**Web 2.0 and the changing relationship between British local newspaper journalists and their audiences**

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Abstract

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British local newspapers are said to be in a state of crisis due to a dramatic downturn in revenue caused by the increase in competition from alternative advertising and news platforms online. Yet the same news companies that produce these newspapers are reaching more people than ever before through their investment in online technology and through the development of websites and social media networks. Meanwhile Web 2.0 is enabling audiences to play a more active role in the news process by creating user generated content, sharing news stories online and by responding to news stories on websites. Audience participation online is not only a vital source and resource for local newspapers at a time of dramatic cutbacks but is also an invaluable tool to create collaborative journalism and enhance the civic obligations of journalism. Through case study research at two local British newspapers this thesis explores how Web 2.0 is changing the relationship between British local newspaper journalists and their audiences and the extent to which a new form of collaborative journalism is emerging. The findings illustrate that audience participation is on the increase and the role of the journalist is changing but traditional notions of gatekeeping remain partially in-tact. Furthermore due to the commercial constraints faced by the newspapers the potential for audience participation to enhance participation for democratic purposes is limited. Economic restrictions are ultimately holding back collaborative journalism and creating an environment where there are confused and contradictory notions of what the role of a journalist is within Web 2.0. This thesis concludes that with better resources, a clear strategy and independence to innovate, journalists would be able to facilitate audience participation for non-economic purposes to create better journalism which could in turn enlighten and educate their readers and enable them to reach mutual understanding of the common good.

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