but, again, for reasons outside of a converged media spectrum. Distinctions in preferred terminology tend to be situated within a specific purpose of a particular medium. Some prefer labels such as *independent media*; others believe that *radical* (Downing 2001) media is a much more apt description. Still other researchers and practitioners have called for *alternative media* to be labelled as *activist* (Waltz 2005), *tactical* (Atkinson 2004), *autonomous* or *citizen's* (Rodriguez & El Gazi 2007) media. Other related terms that have been suggested are *participatory* (Pierce 2002) and *community* (Couldry & Dreher 2007) media. Each of these conceptualizations attempts to capture something unique about a specific media that exists outside of corporate control. Each of these categorizations also shares a foregrounding in social critique, which has historically placed *alternative media* in diametric opposition to the *mainstream press*. Perhaps these different linguistic approaches are much more appropriate than the more widely used term of *alternative*. However, the collective position that these labels are in diametric opposition to a *mainstream press* remains problematic.

Atton (2004) argues that *alternative media* should be fundamentally grounded in the cultural forms of an independent media outlet. *Alternative media* should also possess some, if not all, of the following attributes: a reliance upon modern, evolving technology; de-professionalized organizational norms and roles; horizontal communication patterns; cultural or political radical content; innovative and independent distribution practices; and a compelling aesthetic form (Atton 2002a). One could find *alternative media* that satisfy

such criteria, but mainstream media are also increasingly demonstrating attributes such as these, which would qualify them as alternative under this definitional framework. The converging media spectrum is conflating what once was considered to be two separate media spheres. Such convergence does not necessitate an entirely new definition for alternative media, but in the tradition of Morris and Ogan (1996), it provides a moment to ‘allow scholars to rethink, rather than abandon, definitions and categories’ (Morris & Ogan 1996: 42).

Distance from the mainstream

The distance from the mainstream has been fundamental to most working definitions of the alternative press. Atkinson (2006) defines alternative media as ‘any media that are produced by non-commercial sources and attempt to transform existing social roles and routines by critiquing and challenging power structures’ (Atkinson 2006: 252). The existing social roles and routines that alternative media seek to critique generally stem from capitalism, consumerism, patriarchy and the nature of corporations. All these forces are implicit in the creation of a mainstream, corporate press. In contrast, alternative media have been defined as allowing for an independent ‘alternative communication’ that constructs different social orders, traditions, values and social understandings (Hamilton 2000a).

The difference, at least in definition, is clear: mainstream media generally aim to maximize audiences through pack journalism that is conventional and formulaic, which results in content that can be binary and reductive. In contrast, alternative media often advocate programs of social change through the framework of politicized and in-depth social commentary (Armstrong 1981; Duncombe 1997) found through distinctive, independent alternative journalism. As a definitional framework, these polarized terms are helpful in operationalizing the furthest ends of a media spectrum. They are constructive in understanding where the continuum begins and ends. However, how well do these criteria define the large portion of media that have been labelled under these terms? For example, the alternative press appear to rely on pack journalism in much the same way that the mainstream media have for centuries. A cursory review of the blogosphere reveals an extremely high level of duplicity in content. Several studies support the presence of a self-limiting ‘echo chamber’ within independent, online content (Clark 2002; Kumar *et al.* 1999; Tateo 2005; Trammell & Keshelashvili 2005), which has historically been a central defining characteristic of the mainstream press. Conversely, it could easily be argued that thoughtful, in-depth social commentary can be found throughout mainstream publications, such as *Rolling Stone* magazine and *The Australian*, whereas reductive, episodic reporting is plentiful in many independent publications.

It has also been argued that alternative media offer an independent platform for groups and individuals that have been marginalized by corporate, mainstream media (Atton 2002a). One definition of alternative media puts that point of exclusion at the centre of its defined meaning: alternative media is best conceptualized as simply the media 'produced by the socially, culturally and politically excluded' (Dowmunt & Coyer 2007: 5). Those excluded feel generally outside of corporate media influence, but it should be noted that they also feel free of the bureaucratic processes or commercial responsibilities that often constrain mainstream media (Albert 2006). This opposition to corporate media filters into alternative content that often utilizes resistance narratives about multinational corporations (Atkinson 2003).

Other scholars urge that definitions of alternative media must stress the ideological opposition or challenge to mainstream media. Alternative media are created in 'explicit opposition' (Dowmunt & Coyer 2007: 1) to mainstream media. Atton (2004), a leading scholar in the field of alternative media research, offers an additional definition of alternative media: it is a 'range of media projects, interventions and networks that work against, or seek to develop different forms of, the dominant, expected (and broadly accepted) ways of "doing" media' (Atton 2004: ix). Several researchers argue that alternative media should be defined by its level of subversion from the mainstream (Albert 2006; Downing 2001). Accordingly, an often-cited definition of alternative media suggests that it 'challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power' (Curran & Couldry 2003: 7). Couldry (2003) argues that these challenges are intrinsic to the purpose of alternative media given that almost all of us are actually outside of mainstream media.

This is an important point of distinction that helps to define many outlets which consider themselves as alternative. As an aggregate descriptor, however, this definition also weakens under further scrutiny. Yes, most within society are outside mainstream media as workers. Only a relative few are employed by mainstream media organizations. Yet, in today's corporatized, mega-conglomerated media environment, media power extends into almost every crevasse of a collective culture enmeshed in capitalism. It envelops social institutions as well as corporate entities that monitor, feed and support almost every conceivable subsection of society. How can one fully be in 'explicit opposition' to mainstream media when it's nearly impossible to define the extent of its expanse? The pervasiveness of mainstream media leads to practical doubts that alternative media can ever be truly autonomous, given that they are intrinsically far less powerful.

Mainstream media power is now synonymous with social power, and one might argue that challenges to such power can only come from those situated squarely outside of its purview, but when the extent of media power stretches as far as it now does, how can one ever be fully in opposition to mainstream media? Implicit in this definition is that there is a fundamental

need within a democratic society for a media that situates itself somehow outside the boundaries of media power. But consider the example of 2010 Pulitzer Prize winners, Barbara Laker and Wendy Ruderman. These two women exposed a rogue narcotics squad in Philadelphia through their investigative reporting for the *Philadelphia Daily News*. The deceit and corruption of this squad was so extensive that their discovery sparked a comprehensive FBI investigation, which then led to a review of hundreds, if not thousands, of possibly tainted criminal cases. Laker and Ruderman were successful in exposing unlawful deception within one of the most fundamental centres of power in society: the police. They did so from within a corporate concentration of media power, incidentally, which is owned by Philadelphia Media Holdings LLC, a local group led by, of all things, a wealthy advertising executive. A further point of contradictory interest is that the *Philadelphia Daily News* gives a much celebrated ‘George Fencil’ Award annually to a Philadelphia police officer who embodies ‘compassion, fairness, and civic commitment’ (Glover 2010). One would think that such an open alliance between two powerful institutions of power does not lend itself to investigative enquiry. Yet that is exactly what happened in this case. In fact, it happens repeatedly everyday throughout the world. This is not a unique example of good reporting. Powerful, investigative journalism happens routinely within the mainstream press – just as it does within what is generally labelled alternative media. There are certainly omnipresent forces, within both the alternative and mainstream press, that complicate a journalist’s ability to do good reporting, but in many instances, distinguished journalism comes down ‘to the decisions, and the actions, and the passion of one person’ (Bennett 2010).

Scale of influence and citizen reporting

Some have argued that alternative media should be defined according to their scale in the marketplace of ideas (Dowmunt & Coyer 2007). Alternative media are smaller than mainstream media. They generally invite participation in the creation of content and reciprocal communication. Again, while useful as a categorical tool, mainstream media are increasingly relying on similar reciprocal, social networking tools to bolster readership. Editors at *The Times* blog their personal thoughts to readers who then share personal responses to the news stories of the day via Twitter or any number of social networking technologies. Citizens file stories with television stations and newspapers that quickly gain traction across the world wide web. The Internet has removed much of the sense of scale that historically dictated an individual person’s or media outlet’s position within the media hierarchy. Possibly nothing signalled this fundamental change in the media more than Matt Drudge’s 1998 report that American President

William Jefferson Clinton was secretly having an affair with Monica Lewinsky, a 21-year-old White House intern. Mr Drudge, a lone individual, released evidence of this affair through his website, The Drudge Report, and not only scooped the mainstream media but also largely dictated their content for the entire year. His solitary reporting hearkened a shift in how mainstream media negotiate hierarchies of access and the level of reader input accepted into their publications.

One of the central goals of alternative media is to subvert the ‘hierarchy of access’ (Atton 2002a) which often dictates who is sourced in mainstream media content according to perceived credibility. Such practices ‘emphasise first person eyewitness accounts by participants; reworking of the populist approaches of tabloid newspapers to recover a “radical popular” style of reporting; collective and anti-hierarchical forms of organization ... an inclusive, radical form of civic journalism’ (Atton 2003: 267). This type of journalism has been called ‘native reporting’ (Atton 2002a: 112–17) and has been found to be a part of independent current event weblogs (Matheson & Allan 2003) as well as other alternative, open publishing sources online, such as Indymedia (Platon & Deuze 2003). It is also equally central to mainstream websites such as CNN’s iReport, MSNBC’s First Person, Fox News’ UReport and Broadcast Interactive Media’s YouNews.

Michael Albert from the independent and ‘alternative’ *Z Magazine* wrote, ‘an alternative media institution sees itself as part of a project to establish new ways of organizing media and social activity and it is committed to furthering these as a whole, and not just its own preservation’ (Albert 2006). This very important point of demarcation has traditionally separated how alternative media have covered important social issues differently than the mainstream press. Alternative media generally offer the space for journalists to ‘become reporters of their own experiences, struggles and lives’ (Atton & Wickenden 2005: 349). Proponents of alternative media argue that such personalized self-disclosure is not intended for personal gain. Its purpose is to provide relevant, meaningful news that ‘is best realised through the voices of the community itself’ (Atton & Wickenden 2005: 349). Such activism on the part of the ‘journalist’ is often more valued than any traditional mainstream reporting experience (Atton & Wickenden 2005). This approach favours bystanders to events rather than official voices, which are typically relied upon in the mainstream media (Harcup 2003).

Whereas citizen reporting in the alternative media realm has largely been celebrated, there has been criticism of its use in the mainstream press. Citizen reporters are generally not paid for their contributions to either alternative or mainstream outlets and almost exclusively lose control of how their submissions are later used. Perhaps because mainstream media follow an explicitly commercial mandate, there may be an expectation for some form

of financial compensation, which drives the critique of this practice in the mainstream press. It may be that expectations of remuneration are rooted in the perceived role of mainstream media as a revenue-building institution. However, most alternative media follow the same commercial mandate, albeit on a much smaller scale.

Alternative media often view their role as ‘one of educating and mobilizing the “masses” in the service of the cause or movement’ (Hamilton 2000a: 359). The frequent solicitation from alternative media outlets for feedback from viewers has been said to be purposeful so that an ‘egalitarian relationship’ can be formed between the media outlet and readers (Rodriguez 2001). It is impossible to ascertain the motivations that every mainstream and alternative media outlet may have for engaging citizen input. One could surmise that mainstream media may be seeking out free content from citizens only to help balance their struggling account books, but alternative media, with their own financial pressures, could be doing much the same. From a fiscal perspective, the division between mainstream and alternative media practices in relation to citizen reporting is increasingly unclear.

Connection with social movements

Most researchers agree that, at the most fundamental core, alternative media facilitate democratic participation and cultural disruption while the mainstream press avoids such social critique (Makagon 2000). Social and political movements have traditionally made great effort to forge alliances with alternative media (Atton 2002a; Santa Cruz 1995). In an examination of historical alternative media, such as *Freedom’s Journal*, *Mattachine Review* and *RAIN*, Ostertag (2007) found that these publications played a crucial role in bringing about social change. In another related work, he examined five significant movements – woman suffrage, gay and lesbian issues, the underground Vietnam GI press, abolitionism and environmentalism – and found that social movement journals, such as *Sierra* and *Earth First!*, pushed forth social change by forcing issues on the public agenda and frequently scooping mainstream media coverage (Ostertag 2006). Examples of the powerful effect alternative media can have in fomenting social change stretch back to the American Revolution when the dissident printed press provoked a trumpet to arms for an entire nation (Armstrong 1981; Kessler 1984) and to the British *Poor Man’s Guardian*, which successfully agitated for workers’ rights.

Alternative media have thrived when born out of individualistic, unique political and cultural events and issues. When called upon, alternative media can serve an interdependent function with social movements in creating social change. Alternative media are ‘media plus organisation’ (Stoney 2005).

This places alternative media within a very specific space and time within culture. They exist within that context to the degree that each definition of alternative media, and indeed each example of alternative media, is also a unique theory of political change (Dowmunt & Coyer 2007). Alternative media have been intrinsically part of the process of social change (Albert 2006). It is this centrality that has historically seen alternative media as fundamental to the success of social movements and social change.

Yet it is also important to recognize that mainstream media have played a vital role in the success of social movements as well. Effective social movements gain acceptance and recognition through mainstream attention. At times, it is the mainstream press agitating for change and aligning with social movements. For example, in 1996, over 300,000 people gathered in Belgium to form the largest protest march that the country had ever seen. The march was in response to the arrest of serial killer Marc Dutroux and the frustration many felt towards local politicians and police. Protesters argued for stronger protection of Belgian children and an improved justice system. Yet there was a 'total absence of any mobilization machinery' (Walgrave & Manssens 2005: 113) driving this protest. The five mainstream newspapers in Belgium acted as an 'adequate alternative to intermediary organizations' (Walgrave & Manssens 2005: 113) and actually 'co-produced' the successful march through their positive, motivational framing of the upcoming protest and their negative portrayals of the justice system.

Other research has found that when alternative and mainstream media are used in tandem, social movements can bring new audiences to their own websites, which can then work as a counter-public relations service or simply a promotional arm for the organization (Owens & Palmer 2003). After building sustained relations with those in the mainstream, one prominent anarchist organization succeeded in increasing the amount of thematic coverage given to the group and improved its portrayal to be one of a 'tech-savvy and wired' (Owens & Palmer 2003: 354) contemporary social change organization. Owens and Palmer concluded that 'those active in social movements cannot afford to ignore the mainstream media' (Owens & Palmer 2003: 357). Other examples exist, and will be discussed further in Chapter 3, but as this example illustrates, the onus for social change within a media organization does not exist solely within the realm of alternative media.

Moving beyond definitional limitations

As this review demonstrates, defining what makes commercially minded alternative or mainstream media can be confounding. One of the central problems in attempting such categorizations is the continually shifting media

landscape. Just when academics and professionals finally agree on a shared understanding, the landscape changes yet again – primarily driven by technology but also influenced by circulation numbers, ideological shifts, changing media usage patterns and a myriad of other factors.

At the moment, mainstream media are paradoxically both growing and shrinking. The pervasiveness and visibility of mainstream media has exploded, ‘driven primarily by the needs and pressures exerted by an ever-expanding, globally triumphant capitalist economy’ (Dowmunt & Coyer 2007: 4). Large corporate entities have amassed a network of film, radio, newspaper and magazine businesses that can reach every human being in the developed world. Yet while mainstream media have grown in visibility and potential reach, they have also reduced in number and in readership. Newspaper revenue in the United States fell 19.26 per cent for the third quarter of 2008. This drop was met with a 30.85 per cent decrease in classified advertising in American newspapers (Riley 2008). In Britain, 52 publications folded in 2009 – most of which were local newspapers owned by Trinity Mirror (Greenslade 2009). Such declines have meant a constant threat of redundancy within the mainstream media industry. Very few cities across the globe can boast more than one major mainstream daily newspaper. The 150-year-old newspaper, *Rocky Mountain News*, recently was closed by the E. W. Scripps Company, who cited multimillion dollar annual losses (DeBruin 2009). The threat of replacing the relatively few remaining city newspapers with a larger regional paper remains omnipresent in mainstream media discussions. Despite these losses and declining readership, a sizable portion of democratized societies continue to be engaged with the mainstream press. An average of 1.65 million New Zealanders, or about 38 per cent of the population, read some sort of newspaper every day – roughly 38 per cent of the population (Nielsen, Inc. 2008). Each week, at least 80 per cent of New Zealanders over the age of 15 read at least one daily newspaper (‘Latest Newspaper Readership Survey Results’ 2004).

Within the United States, media productivity, or output per hour, increased by 21 per cent from 1997 to 2006, while the number of employees within the field of print media dropped to 615,000 from 815,000 during that same time period. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics surmised that computerization and the expanding use of the Internet have eliminated many of these media jobs (US Department of Labor 2008). As Fuchs (2009) argues, ‘there is an economic interest in the substitution of living labour by technology to decrease the investment and reproduction costs of capital and its turnover time, which in the ideal case increases profit’ (Fuchs 2009: 382). The present conglomeration within the media industries is itself representative of an essential component of capitalism (Knoche 2007).

This frenzied conglomeration has led several mainstream media outlets to draw heavily from what was once considered strictly alternative media, and independent media are no longer completely uncontaminated with capitalist,

corporate funding. One particularly compelling example of this change can be seen in documentary filmmaking. At a time when Hollywood receives only 15 per cent of its revenue from cinema releases (Marr 2010), radical documentaries continue to gain popularity in commercial theatres. Michael Moore, an ardent critic of mainstream capitalism, became the first feature-length documentary artist to earn more than US\$100 million in box-office theatre receipts for a single film (Box Office Mojo 2009). His progressive, largely anti-corporate stance would appear to be against the capitalist ethos of Hollywood. Yet, in fact, 6 of the top 10 documentaries made since 1982 could all be labelled as progressive critiques on capitalism in some form: *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Sicko*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Bowling for Columbine*, *Religulous*, and *Super Size Me*. It should be noted, however, that the interrelationships found between mainstream production houses and radical content providers remain uneasy. In 2004, a widely reported example of such tension occurred when the Walt Disney Company blocked its Miramax division from distributing *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Rutenberg 2004).

Most individuals still get their information from mainstream media. This reliance on mainstream media continues even as the format of delivery and the number of mainstream outlets are both changing. The most popular websites overall continue to be large, corporate search engines (Google, Yahoo!, Baidu in China, Windows Live) or sites dedicated to social networking, such as Facebook. BBC, CNN and *The New York Times* still remain the top news sources online (Alexa 2009). So even with more options for alternative media potentially available online, citizens largely still continue to rely on mainstream news and opinion. However, alternative media have grown exponentially over the past 30 years – particularly on the Internet. American alternative news weeklies grew from an audience of under 3 million in 1989 to nearly 8 million in 2007 because of the Internet (Annual Report on American Journalism 2008). This growth mirrors alternative media increases in audience share globally (Tsftati & Peri 2006) and has been met with a concomitant decline in mainstream news audiences (Groshek 2010). American newspaper, newsmagazine and television audiences have all decreased over the past decade (Annual Report on American Journalism 2010), and the same trends are seen around the world (Livingstone 2004). The result is a converged, yet divergent, range of media that increasingly draw from each other's model of business operations, motivations, ownership models and organizational practices. It is easier to see this media confluence by briefly tracing a selective history of the news.

Examining the news

Many now argue that print news media is dead. While citizens around the globe lament the loss of the printed word, Rupert Murdoch, managing director

of media conglomerate News Corporation, has quickly amassed about 200 newspapers in addition to his magazines, music studios, radio stations, sporting franchises, movie studios, television stations, broadcast companies, satellite television companies, cable channels, Internet companies, restaurants, mobile entertainment companies, outdoor advertising agencies and more. News Corporation continues to buy newspapers because even if the transmission of some printed words move from paper to pixels, the power of words to transform society remains perpetually strong. Yes, the printed word might be dying, but the influence of the digitally reproduced word continues to grow. Murdoch is reportedly now in the process of launching a new digital newspaper targeted to younger readers and released exclusively on digital outlets such as the iPad and mobile phones (Pilkington 2010). Content will apparently be pooled from the many newspapers owned by News Corporation but customized for the medium and for a young target market. It is far too soon to know if this venture will be successful, but such a development would begin a shift in how mainstream news content is delivered online.

Roughly 28.7 per cent of the world population, or nearly 2 billion people, were using the Internet in 2010 (Internet World Stats 2010). The growth in developing countries has been astronomical: Africa has seen a 2,357 per cent increase in usage since 2000, while that of the Middle East increased by 1,825 per cent in the same time period (Internet World Stats 2010). In terms of real numbers, Asia has, by far, the most Internet users with about 825 million online. Europe is a distant second with 465 million Internet users (Internet World Stats 2010). These numbers allude to the powerful impact that mediated, largely text-based, communication continues to have around the world. Information learned through the media can change societies, build and destroy relationships, create and demolish governments. The commonly conceived newspaper may soon become completely digitized. While this may be hard to imagine for some, most newspapers have already shifted to either a completely or partially digitized format. If they haven't shifted completely, their potential for growth is most certainly online. For example, the *Guardian* paper readership has dropped from 487,000 in 1985 to 365,562 in 2007. However, the online *Guardian Unlimited* attracts 16 million readers and 147 million page impressions each month (Franklin 2008). Mainstream and alternative newspapers are now taking advantage of the technological capabilities inherent in online communication. In doing so, mainstream newspapers might actually be moving closer to where they first began.

Early newspapers were known for their muckraking investigative journalism and their calls to action. The European Enlightenment, French Revolution and British industrialization from the 1790s to the 1840s gave birth to this radical form of journalism (Hartley 2008). Early papers used evocative language in their commentary and invited readers to take action. 'The early mass-circulation newspapers were produced by radicals among whom

were also entrepreneurs, who had the “ability to harness commercialism for the purposes of political dissent and cultural populism” (Haywood 2004: 164 cited in Hartley 2008: 682). The first newspapers focused on a form of popular radicalism aimed for a collective, unifying audience – labelled the ‘we press’ by Hartley (2008). In America, ideals of the ‘we press’ were evident in the mainstream and prominent *Pennsylvania Gazette*. This was one of the earliest examples of a mainstream muckraking paper in the spirit of what might now be considered an alternative press. From 1728 until 1815, the *Gazette* was published as a reformist publication that argued for a new social order – one that stressed equal rights across the entire population, including women and African Americans. Moral education was the explicit purpose of these early reformist publications. Benjamin Franklin, publisher and contributor of the paper, viewed the *Gazette* as a ‘means of instruction’ to ‘prepare the minds of the people for his civic projects’ (Smith 1990: 40, 42). The ‘people’ had very little input in the publication and were simply meant to be educated by the wise words within the *Gazette* (Hamilton 2000a), but it most certainly took on the social causes of the day and challenged positions of power for change.

In 1861, the first daily newspaper in New Zealand, *The Otago Daily Times*, began reporting on the gold rush that had swept through Otago (Ovens & Tucker 2008: 349). *The Otago Daily Times* was first known for its active social reform campaigning, most notably against sweatshops in Dunedin throughout the 1880s. The reporting from the *Times* led to many law reforms in New Zealand (Reed 1956). This early history of New Zealand media also involved popular labour newspapers, such as *The Workingman’s Gazette* (began in 1887) and *The Labour Advocate* (began in 1880). These widely read newspapers reported on news from the perspective of workers rather than business owners. The fact that such a press existed speaks to the implicit assumption that some news media had a capitalistic perspective, which benefited the elite business owners of society. However, these popular publications existed as an important counterpoint within mainstream media.

The first newspaper in Britain emerged in the 1640s and reproduced parliamentary proceedings for the public (Raymond 1996). This was a challenge to previous governmental modes of information dissemination (Conboy 2004). These newspapers not only communicated the political events of the day but they also ‘served to generate a community of information, a community of political preference for an informed middle-ranking citizenship’ (Conboy & Steel 2008: 651). Events in these early newspapers were re-presented from a specific political perspective (Conboy & Steel 2008). This changed when the British monarchy was restored in 1660 and implemented strict controls on newsgathering and dissemination. But the earliest newspapers aimed for a mainstream audience and distributed information from an opinionated, political perspective for the people of Britain.

In Australia, *The Age* was one of four major competing newspapers that began publishing after government censorship bans were lifted in the young country. *The Age* began in 1854, during that country's gold rush era, and quickly began serving citizens as an instigator of social change. It argued for labour reform and stated quite clearly that it was publishing from a liberal perspective. On 17 October 1854, on the first day of publication, *The Age* published the following:

The politics of *The Age* will be liberal, aiming at a wide extension of the rights of free citizenship and a full development of representative institutions. Believing that public order is essential to the preservation of national liberties, it will in all cases uphold the inviolability of law, and urge the reform of abuses and the redress of grievances by means purely constitutional. It will advocate the removal of all restrictions upon freedom of commerce, freedom of religion, and – to the utmost extent that is compatible with public morality – upon freedom of personal action. (The Age, Inc. 2010)

The Age argued rather radical perspectives at the time, which mainly focused on labour reforms. They were ardent supporters of the Ballarat miners who agitated for the right to purchase their mining land among other rights that they felt should be theirs as workers in the mine. *The Age* also argued for an eight-hour work day and sweeping land law reforms to assist workers in Australia (Australian Government 2010). These positions were not popular with the capitalistic establishment but worked to build relationships between the paper and the citizens of Australia.

The idea of a labour paper, or a mainstream newspaper dedicated to issues concerning workers, has long faded. Over time, as mainstream media became more corporatized, calls for citizen action within the mainstream press were relegated to alternative media. Mainstream newspapers became much more of a business as early as 1900 (Cole & Maxwell Hamilton 2008). With this focused economic shift, there was an increase in episodic newsgathering. Concerns for profit influenced the ability for journalists to engage in investigative, long-format storytelling. Over time, one could argue that the relationship between a newspaper and its readers became more distanced as citizens felt less and less engaged with the content. The 'we press' approach to journalism slowly faded and was replaced by a much more commercially popular journalism or a 'they press' (Hartley 2008). Citing the transformation of *News of the World* and the *Daily Herald* (later renamed *The Sun*), Hartley (2008) argues that 'both papers were transformed from radical-popular agents of workers' self-representation to commercial popular mechanisms for turning them into a market; from "subject" to "object"' (Hartley 2008: 683). During the 1900s, news journalism moved from an inclusive, self-representative form of communication to strictly a sender–receiver model. This is largely still the model that exists today in mainstream media. However, the Internet revolution in communication may be working to change that model. Technology is allowing newspapers to build a

stronger relationship with readers, which suggests present conceptualizations of alternative media, but also draws heavily upon early mainstream newspapers – and perhaps future mainstream news as well. Mainstream media are now returning to self-representation and demand-led media through not only user-generated content but user-defined content as well.

It is not as if there was no relationship at all with readers throughout the twentieth century. There has been a continued adherence to editorial pages in the mainstream press. The opportunity for readers to send in letters to the editor provides a space of sorts for public debate (Dahmen 2010). The editorial page allows readers to develop their own ideas and consider counter-positions (Hynds & Archibald 1996). Yet this is largely where editorial engagement with citizens began and ended in the mainstream press. Indeed, this is still the extent of two-way communication for many media outlets. But, throughout the 1900s, there were far more examples of alternative media outlets inviting readers to make meaningful contributions to content that went beyond editorial pages. During the twentieth century, readers of the alternative press were exposed to a range of explicit opinion while also responding to direct calls to action. Mainstream media, however, largely kept citizen input strictly to the editorial page and muted opinions that might tarnish the ideal of an objective press. Throughout the twentieth century, readers of the news could rather easily separate their media consumption into appropriate categories of alternative and mainstream. However, contemporary mainstream media has begun to offer content that appears to specifically target readers' interests while also presenting a range of opinion to readers who are actively solicited for input. This is a return of sorts to early newspapers that reported the news from a citizen's perspective. Mainstream newspapers have now begun a return to building relationships with citizens and even going so far as to encourage their input into news content. Mainstream newspapers are adapting to media technology and how readers now wish to engage with the news – encouraging citizen journalism, blogging commentary and reader responses to 'construct a more pluralist and democratic debate about matters of public interest' (Franklin 2008: 631). By adopting tenets of public journalism, mainstream media are promoting democratic ideals and adopting alternative media practices (Haas 2004). This approach engages the public in a way that has been largely abandoned over the past 100 years in the mainstream press and harkens the sentiment of many early newspapers that aimed to speak on behalf of the citizenry.

Intertwined in this model of soliciting citizen input to the mainstream media are the changing perceptions of objectivity. Most newspaper readers – from the 1800s until today – turn to all their newspaper content, whether deemed alternative or mainstream, as the location of what they perceive to be the truth. Within a liberal pluralist model of democracy, the objective fourth estate defends the public interest by reporting an unbiased truth. Yet the idea of an absolute truth from an objective press has become much more

problematic. News is still heralded as a source of factual information, albeit not necessarily an absolute truthful and objective one. The compounding and complex influences embedded within each newspaper story has led media scholars and practitioners to argue that objectivity should be seen as an organizational goal, rather than a template for practice – at least if one equates objectivity with neutrality or an absolute truth. A more fitting principle that appears applicable to modern journalism as an institution might be to ‘enable citizens to better understand their lives and their position(s) in the world’ (Richardson 2007: 7). If this is taken as a guiding principle of journalism practice, one can better understand the recent rapid increase in mainstream media commentary in news content and the rise of opinion-based blogging as well as citizen journalism. It may be that modern mainstream media are returning to the rousing commentary and citizen engagement in a spirit reminiscent (but perhaps not equal to) Benjamin Franklin’s communication model as a ‘means of instruction’ to ‘prepare the minds of the people for his civic projects’ (Smith 1990: 40, 42).

This change in news is by no means complete. There is much research that has shown relatively little interactive reporting, small gains in public communication and only slight attempts at building relationships with readers across many mainstream online news sites (Oblak 2005; Quandt 2008; Rosenberry 2005). Although it should be said that, in 2004, longitudinal research found definitive improvements in interactivity online over time (Greer & Mensing 2004). The relatively recent arrival of blogs, wikis and other communicative technological advancements, as well as the continued rise and potential competition of citizen journalism, may now be leading mainstream media into a new interactive form of citizen-based news (Paulussen *et al.* 2007). While the speed of this change is not what media and democracy idealists might have hoped, it is occurring and potentially further signalling a convergence of the media spectrum.

News commentary

Commentary is one of the features of news reporting that was once quite common in early newspapers and has now returned to much of mainstream media. Obvious examples come from commentary-laden mainstream news outlets such as Fox News and MSNBC. However, positioning a particular perspective or opinion can happen indirectly, through emphasizing a specific view, quoting certain sources and making inferences (Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992). This form of personal opinion or bias happens frequently in the news and helps to explain why nearly every study of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has found an imbalance in favour of the Israelis in the American press (Deprez & Raeymaeckers 2010). Contemporary news media increasingly rely upon what the BBC’s former correspondent Martin Bell calls ‘journalism of

attachment' (Bell 1998: 103). This form of journalism is actively not neutral and makes clear claims about who is right and who is wrong. Journalism of attachment can become much more obvious in times of global conflict, such as the news coverage of the Bosnian war, which largely supported the Bosnian Muslim government and not the Serbs (Gowing 1997). This type of coverage is not found only in editorial pages but throughout news reporting (Hammond 2000). In America, the Pew Research Center reported that 73 per cent of Fox news stories included opinions from reporters and anchors. This number far exceeds the 29 per cent of opinion from cable rival MSNBC (cited in Johnson 2005), but it is perhaps a harbinger of future mainstream reporting styles. War stories, in particular, are increasingly told through an unequivocal discourse of morality and opinion (Wasburn 2002). September 11th further brought forth opinion and commentary directly into news content. Scenes of personal emotion abounded as reporters cried on camera from Ground Zero (Tumber 2002). Journalists raced to morally interpret who were 'the "friends" and "enemies" of a state' (Ruigrok 2010: 87).

Examples of opinion in mainstream content exist outside of war coverage as well. It is now customary to see broadcast reporters end their reports with personal anecdotes, whereas the staunch broadcasting newsreader historically never shared emotion or personal perspectives. A study of 11 newspapers during the 2006 US Senate elections found that mainstream news coverage strongly favoured liberal candidates through explicit commentary and a range of other communicative tactics, such as the use of quotes and counter-assertions to stated opinions (Fico & Freedman 2008). Anecdotal evidence exists on almost every mainstream news site. For example, *The Sun* recently ran an article online titled 'Julia Fails to Keep the Faith' which is largely about Julia Roberts' movie with one paragraph on her supposed repudiation of Catholicism. With such little content actually dedicated to her personal religion in the article, it is somewhat surprising then that the byline on the main photograph reads 'Convert ... Julia in Eat, Pray, Love' ('Julia Fails to Keep the Faith' 2010). Both the term 'fail' in the headline and the admonishment for her to 'convert' in the byline are discursive terms laden with value and emotion. The opinions in this entertainment news piece are clear even though this article is not labelled as commentary. On the same day that the Julia Roberts piece ran in *The Sun*, a battle for Prime Minister was occurring half a world away. On the front page of *The Sydney Morning Herald* website on 20 August, the headline read 'It's time to choose: Although the two leaders appear different, there is little to separate them on policies'. Below, in smaller text, are the words 'writes Peter Hartcher'. One might assume that this writer is an editorial columnist, but as written – and as designed – this headline appears to be fact, which would be a sweeping indictment if actually proven. It is also interesting to note that the photograph attached to this story on the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* is clearly manipulated. The image shows one of the candidates for

Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, sharing a beer with the other candidate, Julia Gillard. Upon closer inspection, one can see that Mr Abbott has been placed into the frame with a tinted drop shadow behind his silhouette. There is nothing on the photograph or in the photograph caption to make this visual manipulation obvious to the viewer. This visual commentary problematizes an objective mainstream press.

Recent research supports that mainstream journalists are increasingly interested in influencing public opinion rather than strictly reporting the news (Weaver 2007). This aim to add commentary, shift public opinion and therefore influence social change through mainstream journalism draws from early newspapers and from a long history of alternative media agitating the public for action. The confusion between fact and opinion-based commentary appears in many mainstream publications online that make great claims to objectivity. Again returning to the same randomly selected day of 20 August, the *Guardian* ran a story on their home page with a headline reading 'David Mitchell: 3D is nothing more than a distracting gimmick being overused in today's visual media'. This article clearly is making an argument against 3D technology, but there is nothing attached to this story to suggest it is a commentary other than perhaps the writer's name listed in the forefront. This might suggest that the article is the opinion of a particular person, but that assumption is questionable given that there are two stories directly above this one in the same format that appear to be news reports. One headline directly above reads, 'Martin Wainwright visits Havelock academy in Grimsby as it prepares to switch to the International Baccalaureate'. Again, there is nothing suggesting that this is or is not commentary, so it is simply up to the reader to guess. If one actually clicks on the Mitchell story, there is a headline that reads 'Comment is Free', but this is not highlighted on the front page of the website. As these examples suggest, the overlap between commentary and news in the mainstream media continues to blur. Through the discourse of opinion, mainstream newspapers are engaging in a much more colloquial discussion with their readers, rather than the hierarchical communication approaches of the past. This may move mainstream papers away from tenets of objectivity, but such an approach may also engender a newspaper to readers in a way not seen in the past.

Citizen participation in the news

Mainstream media are now utilizing aspects of interactive technology to build relationships with readers and 'to promote the impression of a greater accountability to a generalised readership' (Conboy & Steel 2008: 654). In China, the *Guangzhou Daily* started a public affairs forum called Dayoo.com. The *Daily* has long been a communication tool for the Municipal Communist Party of Guangzhou and is widely read as a mainstream

publication in the Guangdong province (Zhou, Chan & Peng 2008). Similar to other newspaper-affiliated public forums, Dayoo.com was initiated to encourage citizen interaction and facilitate information exchange (Yu & Wu 2007). On Dayoo.com, there are interactive newsgroups, digital magazines, blogs and online forums (Zhou *et al.* 2008). These approaches to generate debate and build relationships also help to elevate the accountability and status of *Guangzhou Daily*. This engaged relationship with readers is a big step away from the strict writer-to-reader communication model previously seen in the mainstream press.

In the United States, newspapers like *The Minneapolis Star Tribune* have prominent sections on their websites dedicated to reader discussion and interaction with writers. The *Star Tribune* has a link on their webpage titled 'Our Voices', which lists the latest *Star Tribune* blogs. This is a comprehensive listing of blogs from people who work for Startribune.com. If one scrolls a bit further down the opening webpage, there is another link titled 'Your Voices'. This brings up a listing of community blogs that are affiliated with the newspaper. Comments are moderated and only appear after an editorial review, which does indicate a residual need for editorial control by the paper. Yet a portal such as this undoubtedly opens up discussion to citizens in ways that were not possible when the *Tribune* was only in print. There are 42 community bloggers listed who are not professional journalists but are self-described performance poets, researchers, artists, web designers, entrepreneurs, song writers, gardeners, chefs, educators and so on. Many of the posts inside the *Tribune's* community and newspaper blogs are purposefully evocative and meant to engage discussion. For example, there is an inclusive use of pronouns throughout most posts that invite readers into the debate. One randomly selected *Star Tribune* community blog post from Rev. Peg Chamberlin titled 'I am not a Christian bomber' repeatedly uses the words 'our' and 'us' in her discussion of a possible Muslim community centre near where the World Trade Center once stood. This equates Rev. Chamberlin with those reading the post and invites those readers to join her in this discussion. She also asks readers directly to engage in civic participation and solicit others in power for social change: 'The connection in our heads between the terrorists of 9/11 and all Muslims has got to change. Let's ask our rock stars and politicians to help us do that' (Chamberlin 2010).

Civic participation has been said to require four basic criteria: '(1) individuals are included; (2) it is voluntary; (3) it refers to a specific activity, which is (4) directed towards influencing the government or authorities in general' (Brezovsek 1995 cited in Zhou *et al.* 2008). All of these criteria are readily available online. Indeed, the use of the Internet in people's daily lives has been found to be related to higher levels of citizen participation (Vromen 2007). Voluntary citizen participation through newspaper-affiliated online news groups and discussion forums, in particular, also appear to meet each

of these criteria. An important caveat, however, should be that even if one's activity might be viewed as participatory, it does not necessarily mean it is also considered integral to a deliberative democracy. In a study of the mainstream *Guangzhou Daily* discussion forum, there were infrequent follow-up posts, a lack of diversity in topics, a tendency for discussion to focus on issues outside of politics, low levels of complexity in discourse and a lack of meaningful debate online (Zhou *et al.* 2008). Therefore, even though citizens may be involved in the process of civic participation, it might not qualify as deliberative. That being said, the deliberative, democratic sphere of the *Guangzhou Daily* discussion forum may have only just begun, or there simply may not be the drive from within the participants themselves. This call for civic participation within the mainstream press – even if not pursued by readers – is a marked change from mainstream journalism of the past and is quite similar to reporting that has been seen in the alternative press over the past century.

Citizen participation in media content throughout independent outlets has a long history and has thrived since the arrival of the Internet. Citizen journalism has empowered the 'former audience' (Gillmor 2006: xxv) to become more involved in their community and their media. It can serve as kind of bridge media that links 'traditional media with forms of civic participation' (Schaffer 2007: 7). Citizen journalism is increasingly being relied upon in what was once considered strictly mainstream media. A technology correspondent from *The Economist* compared citizen journalism to the revolutionary role of religion when he argued that 'people are bypassing the sacrosanct authority of the journalist in the same way as Luther asserted that individuals could have a direct relationship with God without the intermediary of the priest' (Cukier 2006). The idea of citizen journalism is 'becoming less something that is dismissed as the amateur hour before the professionals take the stage and more [as] something that enriches the conversation' (The State of the News Media 2007).

Across alternative media, outlets such as iBrattleboro also rely upon citizen journalism. This website, based within the small town of Brattleboro in Vermont, asks readers to 'read and write your own news, interviews, reviews, and more. Pick a local Brattleboro story and tell the story yourself' ('Welcome to iBrattleboro' 2010). According to their website, there have been 26,640,740 page views to date ('Site Statistics' 2010). This invitation to readers is much like what was found on the mainstream *Minneapolis Star Tribune* website. Other instances of grassroots citizen journalism are seen in other American-based websites, such as *MyMissourian*, which appears to have at least one post each day from random Missourian citizen reporters. *The Bakersfield Voice* attempts to blend their online presence with a paper-based distribution as well. They solicit stories from citizen reporters and then select certain online submissions for printed publication, which is then distributed to 140,000 homes in metro Bakersfield. Baristanet is another leader in American citizen

journalism. It began in 2004 and now receives more than 9,000 visits each day ('About Baristanet' 2010). They claim to have inspired local citizen news sites in 'Pittsburgh, Brooklyn, New Haven, Watertown, MA and Redbank, NJ' ('About Baristanet' 2010). The organization has 17 regular contributors from different backgrounds, but most contributions are from readers. They have grown to have a thriving classified section as well as sections labelled food, real estate, pets and kids. Their 'See-Click-Fix' section is driven by a Google map where citizens can report local issues of concern based on their geographical location. The aim of these postings is to actually fix community problems, which range from litter, car racing, broken sidewalks to potholes. Comments remain open until they are fixed. The mayor and other community representatives are clearly visible on this website and post regular contributions to alleviate community concerns and put forth government solutions. These websites aim to create meaningful relationships between citizens and governmental officials. They also empower citizens to participate within their communities, both online and offline, through neighbourhood gatherings and community events.

Perhaps the most well-known website that has a stated aim to empower citizens is WikiLeaks. The opening page of the WikiLeaks website asks readers to 'get involved' by either submitting documents, contacting WikiLeaks, donating money, contributing to WikiLeaks through other means or following WikiLeaks through email subscriptions, RSS feeds, Twitter, the WikiLeaks blog, Facebook, Flattr or WikiLeaks chat. There are WikiLeaks in seven countries: Australia, France, Germany, Iceland, Kenya, the United Kingdom and the United States (WikiLeaks: Contact 2010). It represents somewhat of a leaderless resistance that is not easily situated within standard norms of journalism practice. It is a grassroots network of information that has thus far been confined to Western democracies, but one can see how profound of an impact it might have in more repressive regimes. It functions by separating traditional spokespeople who normally reveal selected governmental actions to citizens and instead inserts leaks from the workers within these institutions. It is a radical attempt at transparency that challenges governmental tactics of selective information dissemination. Those who submit information are guaranteed anonymity through a secure online submission system that is largely stateless but with central servers based in Sweden. Those who are affiliated with WikiLeaks – outside of the figurehead leader, Julian Assange – are also anonymous and largely work on a volunteer basis. Citizen submissions are posted online but only after an editorial review, which mirrors mainstream media practice. Some notable published leaks were the 570,000 pager messages between the New York City Police Department and the Pentagon on the day of September 11th and video of an air strike in Baghdad that killed 12 people, including two journalists. However, the biggest WikiLeaks story is now known as the Afghan War Diary. This series of 90,000 documents detail around 140 Afghani civilian deaths between 2004 and 2010 as well as many friendly

fire incidents. Not surprisingly, the US government is increasingly wary of the amount of information released through WikiLeaks and has attempted to block the release of this information. The US government has argued that some of the information released could be endangering the lives of informants and soldiers as well as complicating the tactical planning of the American military.

The impact of WikiLeaks on the mainstream media has been nothing less than profound and highlights how mainstream and alternative media continue to converge. In this case, mainstream media draw from documents provided by WikiLeaks and use that information in their coverage. WikiLeaks provides the information and the mainstream news provides 'the context, corroboration, analysis, and distribution' (Madrigal 2010b). WikiLeaks has reached out to mainstream publications to create an alliance between itself and the mainstream press. WikiLeaks has taken this purposeful step towards alliance with the mainstream press for reasons of publicity. 'It's counterintuitive', Assange argued in October of 2009, 'you'd think the bigger and more important the document is, the more likely it will be reported on but that's absolutely not true. It's about supply and demand. Zero supply equals high demand, it has value. As soon as we release the material, the supply goes to infinity, so the perceived value goes to zero' (Nystedt 2009). So even though WikiLeaks published the Afghan War Diary on 25 July 2010, they first released advance copies of the secret documents to *The New York Times*, *Guardian* and *Der Spiegel* on the condition that these mainstream publications didn't release the information until the 25th of July. The newspapers analysed the documentation for some time and then, on the 25th of July, there was a collaborative publication of this material between WikiLeaks and these mainstream goliaths. This concerted alliance signals a further convergence across the media spectrum. It is a convergence not welcomed by everyone. Some have argued that WikiLeaks has a central focus on highlighting information that is anti-American (Rosenthal 2010). WikiLeaks counters by stating that the organization has been 'victorious over every legal (and illegal) attack, including those from the Pentagon, the Chinese Public Security Bureau, the Former president of Kenya, the Premier of Bermuda, Scientology, the Catholic & Mormon Church, the largest Swiss private bank, and Russian companies. WikiLeaks has released more classified intelligence documents than the 'rest of the world press combined' (WikiLeaks: Submissions 2010).

The connections between independent and mainstream media are happening all across the media spectrum. Individual National Public Radio (NPR) stations across the United States are forging alliances with non-profits and smaller, start-up independent journalism outlets. The rationale is rather simple: 'innovative journalism startups can do great work but they have trouble attracting large audiences ... public radio stations have millions of listeners, but limited budgets. Put the two types of organizations together and you have quality, well-researched journalism reaching large numbers of

people' (Madrigal 2010a). This model is already in practice between local NPR stations and *The Texas Tribune* in Austin, the *St. Louis Beacon* in Missouri and the *Watchdog Institute* in San Diego. *ProPublica* provides further evidence of alliances forged across mainstream and independent media outlets. *ProPublica* began in 2007 as an independent, non-profit news organization led by former editors of major mainstream publications, such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Oregonian*, and *The New York Times* ('About Us' 2010). *ProPublica* is funded solely through philanthropic donations and employs 32 independent, full-time investigative reporters who provide stories exclusively to mainstream news organizations at absolutely no charge. The organization provided 138 stories in 2009 that were published in 38 different mainstream news organizations, one of which won a Pulitzer Prize in 2009 ('About Us' 2010). The organization has independently investigated stories such as the ramifications of the Gulf oil spill, toxins in drywall used in home construction, abuse in the New Orleans police force, deceptive recruiting practices within for-profit schools and a lack of medical support for civilian contractors who have been injured in Iraq. The stories are purposefully thematic and packaged within a much larger series of articles that each examines different facets of the story. This holistic approach has largely not been seen in the mainstream press due to the excessive costs incurred in creating such a story; yet these articles still do make their way into mainstream media.

The fact that an independent organization has been so successful in publishing content that has not been investigated by the mainstream press should be extremely alarming to those who celebrate the traditional strengths of mainstream news. In a book titled *Flat Earth News: An Award-Winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in Global Media*, investigative reporter Nick Davies argues that modern mainstream journalism is now, what he calls, in a perpetual state of churnalism (Davies 2008). This model of newsgathering relies heavily on public relations agencies and official sources that can direct a certain perspective to such a degree that pseudo-events dominate coverage and propaganda seeps into modern news. Thus, the reliance on commentary or citizen journalism might not be a move towards building relationships with readers or improving connections with an independent press. Rather, this change in mainstream journalism may simply be due to a lack of funding rather than a purposeful and principled persuasive argument. Whatever the reason, these kinds of inroads from what was once considered alternative media into mainstream content suggest a new model of news journalism that is a hybrid of both forms.

It should also be said that countless newspapers have not yet adapted many of the changes highlighted in this chapter. Large factions of mainstream media remain locked in indecision. Even in the midst of an Internet revolution, which has witnessed remarkable access to open-source publishing tools, an incoming rush of advertising support and limitless distribution opportunities, many

within mainstream media have not yet displayed a meaningful communication strategy online (Bowman & Willis 2005). As of this writing, that remains a truism in much of the mainstream news media. Adherence to such bureaucratic inertia will inevitably lead to failure for the media outlets that continue to operate with such outdated communication models. However, there are many within traditional, mainstream media who are quickly adapting to new technologies and demonstrating a respected appreciation for their readers. Richard Sambrook, director of the BBC World Service and Global News division, highlights this change within the mainstream press when he says, ‘any media organization only exists on the quality and depth of its relationship with the public ... you’ve got to have a healthy and strong relationship for people to come to you’ (Sambrook cited in Bowman & Willis 2005).