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Crowdsourced News:
The Collective Intelligence of Amateurs and the Evolution of Journalism

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MSc in Media and Communications

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Crowdsourced News:
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Melissa Metzger

ABSTRACT

This project explores the practice of 'crowdsourcing' as it is being applied to journalism. Because of Internet technology and culture, large groups of amateur writers, reporters and photographers are filling the roles once reserved for a small number of professional journalists. In this nascent model, the 'crowd' is the 'source' of information production in an online collaborative environment.

At the heart of the research is an investigation to determine to what extent crowdsourcing challenges the values of traditional journalism, specifically professionalism and objectivity, and what, if any, alternative values are emerging to produce credibility. While there is little scholarly research into the practice as applied to news production, both the history of the occupation of journalism and theories regarding collective intelligence are a basic, insightful framework through which to better understand the possible ideals of the phenomenon.

The research design is threefold: depth interviews with editors and founders of crowdsourced news websites; an online survey with a group of amateur participants on such a site; and an emailed questionnaire to a sample of those participants. The first method was used to discover the characteristics of the model that those 'in charge' found most valuable or useful in the discourse of journalism. The second method was used to determine if a crowd of amateur journalists upholds traditional notions and conventions, and to what extent it embodies the characteristics mentioned in the interviews. The third method was used to test hypotheses and understand the opinions and attitudes of participants.

The key findings of the research conclude that while traditional notions of professionalism and objectivity are challenged ideologically by interviewees and inherently by the genre, they are still partially upheld in theory and practice by participants themselves. Alternative ideals are emerging, such as breadth of coverage due to mass quantity of reporters, the value of multiple perspectives, and authenticity and transparency. Yet these perceived values are more likely co-existing with traditional notions, rather than replacing them. Crowdsourced news should be seen as an evolution of traditional journalism, rather than a revolution against it.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a reflection of the zeitgeist, *Time Magazine*'s "Person of the Year" of 2006 was *You*. The title was awarded to each individual because of his or her perceived sovereignty in the Information Age: "It's about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wrestling power from the few…" (Grossman, 2006: 40). Self-publishing Internet technology and its low entry costs give consumers the opportunity to become 'users' defined by Benkler (2000: 562) as "participants in the production of their information environment." Bennett (2003: 34) wrote, "People who have long been on the receiving end of one-way mass communication are now increasingly likely to become producers and transmitters. With the advent of interactive communication systems…the distinction between information producers and consumers will be increasingly difficult to draw." In essence, whereas once people consumed media produced by others, they are now creating their own content.

This participatory culture on the Internet—dubbed Web 2.0— has significant implications for online journalism. With 50 million blogs online, and a new one created every second, average citizens can report or editorialize the news with a click of a mouse or camera phone (Tapscott & Williams, 2006). Yet the amateur journalist need not build his own blog to publish; a plethora of sites host, aggregate, and display user-generated news. Many of these sites—some of which are the focus of this paper—are employing what has come to be known as "crowdsourcing" to fill their pages. They are the collective effort of many *You's*.

Crowdsourcing, as defined by expert Jeff Howe who helped to coin the term, is "the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call" (Howe, 2007: n.p.). When applied to journalism, crowdsourcing news in its broadest sense might mean soliciting reporting, writing, editing, photographs—or all of the above—from amateur users, rather than traditionally trained journalists. Two of the most well-known examples involve amateur contributions of photographs, video footage, and original reporting during Hurricane Katrina in the United States and the 7/7 bombings in London. While the individual blogger remains an important addition to the news media landscape, crowdsourced news websites allow the reader to see the offerings of many minds in one place. Tapscott and Williams (2006: 11) wrote these "weapons of mass collaboration" are responsible for "the upheaval occurring right now in media and entertainment. Once a

bastion of 'professionalism', credentialed knowledge producers share the stage with 'amateur' creators who are disrupting every activity they touch."

"Upheaval" is an accurate description of the emerging paradigm shift in the news media landscape. Some news media organizations have embraced Web 2.0. Jenkins (2006a: 1) wrote, "Powerful institutions and practices…are being redefined by a growing recognition of what is to be gained through fostering—or at least tolerating—participatory cultures." Tapscott and Williams (2006:146), however, highlight the other side of the coin: "In most cases, the sclerotic pace of change reflects the cultural inertia of institutions steeped in the journalistic traditions of mass media."

These journalistic traditions—specifically professionalism and objectivity—have defined news production for the past century. Mainstream media journalists developed practices and codes of conduct to guide their information production in an attempt to be considered credible. Yet with the advent of crowdsourced news and the so-called "rise of the amateur", how will the culture of journalism change? (Howe, 2007: n.p.). As the online public is being increasingly asked to fill the role of journalist, what traditional values of news production will be upheld by the crowd, and what alternative ideals will be emphasized to produce credibility in this emerging practice?

Theoretically speaking, on one hand the history of journalistic traditions and, on the other, contradicting theories regarding collective intelligence provide an interesction at which to examine how widely held definitions of news values may be evolving as crowdsourcing becomes more popular. Empirically speaking, however, there is little research analyzing the phenomenon in the specific context of news production. If we are to believe that a functioning democracy relies on news to inform citizens as voters, then the culture of journalism remains an important site of inquiry (Cook, 2001). This project aims to qualitatively assess the opinions and self-reported practices of both members of the "crowd" (of amateur journalists) and the editors and founders of the sites on which they publish. If the power of the media is an ability to construct reality (Thompson, 1995), then understanding the values and ideals underlying its construction is surely a worthy pursuit.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This first aim of this chapter is to explain the economic concept of crowdsourcing in general and the genre of crowdsourced journalism more specifically. The second aim of this chapter will be to an attempt to demonstrate professionalism and objectivity as the guiding principles of traditional journalism. The third aim will be to offer a review of contradicting theories regarding crowd behaviour collective intelligence, highlighting the controversy of amateur vs. professional. Although seemingly unrelated, these aims will provide the framework by which to analyze empirical data in later chapters to determine to what extent the genre of crowdsourced journalism challenges the guiding principles of traditional journalism and what alternative values may be replacing them.

2.1 TAPPING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CROWD

> *"Technological advances in everything from product design software to digital video cameras are breaking down the cost barriers that once separated amateurs from professionals. Hobbyists, part-timers, and dabblers suddenly have a market for their efforts, as smart companies in industries as disparate as pharmaceuticals and television discover ways to tap the latent talent of the crowd. The labor isn't always free, but it costs a lot less than paying traditional employees. It's not outsourcing; it's crowdsourcing"* (Howe, 2006: n.p.).

"Welcome to the Age of the Crowd," wrote Howe in the article quoted above titled "The Rise of Crowdsourcing." Crowdsourcing as an economic concept is being applied to practically every kind of business with many different functions (Howe, 2006).[1] It is important to note that this is possible because of technological advances, but also because people are willing to participate. From the networking capabilities of the Internet has risen a culture of "decentralized individual action—specifically, new and important cooperative and coordinate action carried out through radically distributed, non-market mechanisms that do not depend on proprietary strategies"… (Benkler, 2006: 3). In plain English, people have started working collaboratively online to produce things (usually) for free. Participants are

[1] Some interesting examples include iStockphoto, a website where amateur photographers upload and distribute their stock photographs, Threadless.com, which sells clothing designed by people on the site, and Marketocracy, a financial services company that bases stock tips on predictions from a large group of successful analysts and investors. See Howe (2007) for more examples.

not seeking financial gain, but instead are motivated by a variety of social and psychological factors such as gratification through self-expression and social connectedness (Sunstein, 2006 & Benkler, 2006).

The "open-source" software movement (in which the source code could be changed by the public) is often cited as the first major development in the trend (Benkler, 2006). It led to the creation of operating system Linux, and later the Web browser Firefox. Benkler (2006: 5) wrote, "We are beginning to see the expansion of this model not only to our core software platforms, but beyond them into every domain of information and cultural production." Crowdsourcing is a direct result of this expansion. It is—put simply— "the application of open source principles to fields outside of software" (Howe, 2007: n.p.).

Online collaborative encyclopedia Wikipedia is perhaps the most notable example of crowdsourcing applied to information production. Using software that allows users to add and edit text online, contributors have collectively posted and edited upwards of 1.6 million encyclopedic articles (Jenkins, 2006b). While critics argue that errors, misinformation, and site vandalism abounds, generally Wikipedia provides accurate information because "the vast majority of people are operating with knowledge and in good faith," and quickly correct other's mistakes (Sunstein, 2006: 222).

2.2 CROWDSOURCED NEWS

Crowdsourcing is being applied to journalism in predominantly two ways: 1) Mainstream news outlets solicit content from their audiences to complement their traditional reporting and 2) Alternative websites solicit content from their audience to exclusively comprise the sites' news, visuals, commentary, and in some cases editorial decision-making. In the first case, user-generated photojournalism is often solicited. For example, CNN calls their initiative "I-Report"; Yahoo! News has teamed up with wire service Reuters in an effort called "You Witness News." While practically all mainstream news outlets now allow users to comment online on stories, few open the site to user-written articles or editorials. Gannett, publisher of *USA Today* and 90 other American newspapers, however, has launched a 'pro-am' (professional-amateur) approach to reporting asking readers to call and email in with reporting details that professional journalists will use when writing articles.

The second application of the crowdsourcing principle has created some strong news outlets in the new media environment. *OhMyNews*---a Korean website founded in 2000—is written by mostly 47,000 amateur journalists, but professionally edited, receiving 1 million to 1.5 million page views a day (Grossman, 2006: 58). Kim and Hamilton—global scholars studying the site as alternative media—wrote, "*OhMyNews* has become a prominent player, not only in Korea but also increasingly in the international sphere of internet publishing, and it has achieved this through a series of innovations to the extent that it is cited as a model for similar ventures in the West" (Kim & Hamilton, 2006: 541). Two such examples—among those selected for the empirical research of this project—will be explored further in Section 5.2.

2.3 THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF TRADITIONAL JOURNALISM

The concept of an "amateur" journalist challenges the very notion of journalism as a "profession." As the occupation evolved, certain ideals and practices were inscribed to govern who a journalist is and how he should carry out his job. This section will look to the development of the occupation, focusing on the United States as it will be the source of the empirical research of this project. An understanding of the guiding principles of the occupation—professionalism and objectivity—is key to examining how the values of crowdsourced journalism might be a departure from those of traditional journalism.

2.3.1 PROFESSIONALISM

The early journalists of the United States were not particularly educated, nor considered on par with the men of the elite professions of law or medicine (Schudson, 1978). Schudson (1978: 163) wrote, "When Joseph Pulitzer endowed the School of Journalism at Columbia (in l904 although classes did not begin until l9l3), he declared that he wanted to 'raise journalism to the rank of a learned profession'." The period following World War I brought a major change to the occupation (Schudson, 1978 & Rosen, 1999). Rosen wrote:

> *"Like so many status-seeking Americans, journalists in the 1920's and 1930's were eager to professionalize. University-based training emerged in these years, along with a code of conduct among professional associations like the American Society of Newspaper Editors (founded 1922) and the Associated Press Managing Editors (1931)…Professionals were authorized to know in the place of citizens who were too busy or overwhelmed to know"* (Rosen, 1999: 69).

The last sentence deserves particular attention. During the same period, a certain conception of the public's capacity for understanding the world emerged—that they were too busy or perhaps even too ignorant to comprehend the increasingly complicated world around them. Rosen (1999) explores how Walter Lippman, co-founder of *The New Republic*, wrote in 1922 that it was foolish to believe that everyday people could have reliable, informed opinions about current events. They were busy earning a living, and therefore relied on stereotypes and first impressions to form their opinions. Lippman voiced the limitations of the average citizen, and instead stressed the importance of well-informed experts. While there were critics of Lippman's conception of the public—particularly philosopher John Dewey, it became widely-held and influential for the development of journalistic professionalism (Rosen, 1999).

The role of journalist as expert and "trustee for the public" gave rise to authority and credibility in the field.[2] Rosen (1999: 69) wrote, "The journalist could claim elevated status as an expert commentator…as a superiour judge of what counted as news…or as a professional 'adversary' keeping the government in check…These became common aspirations in an increasingly professionalized press" (Rosen, 1999: 69).

2.3.2 OBJECTIVITY

Part and parcel with the professionalization of the press in the 1920's and '30's was the development as objectivity as the "official doctrine" of journalism (Rosen 1999: 70). Mindich (1998: 1) wrote, "If American journalism were a religion, as it has been called from time to time, its supreme deity would be 'objectivity'." Described as "the occupational norm

[2] The phrase "trustee for the public" is taken from "The Journalist's Creed" of the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. It begins: "I believe in the profession of journalism. I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public…" (Rosen, 1999: 1).

of journalism", it is "at once a moral ideal, a set of reporting and editing practices, and an observable pattern of news writing" (Schudson, 2006: 140).

Defining objectivity in the journalistic context is difficult as the term is used to describe many things at once, leading one scholar to write jokingly, "Nailing down objectivity is like nailing Jell-O" (Mindich, 1998: 9). Schudson (2006: 150) described it through its characteristics:

> *"The objectivity norm guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts. Objective reporting is supposed to be cool, rather than emotional, in tone. Objective reporting takes pains to represent fairly each leading side in a political controversy. According to the objectivity norm, the journalist's job consists of reporting something called 'news' without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way."*

Other scholars define objectivity through the characteristics of reporting. Mindich (1998) included detachment, non-partisanship, the 'inverted pyramid' style of writing, facticity, and balance.[3] Chalaby (1998) also used the term 'impartiality'. These characteristics point to the underlying belief that a journalist should be an observer; Rosen (1998: 54) wrote, "Almost all of the key tenets in their ethical code emphasize detachment rather than participation."

Schudson (1978) argued that World War I and subsequent propaganda, and the emergence of the field of public relations, brought a distrust of facts to the public and the journalistic community.[4] He wrote, "Objectivity, in this sense, means that a person's statements about the world can be trusted if they are submitted to established rules deemed legitimate by a professional community" (Ibid: 7). Adhering to a scientific principle lent a certain credibility to the profession, as well as acting as a norm through which the occupation could find solidarity and define a culture to pass on to younger generations. Schudson (2006: 163) wrote, "Far more than a set of craft rules…objectivity was finally a moral code. It was asserted in the textbooks used in journalism schools, it was asserted in codes of ethics of professional associations." Objectivity is a claim about what kind of

[3] The 'inverted pyramid' refers to a style of newspaper article writing in which the most important details of a story are recounted at the beginning, leaving lesser details until the end, as opposed to a narrative style.

[4] Schudson (2006:158) successfully argued against the technologically and economically deterministic factors sometimes attributed with the rise of objectivity, but they should still be noted: "the invention telegraph put a premium on a terse, factual style; the wire services required value-free reporting to serve various; newspapers in general found profit in winning over both Democratic and Republican readers."

knowledge is reliable with moral connotations about how one *should* convey reality to the public.

It should be noted, however, while objectivity has been the guiding ideal of journalism since the 1920s, it has been "completely and divisively debated" (Schudson, 1978: 10). Most journalists concede that total objectivity is not attainable, realizing that they "do not operate in a vacuum" of cultural, social and political biases (Mindich, 1998: 133). Still it is considered something to strive for. Critics, however, see it as reflecting the status quo of institutionalized values (Schudson, 1978 & Mindich, 1998). Barnhurst (1998) noted young people especially have a growing skepticism toward the objective reporting of traditional news sources. So, as innovative forms of journalism proliferate, like those produced through crowdsourcing, it is essential to examine if "the maligned but still influential doctrine of objectivity" is being upheld or if alternative values are emerging to produce credibility (Rosen, 1999: 54).

2.4 COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

James Surowiecki (2004: XIII) offered this argument in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds*: "Under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them." This thesis directly opposes Lippman's conception of the public and society's need for well-informed experts—the prevailing ideology that promoted the journalistic professionalism explored in the previous section. Surowiecki noted that indeed it is often assumed that the best way to solve a problem is to find the right person, by "chasing the expert." He suggested, however, "We should stop hunting and ask the crowd (which, of course, includes the geniuses as well as everyone else) instead" (Surowiecki, 2004: XV).

The underlying notion of Surowiecki's argument involves the concept of 'private information'—that each person has unique information: facts and knowledge and also a unique interpretation and analysis of those facts and knowledge. By aggregating the private information of many individuals, a complete assessment is possible. Jenkins (2006b: 4) wrote, "None of us can know everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills." And, ideally, then end

result is collective intelligence.[5] Surowiecki (2004: XIV) wrote, "When our imperfect judgments are aggregated in the right way, our collective intelligence is often excellent." Several scholars believe that Internet technology has and sometimes enacts the potential "to aggregate in the right way" as embodied by the "open-source" software movement and Wikipedia (Jenkins, 2006a; Tapscott & Williams, 2006; Benkler, 2006; Sunstein, 2006).

The theory of collective intelligence contends that the sum of the efforts of many may produce a better result than one expert. Again in opposition to Lippman, Surowiecki (2004: 32) wrote that expertise is overrated because it is "spectacularly narrow." No human being possesses complete information, and while an expert's knowledge may be valuable it is but one perspective. Additionally, smart people's ways of thinking are generally similar, whereas an average person might conceptualize the problem or issue differently. Combining these perspectives can, in some cases, prove more insightful than the expert's alone.

How might the theory of collective intelligence apply to crowdsourced journalism? Most obviously, the sheer numbers a crowd bring to a large news event allow for a wealth of reporting, as was the case during Hurricane Katrina. Or the quantity of participants might allow for a large amount of information to be processed quickly. For example, when the U.S government unclassifies or releases massive amounts of legislative documents, blogs such as TalkingPointsMemo and Porkbusters solicit readers help look for possible signs of corruption (McLeary, 2007).

Another theory that suggests how collective wisdom might apply to journalism—presented by Bruns (2006) in his research on crowdsourced news outlet Wikinews—is that of "multiperspectival news" as conceived by journalism scholar Herbert Gans in the 1970s. He proposed it as a source of alternative news to challenge the power dynamics of the traditional news media. This model of newsgathering would focus on incorporating as many views as possible on a topic, "beyond those of politicians, leaders and experts" (Bruns, 2006: n.p.). Gans (2003: 103) wrote, "Ideally multiperspectival news encompasses fact and opinion reflecting all possible perspectives… multiperspectival news is the bottoms-up corrective for the mostly top-down perspectives of the news media" (as quoted by Bruns, 2006: n.p.).

[5] A term coined by French cybertheorist Pierre Levy referring to the result when a group collaborates to successfully achieve goals. (Jenkins: 2006b).

2.5 "THE CULT OF THE AMATEUR"

The majority of the examples of collective intelligence used in Surowiecki's book, however, involve problems with "correct" solutions. Yet Sunstein (2006: 98) noted, "Groups are often asked to answer questions that are not purely factual. Issues involving morality, politics, and law require *judgments of value, not merely fact*" (italics mine). Journalists cover these issues frequently; the doctrine of objectivity advises to separate the two. These sorts of issues present a number of problems for group problem-solving: "when people answer such questions, informational influences and social pressures will almost inevitably play a major role" (Sunstein, 2006: 98).

Social psychologist Irving Janis' *Victims of Groupthink* (1972) explored the concept from which the title is drawn that homogenous small groups are more likely to make decisions and form opinions based in influence of authority and group allegiance, rather than on fact. Similarly, the pressure to conform often compels those with periphery opinions to instead voice the popular version or simply not contribute for fear of social ostracism, known commonly as "The Spiral of Silence" or what Sunstein (2006: 8) calls a "reputational cascade."[6]

While the anonymity and the decentralized nature of the Internet may reduce the risk of reputational cascades, it presents a new problem best described through Negroponte's concept of "The Daily Me" in *Being Digital* (1995). Many users' experience of personalized, niche content (and specifically news) on the Internet may create what Sunstein (2006: 9) calls an "informational cocoon." He wrote that while the Internet contains a wealth of diversity of opinion, more often than not "like-minded people sort themselves into virtual communities that seem comfortable and comforting. Instead of good information aggregation, bad polarization is the outcome" (Sunstein, 2006: 97).

To avoid these informational and social problems, there are several conditions that are necessary for a crowd to be "wise", according to Surowiecki (2004). Firstly and most importantly, the crowd must be diverse. Diversity allows for a variety of differing perspectives and maximizes the possibility of lots of unique private information. It reduces systematic bias and the desire to conform because divergent opinions are wide-spread. Secondly, crowd members should be independent from one another to avoid destructive social pressures. Along those same lines, thirdly, power in the crowd should be

[6] The "Spiral of Silence" is a term coined by German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974).

decentralized. In the context of crowdsourced news, these conditions seem easily attainable through the structure and ubiquity of Internet technology. While possible in theory, whether or not such conditions are met in practice requires further empirical inquiry.

Despite these prescriptions for the creation of a "wise" crowd, some doubt the ability of a group of amateurs to provide the same thoughtful discourse that professional experts might. While it should be considered comical rather than a scholarly contribution, critic Andrew Keen recently published a book titled *The Cult of the Amateur* arguing against the utopianism of Web 2.0. His assessment of amateur journalists is bleak:

> *"Professional journalists acquire their craft through education and through first-hand experience of reporting and editing the news under the careful eye of trained professionals. In contrast, citizen journalists have no formal training and routinely offer up opinion as fact, rumor as reportage and innuendo as information"* (Keen, 2007: 47).

Nor does he believe in the possibility of collective intelligence:

> *"But if there was such a thing as the wisdom of the crowd, should we trust it? The answer is, of course, no. …Many unwise ideas—slavery, infanticide, George W. Bush, Britney Spears—have been extremely popular with the crowd. This is why the arbiters of truth should be the experts—those who speak from a place of knowledge and authority—not the winners of a popularity contest"* (Keen, 2007: 96).

The purpose of this project, however, is not to make a judgment call on whether or not the genre of crowdsourced journalism is a positive contribution to society. Only time will tell. Instead, an empirical exploration of the opinions and self-reported practices of both members of the crowd of amateur journalists and the editors of the sites on which they publish aims to provide a deeper understanding of this emerging model.

3. STATEMENT OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The empirical exploration of crowdsourced journalism has been situated in the context of collaborative participation on the Internet, a phenomenon born out of the "open source" software movement, made possible by both technology and a culture motivated by social and psychological rather than financial gains. Collaborative participatory culture online has allowed for various applications of crowdsourcing—"the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people"—to various fields, including and of primary interest for the purposes of this project, journalism (Howe, 2007: n.p.).

The research must also be framed in the context of the guiding principles of American journalism: professionalism and objectivity, both constructed to lend credibility to the occupation. In previous sections this paper has suggested professionalism stressing journalists as experts is inherently challenged by crowdsourcing's application to journalism as it promotes a group of amateurs—"a hobbyist knowledgeable or otherwise, someone who does not make a living from his or her field of interest"—filling the role of the professional (Keen, 2007: 36). And objectivity, emphasizing the removal of personal values from writing and reporting, "is an ideology of the distrust of the self" (Schudson,1978: 71). Yet crowdsourcing seems to celebrate the "self" pursuing collective intelligence based on the aggregation of the private information of many individuals.

This line of inquiry leads to the final element of the theoretical framework of this project: disputing theories on "the wisdom of crowds" to borrow from Surowiecki (2004). These theories are presented to explore possible alternative values that may lend credibility or perhaps damage it if, in fact, the guiding principles of traditional journalism are challenged by crowdsourced journalism. Scholars who believe in collective intelligence—and most explore it often through example—maintain that a group of individuals working collaboratively will produce a better solution or product than an expert alone. To avoid the pitfalls of informational cocoons and reputational cascades that lead to "groupthink", the group must be diverse, decentralized and independent, according to Surowiecki. The Internet both promotes and discourages these conditions. It is arguably "the most decentralized system in the world" and the population of users tremendously diverse, but the abundance of both content and niche networks can also lead to the creation of what Negroponte (1995) described at "The Daily Me", media so personalized one remains in a sort of ideological bubble (Surowiecki, 2004: 71 & Sunstein, 2006).

As applied to crowdsourced journalism, the actual realization of disputing theories of collective intelligence may produce many results. A few possibilities outlined in the framework are, on the one hand, the sheer numbers of the crowd contributing to a story that overwhelms traditional journalists and the potential for "multiperspectival" news, and, on the other hand, the deterioration of quality reporting and civic discourse. It boils down to a controversy weighing the talent of group of amateurs vs. one professional.

4. STATEMENT OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The goal of this research project is exploratory, to understand a recent phenomenon by obtaining and studying the opinions and self-reported practices of those involved. The trend of crowdsourced journalism is growing; both traditional news outlets and alternative websites are increasingly asking crowds of amateurs to fill the role of journalist. After studying the guiding principles of journalism, the researcher has considered the hypothesis that this practice inherently challenges the ideals constructed by journalists in order to lend credibility to the occupation. Yet crowdsourced news sites proliferate, some of which receive considerable online traffic, so there must be some perceived positive contribution of the practice to the journalistic discourse.

These considerations lead to the research question at hand: *To what extent is crowdsourced journalism challenging traditional notions of professionalism and objectivity, and what alternative ideals, if any, are emerging to replace them?*

Mindich (1998: 5) wrote, "With so many storytellers trying to tell stories (the Internet alone has millions of separate sources of news), and with so many departing from the information model of objective news, journalists once again must attempt to define their craft." At the heart of the research objectives of this project is the desire to identify, or at least explore, how these new journalists—members of the crowd and the editors employing crowdsourcing—"define their craft." The current definition, as constructed almost 100 years ago, may no longer be applicable to the participatory journalism of the Internet. This research project attempts to contribute a better understanding of a recent phenomenon, of which there is little empirical data or scholarly literature. But more importantly, it attempts to explore the effects of this practice on the evolution of journalism culture.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 DESIGN STRATEGY

The strategy used to address the research question was a combination of semi-structured depth interviews, and an online structured survey followed by an optional open-ended questionnaire. The researcher arrived at this design through a number of considerations, both before and during the research's implementation.

From the outset, it was felt it would be most relevant to investigate crowdsourced journalism from the perspective of its producers. As the researcher was interested in discovering what guiding principles inspired and were inscribed in the practice, it seemed apt to ask those responsible for its construction. This led to two possible groups of key informants: the editors and founders of the crowdsourced news websites, and the crowd of amateur journalists themselves. The broad opinions and attitudes of the first group regarding crowdsourced journalism generally (the inspiration) and the opinions regarding specific values of news production and demographics of the second group (the inscription) were deemed most valuable.

Gaskell (2003: 39) wrote, "The qualitative interview provides the basic data for the development of an understanding of the relations between relevant social actors and their situation. The objective is a fine-textured understanding of beliefs, attitudes, values and motivations…" For the first group, qualitative interviews were deemed most applicable. Because of the decentralized nature of the Internet, focus groups were deemed impractical. Semi-structured, individual depth interviews with editors and founders done before the investigation of the dynamics of the crowd would emphasize "exploration" and then those done afterwards would emphasize "hypothesis testing" of opinions and attitudes (Kvale, 1996: 127).

Understanding the demographics of the crowd of amateur journalists was crucial to understanding if it met the conditions of the "wise crowd" Surowiecki (2004) outlined, avoiding the pitfalls associated with group dynamics. It was felt it was important to investigate the likelihood of producing this result by understanding the make-up of the crowd. This is the kind of research that "can only be obtained by asking a sample of people about themselves" (Fowler, 2002: 2). Here an online survey seemed most applicable,

allowing the researcher to reach a large number of people via a medium they used. Additionally, a survey could remain anonymous, allowing the researcher to ask sensitive questions such those regarding as race and income. A survey also allowed the possibility to test out some of the themes that had surfaced in the depth interviews on a larger sample (Kvale, 1996).

Although less effective for exploring possible alternative values emerging from the practice (as these are somewhat embedded in attitudes and opinions and not easily classified), a survey could address if "professionalism" was being upheld (i.e. *Have you ever received formal journalism training or education?*). And by asking the crowd about their specific practices of news production, it might be determined if objectivity is still an influential doctrine and if there are any significant relationships between professionalism and types of production practices.

By soliciting optional contact information at the end of the survey, the researcher was able to determine a small sample of respondents to whom she could pose the types of questions better assessed in qualitative interviews through an emailed list of open-ended questions. These questions might have discouraged the online survey respondents from continuing, yet those engaged in this next step seemed more likely to participate further. This brief emailed questionnaire proved fruitful, and in hindsight, perhaps more valuable than the survey and its demographic output. More of an afterthought to the original research design, these emailed questionnaires could have reached a large number of the crowd if more time was available for outreach, and are an advisable method for future researchers of the phenomenon.

Additionally, without time constraints, this strategy could benefit from content analysis of crowdsourced news. On determining, what, if any, alternative ideals define the practice, systematically researching how they are actually enacted in the content of the site would be a valuable contribution to this study.

5.2 SAMPLE

Initial Internet research into the phenomenon of crowdsourced news led the researcher to read "Assignment Zero" (hereafter referred to as "AZ"), the first project launched by NewAssignment.net, a journalism site experimenting with "pro-am"

collaboration (see http://zero.newassignment.net/). Conveniently, the subject AZ was asking amateur journalists to cover was actually the phenomenon itself: crowdsourcing in its many forms. Investigating this site would "kill two birds with one stone"; learning about the process of crowdsourced journalism both in practice and theory in one place. NewAssignment's founder Jay Rosen is a renowned journalism scholar in the United States, with an obvious interest in crowdsourcing, therefore seemed to be a prime candidate for one of the editor interviews the researcher had envisioned.

In conversing via email with Rosen (the method by which all subjects were solicited), he requested—in exchange for granting the interview—that the researcher also interview one of the experts of crowdsourcing as an amateur reporter for AZ. This presented an interesting opportunity to be involved in crowdsourced journalism, as well as choose an individual whose insights would prove valuable for the research.[7] The researcher choose (from the list provided by AZ) to interview Jon Donley, the Pulitzer Prize-winning editor of the website of the newspaper the *Times Picayune* of New Orleans, which utilized crowdsourcing famously during Hurricane Katrina, to the extent that U.S. military turned to the website for guidance in looking for trapped people (Glaser, 2005).[8] It was felt this interview would shed light on the use of crowdsourcing in breaking news situations by a traditional news outlet (whereas AZ focused on feature reporting).

The researcher was also interested interviewing the editor or founder of a site completely devoted to crowdsourced news where amateurs acted as both writers and also as editors. Research led to NowPublic.com, voted one of the best websites of 2007 by Time Magazine ("50 Best Websites", 2007). Time praised the site's breaking news capabilities: "During Hurricane Katrina, NowPublic was there; eight contributors filed on-the-scene reports from London's Heathrow Airport during the August 2006 terrorism lockdown—while the regular press was forced to wait outside." This site seemed preferable to the other major crowdsourced news sites, which have been previously studied, namely the lackluster Wikinews (see Bruns, 2006) or the English-language edition of *OhMyNews* based on the Korean model.[9]

[7] While the researcher draw on my experience as an "amateur journalist" occasionally in this project, involvement was casual and should not be interpreted as ethnographic or as a key part of the research design. An abridged, edited version of the researcher's interview with Jon Donley appeared at http://zero.newassignment.net/assignment/interview_jon_donley_editor_chief_nola_new_orleans#az-2

[8] For a detailed look at NOLA.com's role during and after Katrina see Mark Glaser's interview with Donley at http://www.ojr.org/ojr/stories/050913glaser/

[9] It was also decided to stay away from *OhMyNews* and other sites powered by crowds namely outside of the United States because journalistic professionalism and objectivity are distinctly North American inventions

The researcher also attempted to solicit an interview with any of the executives at Gannett involved in the decision to crowdsource, but emails went unreturned. After discussing my research design with an advisor, it was decided three interviews would be sufficient to complement the survey data.

For my survey sample, the researcher had originally hoped to sample the crowd of amateur journalists using NowPublic.com. With upwards of 100,000 users, it was felt this site would provide a large group of respondents to the solicitation who used the site in a variety of ways. In his depth interview Michael Tippett agreed to review the survey for possible distribution via email or in a posting on the site. After reviewing the survey, however, Tippett felt some of the survey material was sensitive. While the researcher offered to amend the survey in order to gain access, Tippett was unresponsive, and as this process had taken several weeks, it was felt it was time to move on. Surveying NowPublic users remains, however, a fruitful pursuit for academic research with similar goals.

The researcher's experience with AZ had thus far been very positive, both in research and personally contributing to the site, and after failing to engage NowPublic, it seemed a natural contingency plan to survey its users. Although it would have been ideal to survey amateur journalists who contributed to crowdsourcing of both breaking news and feature stories, time constraints did not allow for further investigation and outreach to other sites. In this sense, AZ was a "convenience sample" (List, 2002: n.p). The survey was emailed to an AZ editor, who then emailed it to the entire listserv of approximately one thousand users. Of this group, 87 people started the survey, although only 61 completed it in its entirety.

Of the 87 respondents, seven people responded to my request for further questioning at the end of the survey by using the email address provided to contact the researcher. In retrospect, it may have been more effective to ask for optional contact information and then reach out to them. Regardless, of the seven who were emailed a brief questionnaire, four responded. Again, all available data was used. Because of the small sample, these responses should not be generalized onto the entire population, but will instead be used to color quantitative data.

(Schudson, 1978 & Rosen, 1999). The researcher was most familiar with the American news media, and therefore determined it would be difficult to judge any changes in the landscape of journalism culture in other countries without an in-depth understanding of the status quo. Time constraints would not allow for this exploration.

5.3 DESIGN OF RESEARCH TOOLS

Research tool design began with the crafting of interview topic guides. The *Times-Picayune* website (NOLA.com) editor Jon Donely was the first and provided the basis for the following two (see Appendix 1). Four major themes were pursued in this topic guide: case study of crowdsourcing during Hurricane Katrina, crowdsourcing on the site now, the amateur vs. professional controversy, questions about crowdsourcing as an economic concept. Many of the questions from the last two themes are used in all topic guides. Questions regarding the editors' specific site are unique to each (see Appendices 2 & 3). Questions were framed with a balance of "exploration versus hypothesis testing", starting from general becoming more leading as the interview progressed (Kvale, 1996: 127). The researcher was most inclined to let the editor/founder "sell" his site to see what qualities he would offer as valuable before testing certain hypotheses. Additionally, some specific questions regarding the doctrine of objectivity were asked of Jay Rosen to gain his insights as a journalism scholar.

Interviews were conducted and recorded by phone because of the researcher's inability to travel freely, then later transcribed (see Appendix 4 as an example).[10] Unsuccessful attempts were made, however, to schedule face-to-face interviews when Tippett was visiting London and with Rosen when the researcher was in New York. Rosen's interview was conducted after the survey data was collected about his site in order to further inform the topic guide questions.

The survey, first crafted for NowPublic users, then amended for AZ was created on SurveyMonkey.com using their premium service (see Appendix 5). The researcher referred to Fowler (2002) and Peterson (2000) in constructing the survey, beginning with simple multiple choice questions, moving on to more complicated attitude scales and ending with possibly sensitive questions such as political affiliation, race, and, lastly, income. The survey was piloted by several academic peers, and an academic advisor. Corrections were made in order to ensure categories were mutually exclusive and exhaustive. After the failed negotiations with NowPublic, a URL link to the Survey Monkey site was emailed to an AZ editor, who then emailed it to all AZ users. Ideally, without time constraints, the researcher would have first attempted to pilot the survey with a small number of AZ users. Also, the AZ editor used his own solicitation, mentioning it in a more general emailed letter, which addressed a variety of AZ issues (see Appendix 6). Ideally, the researcher would have

preferred control over the solicitation. The survey was left open to responses for two weeks before being analyzed. As mentioned previously, in that time, seven people contacted the researcher offering to be interviewed further. A casual email with five direct hypothesis-testing questions was sent to all, garnering four responses (see Appendix 7).

[10] Tippett and Rosen interview transcripts are available upon request.

6. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

6.1 INTERVIEWS WITH EDITORS/FOUNDERS

The method of analysis of the three interviews was a form of "meaning condensation", in which the researcher read through the transcripts, summarizing long passages into succinct statements of the ideas expressed (Kvale, 1996: 192). Connections between transcripts were then assessed in a thematic analysis of which Gaskell (2003: 53) wrote, "The quest is for common content themes and the function of these themes." Common themes between the three interviews relating to the research questions were: 1) the value of the mass quantity of amateur journalists, 2) the value of multiple perspectives, 3) authenticity and transparency as replacing objectivity, 4) empowering and trusting the public, 5) 'anti-professionalism', but a need for some professionals.

6.1.1 THE VALUE OF THE MASS QUANTITY OF AMATEUR JOURNALISTS

Interviewees expressed enthusiasm in their websites most basically because of the number of contributors as surpassing that of a traditional news organization. When asked about crowdsourced coverage of Hurricane Katrina, both Tippett and Donley spoke of the importance of the mass of amateur journalists. Tippett said, "We had about 2,000 people in the area, which when you think about in relationship to Reuters or something... we had amazing coverage." Donely recognized the same benefit of tapping into crowd contributions when he said, "Our disaster was so widespread, that even if we had every [traditional] reporter out in boats, we would not have been able to tell the story of New Orleans" and " The *Times Picayune* has twenty photographers. I like to tell them, 'You all have twenty photographers. I have twenty thousand.'"

Donley also noted the mass of contributors creates a body of knowledge from which to determine trends. He said,

> *"It's a scientific principle. If you do one test on one test tube it will come out one way or the other but it doesn't necessarily prove your case. You do lots of experiments on lots of subjects and then you come out with a general view of the way things are mostly."*

6.1.2 THE VALUE OF MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

Both Rosen and Donley mentioned the value of multiple perspectives that crowdsourcing offers to one story. Rosen, when asked directly what alternative values may be replacing objectivity, proposed Gans' "multiperspectival" news as "the germ of an idea." He said, "A crowdsourcing view can be more of a 360 view because you have more potential sources."

Donley equated the value of multiple perspectives to collective intelligence, referencing Surowiecki's *The Wisdom of Crowds* (2004):

> *"There is an active philosophy out there among the online journalism geeks…that there is a thing out there called the wisdom of the crowd. That is if you take a camera and take pictures all over the city and stick 'em up on the wall like a mosaic you are going to get a fairly accurate picture of what's out there, a fairly authentic idea of what that city is. And it works the same way with users. We take all of the user content that we've gotten during and after Katrina and you get a very authentic accurate view of what life is like here."*

This quote reflects Donley's attitude that use of multiple perspectives, rather than one objective one, might provide a more "authentic" story. This theme resonated throughout the interviews.

6.1.3 AUTHENTICITY AND TRANSPARENCY AS REPLACING OBJECTIVITY

Rosen spoke of how objectivity as a doctrine is breaking down because it is ill-adapted to the current media environment, but that certain characteristics it was meant to bring to journalism are still important such as legitimacy, reliability, accuracy, reputation and, most importantly, production of trust. He said, "So what I think we need to do is look at how the production of trust works online and in the new media environment. And derive from that the set of principles that are maybe better than objectivity. Or better adapted."

One possible set of principles suggested by Tippett and Donley was that of authenticity and transparency. Tippett's NowPublic "Crowd-powered News Values" page includes this advice: "Traditionally, journalists strive for "balance", "fairness", or "objectivity."

At NowPublic, we think about these concepts differently: Is there a sense of "transparency" - so that readers get a sense they are being told everything?" ("NowPublic News Values", 2007: n.p.). In discussing a controversial story involving a NowPublic contributor, Tippett said "…it's all a little contentious. It's her word against the TSA. So people are asking 'What is the truth here?', and I think that the overall consensus is that it's good to have this kind of transparency." Donley made clear the importance of transparency also when he said, "We are not putting a stamp on this saying, 'This is true.' We are saying, 'This is how people feel.' So in all of our user-submitted stuff, we make very clear to say, 'These are our users'."

Authenticity is also mentioned on NowPublic as something contributors should work towards ("NowPublic News Values", 2007: n.p.). Donley felt that the amateurs' stories of Katrina were inherently more authentic than traditional reporters because of first-hand experience. He said,

> *"I just want to hear people's stories…I want to hear it from them. And I want to hear it without it being filtered through whatever filter the reporter is filtering it through. During the storm we had great journalists from all over doing the best job they could writing about the storm and shooting pictures, but the fact was they weren't up to their necks. They weren't watching people drown. They didn't carry their kids into the attic chased by the water. Getting those stories second-hand is never as authentic as getting it first-hand."*

6.1.4 EMPOWERING AND TRUSTING THE PUBLIC

Interviewees saw the Internet as changing the role of the journalist. Rosen said, "Before the Web, they [traditional journalists] saw readers as having knowledge deficits. 'What is it that readers don't know? That's our job.' And now it's what they *do* know and that's a real switch." Donley said, "For centuries journalists have stood in the place of the people; they've represented the people... But now it has been democratized to the point where the people have the capability [to be journalists]."

Interviewees agreed that this empowered public should also be trusted. When asked if professional editors were still needed to tell people what news was important, interviewees felt that often the public is capable when using crowdsourced editing systems. Tippett said,

"…collectively people have been unappreciated or, as Bush would say, misunderestimated… If left to their own devices rather than being fed the spoon-fed crap, that they will actually find the good stuff out there." Rosen said:

> *"Because there's so much stuff, because there are so many more producers and more participants in the media system... we need editors. But there are different editing systems. A system like Digg[11], that's one. A system like, "Let's ask Arnie to do it, he's really experienced." That's another…But who says [professional journalists] are going to be the editors people trust? Just because you walked in and said I'm an editor?"*

Or in Donley's words: "One of the problems with journalism, and a problem a lot of people have with journalists is that they have the idea that they are smarter than the average people. They're not."

6.1.5 'ANTI-PROFESIONALISM' BUT THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONALS

These quotations point to a negative attitude toward the principle of journalist professionalism among interviewees, especially Donley who said, "You'll find there's really not that much in a daily paper that needed to be written by someone with a journalism degree. But that's what we've traditionally made our money off of" and "I will tell you young reporters have no special skills over a decently educated American citizen."

The attitude toward the principle of professionalism should not be seen, however, as a dismissal of the contributions of professional journalists. Rosen's Assignment Zero is, again, a "pro-am" approach overseen by professional journalists. Both Tippett and Donley noted the importance of having professionally trained, experienced journalists for investigative and analytical stories. Tippett said,

> *"For us, citizen journalism is about being there... A lot of times it's about newsgathering and getting that information out to the general population. The role that a traditional, trained, seasoned journalist would play in that situation is to provide a level of analysis and apply journalistic procedures to what that is. To understand the biases, the ethical ramifications, the political*

[11] Digg.com uses a reader voting system to determine the prominence of story postings.

context…And so its very important to have that traditional voice on the other end of the table to say, "Well, have we heard the other side of the story?" And ask the questions that traditional journalism asks. "

The opinions and attitudes of the three respondents are, however, very much in favor of crowdsourced news, which should come as no surprise considering they are founders and editors of such websites. This study could be enhanced, in the future, by interviews with traditional journalists acting as a control group of sorts, and offering a different bias of the practice.

6.2 ONLINE SURVEY OF AZ PARTICIPANTS

While the qualitative interviews presented some possible news values that might be introduced into the culture of journalism, the quantitative survey was meant to determine to what extent these traditional values were actually being challenged in the context of a crowdsourced news project. See Appendix 6 for complete survey results.

6.2.1 QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO PROFESSIONALISM

The two most overt questions relating to journalistic professionalism in its most basic sense were '*Are you currently or have you ever been employed (paid at a news organization?'* and '*Do you have any formal journalism training or education?'*. Respondents answered in a nearly 50/50 split, most respondents answering in the same way both questions. So it should be noted through the rest of the analysis of this survey that about half of the respondents can be considered professional journalists. So here we see that professionalism in its most basic sense is only being partially challenged in the AZ crowd.

Interestingly, however, 76.1% of respondents believed they would never make money from their involvement in AZ, participating for other reasons instead, namely they found it intellectually stimulating and that others might benefit from their contributions. Of those that filled in the *Other* field as to why they participated, many wrote it was because they were "curious" if the project would work. Most participated when they "had some free time." So while many of the participants can be considered "professionals", they reported participating for the psychological and social factors scholars often find in investigating

collaborative culture online. In short, AZ was a hobby for most participants, and not considered as a part of or a launching pad for a career in traditional journalism.

6.2.2 QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO OBJECTIVITY

Studying attitudes towards and self-reported practices surrounding objectivity proved somewhat difficult in survey form because, as Rosen said, it "is about ten different things at once." When formulating questions, the researcher considered Schudson's (2006) definition of objectivity as the separation of facts from values. Some respondents (21%) were posting what they considered to be opinion pieces, which are inherently not objective. Yet more people were posting original reporting or articles (40.3%). Here the goal was to determine what percentage of respondents inserted "values" into their reporting—whose content and writing style opposed traditional objective conventions such as detachment, the 'inverted pyramid' style of writing, and impartiality mentioned in Section 2.3.2.

In these responses, there is a fairly balanced ratio of those maintaining objective conventions and those straying from them. Responses to the question '*When you posted content, was it written in the first-person?*' were more or less evenly split between '*Yes*', '*No*', and '*My style varied*'. The most popular responses to the question '*How often did you include your own opinion or personal commentary in your posting?*' were '*Never*' (25.8%) and '*Usually*' (22.6%).

One direct question regarding objectivity was part of a 3-point attitude scale concerning perceived importance of different qualities in an article on AZ. While 50.7% found objectivity to be '*Very Important* ', respondents felt more strongly about '*Factual Accuracy*' and *'Engaging Content'* which 91.2% and 82.6% respectively found to be "*Very Important* '.

From these responses, it is possible to state conclusively that objectivity is not "the official doctrine" of AZ journalists, but that many still find it valuable and stick to its conventions. And yet, at the same time, others do not.

6.2.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONALISM AND OBJECTIVITY

The researcher was also interested in investigating a possible relationship between those respondents who were professionally employed at a news organization and their feelings towards objectivity and adherence to its conventions. Using employment as the independent variable, several logit regression models were run to determine if there was a significant relationship between employment and dependent variables such as inclusion of personal commentary, use of first-person writing style or perceived importance of objectivity. Unfortunately, the majority of logit regression models did not provide statistically significant relationships. This is most likely due to the small sample size, and incomplete responses on the survey, which led to many of the observations to be thrown out.

Although its findings should be interpreted with caution, the most robust model is included as Appendix 8. Without placing a definite value on the effect of employment on personal commentary, the logit regression model results seem to indicate that if a respondent was employed at a news organization, he or she had lower odds of inserting opinion or personal commentary into story postings. While inconclusive, this line of inquiry presents an interesting opportunity for further research.

6.2.4 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The researcher was also interested in examining the demographics of the AZ crowd. As mentioned in Section 2.5, Surowiecki (2004) and Sunstein (2006) maintained that a crowd must be diverse in order to be wise. If their brand of collective intelligence is to emerge as a perceived ideal of crowdsourced news, it is important to research if the crowd's make-up supports that theory.

In the case of AZ, the crowd of amateur journalists is far from diverse. It is representative of the "early adopter profile" explored by Jenkins (2006b: 23) as "disproportionately white, male, middle class, and college-educated." Although the male/female ratio is not heavily skewed (57.4%: 42.7%), other categories follow this early adopter profile. Most notably 80.9% of the AZ crowd reports their race as '*White*'. Additionally, a large proportion of respondents considered their political affiliation to be '*Liberal* '. Age, however, can be considered a somewhat diverse category with an even

spread of participants in their 20's, 30's, and 40's and descending participation in the 50's, 60's and 70's.

6.3 BRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE OF AZ PARTICIPANTS

Although, as previously stated, this section was not a part of the original research design, some of the insights gleaned from asking AZ participants direct hypothesis-testing questions are at least useful, if not representative.

Some respondents corroborated what was said in the depth interviews with the editors/founders regarding the values of the contributions of a crowd of amateurs. For example, one respondent said, "I think amateurs have the ability to bring a wider spectrum of opinions and perspectives to the table. They are also less restrained by limits of professional journalism, which must be filtered by editors and the codes of professional reporting" and "I think an amateur's story is great if it captures a unique and personal experience" (Paula). Another mentioned amateurs brought "time, numbers, and random expertise" to journalism (Ken).

All respondents felt it was still important for professionals to stay involved in crowdsourced pursuits, mostly because amateurs lack the writing skills of the pros. While all felt that crowds can be wise if certain conditions are met, two introduced the concept of "designer crowds" in which only the best amateurs are allowed access (Robert and Ken).

Objectivity as a doctrine was upheld by three of the four respondents. Paula, the outlier, felt "citizen journalists should not strive to be objective because that would place unnecessary limits on a media outlet whose value lies in greater freedom of expression." Steven said on the topic, "I think that they [amateur] journalists should strive to be transparent, then balanced, and finally objective. True objectivity is impossible…" Both Ken and Robert defended the doctrine wholeheartedly. Robert said amateur journalists should "absolutely" try to be objective because "I think part of establishing yourself as a recognized journalist (in the sense that your peers in the field would respect you as a professional) is bringing up a level of credibility…"

Again, while this exercise was by no means representative, it demonstrates that the values offered by crowdsourcing (and evangelized by its founders) such as mass quantity, multiple perspectives, and authenticity are recognized by participants. These values,

however, may not yet be replacing objectivity and professionalism in the production of trust and credibility in journalism, at least for some participants.

7. DISCUSSION

Returning to the research question '*To what extent is crowdsourced journalism challenging traditional notions of professionalism and objectivity, and what alternative ideals, if any, are emerging to replace them?'*, the researcher found that while traditional notions of professionalism and objectivity are challenged ideologically by the founders of crowdsourced news and inherently by the genre, they are still partially upheld in theory and practice by participants themselves. Some of the alternative ideals suggested in scholarly literature are corroborated by founders and participants alike, although they are more likely *co-existing* with traditional notions, rather than replacing them. It is helpful to think of crowdsourced news as an "extension" of traditional journalism, rather than a revolution. Karp (2007: n.p.) wrote, "The practice of journalism hasn't been fundamentally changed so much as it has been extended. Journalism used to be linear. Now it's networked. It used to be in the hands of a few. Now it's in the hands of many more."

As explored in the literature review, there is a professional vs. amateur debate among scholars with interesting implications for journalism. Because amateurs now have the capability to be journalists, the notion of professionalism as created in the 1920's is under consideration. Journalists were considered "trustees" of the public not only because they lacked publishing capabilities, but also because many felt the public was too ignorant or busy to develop reliable, informed opinions without aid. This dominant conception of the public—voiced prominently by Lippman in 1922—was contested in the researcher's investigation.

The founders of the crowdsourced news sites interviewed offered a different conception of the public, one they felt should be empowered and trusted, in contrast to Keen's (2007) assertion that amateurs are "killing our culture." Interviewees all felt the public has been "underappreciated" in Tippett's words. So how does this sentiment affect the notion of journalistic professionalism? Donley especially made the point that most journalism can be done by someone without a journalism degree, a theme that resonates in Surowiecki's (2004) claim that expertise is overrated. Yet while the interviewees downplayed professionalism as a guiding principle of journalism, they also contended that professionals are important for investigative and analytical stories, also mentioned by Tapscott and

Williams (2006). The AZ participants who were questioned by email also felt professionals should stay involved in crowdsourced pursuits, even if only for copy-editing. While refined skills are necessary for these roles, one should consider a potential shift in the way journalism as an occupation is conceptualized. The New York Times' media critic David Carr (2007: n.p) wrote, "Those of us who perpetrate journalism, know in our hearts it is a craft, not a profession."

Professionalism as a guiding principle of journalism was challenged ideologically in the empirical research, but less so in practice. Demographic information of AZ survey participants showed approximately half of respondents were journalism professionals, and the majority had some or completed post-graduate education. This may be reflective of the crowdsourced news genre in general, but more likely a consequence of the somewhat academic or cerebral subject matter. In response to this Rosen said, "I think if we did a subject that lots of people cared about—as long as they were online—they would participate. That's my hope. But certainly I don't know that."

Objectivity, as explored through the various writing conventions used to construct it, was only partially upheld in practice as researched through the self-reported practices of AZ participants. Along the same lines, while about half of respondents felt it was '*Very Important'*, other qualities such as factual accuracy and engaging content received more overwhelming support. Statistically speaking, the researcher was not able to prove with confidence if those respondents who were journalism professionals were those who were upholding objectivity's conventions. AZ participants interviewed by email were mostly in favor of objectivity, although small sample size here makes it difficult to generalize. In all cases, its limitations were admitted. So while objectivity as a guiding principle of journalism still remains somewhat intact—even in crowdsourced news—its status "as an ethical touchstone…is faltering…It doesn't provide the kind of guidance and direction that it once did", making room for other guiding principles (Rosen as quoted by MacKinnon, 2005: n.p.).

Interviewees suggested several other principles that might guide crowdsourced news. Most simply, the sheer number of amateur journalists was considered valuable, in what Surowiecki (2004:10) called "a mathematical truism." Scholars of crowdsourcing argued that, if certain conditions were met that, this might produce collective intelligence. One of the underlying theories supporting this conception is that of "private information" that each person possesses unique knowledge or skills (Surowiecki, 2004). Donley verbalized this theory in his description of one of his "best" citizen bloggers, a retired private detective who

had a knack for investigative journalism because of his ability and patience scrutinizing documents.

By aggregating the private information of a diverse crowd, one can see "the big picture" (to quote Donely), creating something similar to Gans' "multiperspectival" news, as mentioned by Bruns (2006) and Rosen in the researcher's interview. But in order for these ideals to be achieved, and for the pitfalls associated with '*groupthink'* to be avoided, the crowd should, in theory, be diverse (Janis, 1972). Some of the AZ participants acknowledged these possible pitfalls caused by lack of diversity, yet the editor/founder interviewees only approached the issue of diversity when probed, perhaps because they felt the need to evangelize their site to the researcher.

The demographic information gleaned from the survey showed that the AZ crowd was not particularly diverse, fulfilling the classic "early adopter profile" as described by Jenkins (2006), which Rosen attributed to AZ's subject matter. All interviewees felt that as the Internet increased its ubiquity, more diverse crowds would rally around these projects, especially if they cared about the subject matter. Donley said he was once asked, "Isn't it an elitist white medium, you are doing okay getting to the well-off white folks, but isn't this creating a distance?" and he responded, "Well, when we were getting cries for help, we were getting them from every area of the city." Rosen felt that diversity's role in collective intelligence might not be necessary all of the time. He said, "What matters is producing quality work. If a non-representative group produces quality work for the public that's still good." Yet, it seems diversity is needed to produce a truly "multiperspectival" crowdsourced news site rather than an amateur-created version of Negroponte's (1995) "The Daily Me."

And finally, transparency and authenticity were also offered by interviewees and some AZ participants (Steven and Paula) as emerging ideals in the practice of crowdsourced journalism. Yet because survey questions were formulated before the thematic interview analysis, the researcher did not probe respondents for attitudes or practice towards these concepts, something that might be considered in further empirical investigation. Additionally, content analysis of crowdsourced journalism, especially on a mixed-content site like NowPublic, could measure the prevalence of the manifestation of these principles in actual writing samples.

8. CONCLUSION

> *"We need to recognize the larger sphere that journalism now occupies and the larger group of people who are now acting as journalists — and we need to help them all succeed for the greater good that journalism, in its ideal, has always been about"* (Karp, 2007: n.p.).

This exploration of the crowdsourcing model as applied to journalism has presented an emerging practice that is upholding traditional ideals of journalism, and at the same time offering new ideals to co-exist with the old. The hybridity of the practice brings with it a tension between the values of a refined craft, and those of a new collaborative knowledge culture as explored in the theoretical review. While there is little scholarly literature on crowdsouced news, theories regarding collective intelligence provided insight into what the model—functioning in its ideal form—might achieve. Situating crowdsouced news in a theoretical framework of alternative media might also yield fruitful results.

Empirically speaking, in interviewing founders and editors of crowdsourced news websites, several themes persisted in their perceptions of the values of the model: the mass quantity of amateur journalists, multiple perspectives, and authenticity and transparency. Interviewees also offered a conception of the public as empowered and competent, but maintained professional journalists are still crucial for certain pursuits. As mentioned previously, interviewing editors of traditional media might provide a useful foil to the championing of the model from these key stakeholders.

The online survey of Assignment Zero participants showed that the practice of crowdsouced journalism may be less of an ideological departure from traditional journalism than theories and the editors suggest. About half of the participants were professional journalists themselves, and many adhered to the conventions of objectivity. Further qualitative research with participants confirmed this finding. Demographic information showed the majority of participants fit an early adopter profile, falling short of the diversity scholars argue is a necessary condition for a wise crowd. Editors of these sites might consider this finding as a reason to work towards attracting a broader audience of users. Further study into participant motivation would inform such an initiative.

Rosen, in his interview, said, "Open platforms for news are different from closed platforms. They work differently. They have advantages and they bring costs. And to work in this area, we are trying to find out those advantages and reduce those costs." If those

advantages and costs of open platforms for news are better understood, then crowdsourced news has the potential to be a positive contribution to the culture of journalism, engaging citizens and offering breadth of coverage and a diversity of viewpoints lacking from traditional media. Considering the social and political influence of the news media, these innovational forms demand continued research if they are to succeed for the greater good.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview topic guide for Jon Donley, editor of NOLA.com

Case study: Crowdsourcing during Katrina

- For a little background, describe the chain of events during Katrina that led to the self-publishing component of the site becoming so important?
- Do you remember any specific examples of what were people posting?
- Is that what you expected?
- What motivated people to tell their stories?
- I remember at CNN—where I was working during Katrina—in the weeks following the storm we used the Forum and blog to look for story ideas…did the Times-Picayune do the same?

Crowdsourcing on the website now

- Other than saving lives, what do you think the greatest accomplishment of the Forum has been?
- What has been the most problematic?
- How do you edit it?
- Tell me about the North Shore bloggers feature you are working on…

Amateurs vs. Professionals

- To just your average reader removed from the story, how would the experience of surfing NOLA.com differ from picking up a newspaper or watching CNN?
- What is the biggest difference between citizen journalism in times of breakings news vs. everyday life?
- Is one more valuable?
- What do amateurs bring to the table that professionals lack?
- Is it still important for professionals to be involved?
- What surprised you the most about your experience with citizen journalism?

Crowdsourcing as an economic concept

- Is there money to be made with crowdsourcing? If so, why will some people work for free so that others can profit?
- Academic proponents of crowdsourcing argue there's wisdom in crowds…do you agree?
- Anything else to add?

APPENDIX 2

Interview topic guide for Michael Tippett, founder of NowPublic.org

Crowdsourcing on the website

- For a little background, describe how project started?
- Crowd-powered vs. crowdsourced?
- What motivates people to contribute?
- With more than 100,000 contributors may be hard to tell but from looking at profiles do you get a sense of a dominant demographic?
- How is the relationship with the AP working out? Does mainstream media often pick up story ideas or breaking news from NowPublic?
- To just your average reader, how would the experience of surfing NowPublic differ from surfing traditional news sites?
- What do you think the greatest accomplishment of the site has been?
- What has been the most problematic?

Amateurs vs. Professionals

- To just your average reader, how would the experience of surfing NowPublic differ from surfing traditional news sites?
- What role do editors play?
- I read Mark Schneider's "News Values", but what do you think makes a great story?
- As you let the "crowd" decide what the top stories are…the last time I checked it was about a diet pill that makes you fart oil…one of the traditional criticisms about these projects is you need journalists and editors to tell the public what to pay attention to if we have any hope of an informed electorate…how would you respond?
- What is the biggest difference between citizen journalism in times of breakings news vs. everyday life?
- Is one more valuable?
- What do amateurs bring to the table that professionals lack?
- Is it still important for professionals to be involved?
- What surprised you the most about your experience with citizen journalism?

Crowdsourcing as an economic concept

- Is there money to be made with crowdsourcing? If so, why will some people work for free so that others can profit?
- Academic proponents of crowdsourcing argue there's wisdom in crowds…do you agree? Can you think of an example from your experience?
- Anything else to add?

APPENDIX 3

Interview topic guide for Jay Rosen, founder of NewAssignment.net and Journalism Scholar

Crowdsourcing on the website

- What do you think the greatest accomplishment of the project was?
- What has been the most problematic?
- What's with the 28% of it worked figure I've been seeing?

Crowdsourcing as an economic concept

- Surowiecki says that the crowd needs to be decentralized to be wise, yet looking back at AZ, it may have been that lack of outreach from the central players that made it lose steam…
- How about diversity? My survey showed—or at least those who responded—fit the profile of the well-educated, white early adopter…will that change as this gets more popular?

Objectivity

- I've read you quoted as saying objectivity as an ethical touchstone in mainstream journalism is faltering…what will replace it?
- It seems, historically, that the objectivity doctrine was born out of a need to legitmize the profession…I'm wondering what new ideals will lend legitimacy to crowdsourced news?
- How do you think AZ journalists approached objectivity?

Amateurs vs. Professionals

- What did the amateurs bring to the table that professionals lack?
- From the readers' perspective, what are they getting from a crowdsourced news website that's missing from a mainstream news?
- How do you think professionals to be involved in these pro-am pursuits?
- I wonder if the journey the destination—engaging citizens, trying to get them involved in public discourse--more important than the final product…an evolution of the civic journalism you championed in the '90s…what do you think?
- With sites like NowPublic and Digg where users determine the lead stories, some argue the discourse will be entertainment-based or sensationalized...do we need editors to tell us what's important?
- What surprised you the most about your experience with citizen journalism?

APPENDIX 4

Interview Transcript with Jon Donley, editor of NOLA.com

For a little background, describe the chain of events during Katrina that led to the self-publishing component of the site becoming so important?

I think its important to understand this didn't just happen on the fly. I took over NOLA.com ten years ago. Then in 1998, we had a brush with Hurricane George, and that was the first time there had ever been a major evacuation of the New Orleans area during a hurricane…we thought, "Our audience is gone. We are not going to be very busy. We'll just have fun and cover what we cover. But we had rolled out our community forums about 6 months earlier. And to our surprise it turned out that when people got to where they were evacuating to they came back onto the website, and started communicating with each other asking questions like, "Is the evacuation over, can we come back, does my neighborhood have power?" the kind of things you need to know before you pack the kids up and drive 500 miles back…We were pretty amazed by the amount of traffic we were getting by people who were not even here. The Times Picayune's reaction [to George] was to create a hurricane bunker within the interior of the Times Picayune and prepare it so they wouldn't lose power and lose the ability to cover the news. Our reaction was, "Huh. We better create ways that people can communicate even better during the next storm."…Over the time between George and Katrina we had built up over 100 forums for various usage, a quarter of those were neighborhood or geographically based. When there was a storm, we would roll out a hurricane or storm centric page and promote those forums where and the ability to keep up with the breaking news and contribute to the breaking news. That's been a part of our model for storms for the past ten years. So by the time we got into the bunker for Katrina, we had Cindy two months earlier, so we had a good dry run. That one came right over New Orleans, but it wasn't a very strong hurricane. And the year before, Ivan came, and it looked like it was going to be a big one. This is 2004. We had a full complement of blogs now that complemented our forums, several of which readers could contribute to. So by the time we got around to Katrina we had a pretty good set of tools at our disposal. But more than that we spent the last ten years educating people that if something big happened we welcomed their input, and we wanted them to send us their photos, their storm stories that kind of thing. I think that's important as I tell this story because if we had just rolled out blogs, forums without the public knowing we were there it would not have worked. I think a big thing with this citizen journalism or this crowdsourcing or whatever we are calling it this week [laughs heartily]…first of all it has to do with letting the people know you respect their input. I came into the Internet with that being one of the top things on my mind. The last job that I held on the print side was as the op-ed editor [of the San Antonio Express News] and a big part of what I did was handle letters to the editor. We got thousands of letters a week…and the fact that these people cared enough to try to get their views showcased at their newspaper…if the paper respects them it benefits everyone. So the first thing I started doing when I got into the Internet was get into forums and reach out to the same people who wrote letters to the editor. Now they get published all the time. Building up that relationship is a big deal. I've written letters to the New York Times before, but I've never gotten one published [laughs]. My image is when I send a letter to the New York Times it has to go through a barricade of some very crusty Ivy League elite people.

Guys in tweed?

[Laughs] Yeah. But the Internet gives me a chance to get my voice heard. And I'm the guy that votes. A lot of those guys in tweed don't even vote.

Why do you respect the reader-contributor so highly?

Well, I guess our system of government is based on everyone voting and everyone voting in an informed way. That might not be the way it works but that's what it's supposed to do. I believe in voter education…but I've always found—and maybe I am just a human-interest reporter on my print side—but I just want to hear people's stories. I want to hear their experiences. I want to hear it from them. And I want to hear it without it being filtered through whatever filter the reporter is filtering it through. During the storm we had great journalists from all over doing the best job they could writing about the storm and shooting pictures, but the fact was they weren't up to their necks. They weren't watching people drown. They didn't carry their kids into the attic chased by the water. Getting those stories second-hand is never as authentic from getting it first-hand. And that's a dramatic example, but it applies to things like Jazz Fest and Mardi Gras, also. You know, the Times Picayune has a very [pause] jaded isn't the right word [pause] dignified view of Mardi Gras because, you know, it happens every year. Its like summer and winter. They have been covering it for 175 years now, and [laughs] they've got a set agenda. Nothing they do, nothing these professional reporters do—and I put myself in the same category as they, I am not blasting the newspaper—but nothing that they do conveys the joy and the human face of Jazz Fest or Mardi Gras the way that the people who are actually in the middle of it do. In traditional journalism they way you try to capture that is to send reporters out and to try to pry it out of people and then you put as much of it into a story as you can, and then you write a story that hopefully reflects it. But most reporters, and I am definitely one of them, wherever I am, I am observing. If I go to a party, I stand in the corner and observe like an objective reporter. That's just training. I'm not even sure I have fun [laughs]. But you know, what we do…on the lighter side…we just finished Jazz Fest. And it's a huge event and we cover it. And the Times Picayune treats it like huge event but actually getting across the simple joy and the feeling that is Jazz Fest is something that a journalist very rarely can do. So we ask people, "Tell us about your Jazz Fest. Tell us what it means to you." And it is especially important now because we are trying to recapture and reclaim things that were lost during the hurricane. And try to hold the spirit of our city together. And having people write in and tell us what this poignant first Jazz Fest since Katrina—which was last year—meant to them, it's really telling the soul, telling the story of the spirit of New Orleans and its telling it in a way that a journalist never could. A journalist could maybe philosophically convey that, but other than that they are covering it as a big music event. We are still getting pictures. Everybody in the crowd has the tools of journalism in their hands. If they've got a cell phone, they've got a camera, they've got a voice recorder, they've probably got the ability to send emails. And we've trained these people that we are a platform that loves them and wants to hear from them.

What do you think motivated people to write in? I understand why during Katrina people would write in about missing family members, but what motivates people to write in during something like Jazz Fest—when they are not getting paid?

Well, everyone wants to tell their story. That's one of the foundational rules of journalism. That's why you can walk up as human-interest reporter into a crowd and come out with a story if you are a good journalist because honestly everyone wants to tell their story. It's human nature.

But is there a difference in the motivation of the person who will volunteer their story when asked and the person who takes the extra initiative to log on and write something or upload pictures?

…If you go to a small town with a healthy newspaper you see that the paper becomes the forum where the voice of the community is expressed. And NOLA's case on the Internet, we are by far the leading site, but a huge part of the traffic is derived by the content we get from readers. And we have—at least since the hurricane—established ourselves as the place where the voice of the community can be expressed. The community wants to tell its own story. It's an organic being. For centuries journalists have stood in the place of the people, they've represented the people. They didn't have a printing press. They didn't have the ability to go from town to town. We were their representatives like elected representatives. But now it has been democratized to the point where the people have the capability—and of course they can go start their own website or go start a blog on blogger—but there is an extra added motivation for people to have their views heard on their hometown newspaper or website.

So then as a professional how do you do your job and how do you think professionals should be involved in this new environment?

If you were a print reporter and you wanted to find the soul of Jazz Fest, you'd go there, eat some Crayfish Monica, and talk to dozens of people. Get a bunch of quotes, and try to form a picture in your mind to get a hold of that soul in everybody's comments. Then you'd go back and try to distill it hopefully accurately. What we do is not that much different. What we do though is let our readers read everything people have to say and see all the pictures, and then The Times Picayune or we or both distill it. The Times Picayune often writes at least parts of stories from what people have said or uses what people have said as a starting point for more analytical stories. In other words, the people each tell a small viewpoint story and it's a limited viewpoint. For example, you can see what's happening on Bourbon Street during Mardi Gras on our webcam, but if you have a network of webcams all over the city you have a lot of little windows you can look out of to get the big picture.

So the metaphor is that the professional can take look at all of the different "webcams"—meaning people's opinions—to get an idea of the big picture?

Yes, they can see trends. Trends are pretty clear. We were locked away in the Times Picayune and we had few reporters get out a short distance and two photographers con their way onto rescue boats. And those people came back with very gripping, graphic descriptions, but our disaster was so widespread, that even if we had every reporter out in boats, we would not have been able to tell the story of New Orleans. So during the storm we got a package of picture from a guy who was in his house in Chalmette and he pulled out his camera and started shooting the water rising up his living room window outside the house. He shot pictures as he was climbing into his attic and then when he broke a hole to get on the roof. He sent me 83 pictures of that very gripping first-hand experience. This isn't a professional photographer this is a guy who is shooting pictures while he is having his house torn up. There are houses floating by. Shingles being ripped off and nails sticking up from the plywood. It was just powerful. There's no way anyone could tell that story second-hand…its much more gripping when you are hearing it from a coherent witness who is personally involved. We got the news first that there were hundreds of people trapped in St. Mary's Vietnamese Church from our forums. A guy with a blackberry was SMSing messages to us. We was saying, "We've got about 300 people here in the church and the water is

getting deeper and deeper." I think he sent about a dozen messages. And the last one was, "We've got a lot of old people in here and the water is up to our chests and the old people are losing the strength to hold up their heads." That was right out of the center of the flood and that type of story happened over and over and over again. We troll our forums and our blogs constantly for story ideas. The doctor and two nurses from Memorial hospital who were charged with euthanasia. One thing we do all the time now is a feature we call "In Your Own Words" where we ask people to post on a blog about whatever the big topic of the day is. Well, we were asking people what they thought about these charges, and there was just an overwhelming amount of support for these medical people and the criticism of the attorney general. One woman wrote in, "I was there. I was in the middle of this and I support them." So on our little patrol [for story ideas], a little red flag went off. I contacted her and said why don't you tell your story. She said, "Okay and I pictures." "Oh Yeah?" "And I have video." "Oh Yeah?" So I went in and interviewed her. And she had about 30 video clips and hundreds of photos she had taken with her digital camera. And her father had died the day before in the hospital and the family was there in a family apartment across the street. They just happened to be there when the storm hit and this woman just started taking pictures. She said, "I didn't see any reporters around I thought it was important this story got out." This is just a normal person. We've al heard how horrible it was there. You know, nurses fanning patients with chunks cardboard. Try to push gurneys up steep garage ramps to get them to the top to be pulled off by helicopter. She had video of all this and we did a video feature on it. She deliberately said to herself, "This needs to be reported." And that's the attitude we've been working ever since the hurricane.

I saw a feature you are working on looking to recruit bloggers from the North Shore?

Yeah, we are kind of in transition now between designs. The new North Shore homepage is going to be mainly driven by citizen bloggers. There's a few that we pay; people who are freelancers or people are going to cover city council meetings for us and people who we've vetted as far as their skills... Our bloggers so far; there's an active recall on the entire city council of the village of Folsom because they fired a police chief…he ran against a good ole boy system up there but he was very popular with the people. And they started a petition, I'm talking about citizen journalists now, through our forums and our blogs they actually got a petition with more certified signatures than people who voted in the last election! The entire city council is up for a recall vote and its probably going to be successful. That's just grassroots people using our site to tell the story, and using it to get information that people probably didn't want out. They are making it a political tool.

Do you get a sense of the demographic of people writing in or would you saw it's a pretty diverse crowd?

…Statistically speaking out city is so screwed up her I don't want to make any judgments about that. One of the first things I heard about that, I think it was at the American Presidential Council. There was a question, "Isn't it an elitist white medium, you are doing okay getting to the well-off white folks, but isn't this creating a distance?" Well, when we were getting cries for help, we were getting them from every area of the city. It has been my experience working in the French Quarter with a lot of the service people that even the kids that tap dance on the street…they all have MySpace pages. They are very computer literate. Same with gang bangers. They may not have a computer, but they have a cell-phone, they can send text messages because that's how it was being done [when they were receiving please for help]. I don't really want to have an opinion about that at the moment. I will say that the NAACP of St. Tammany Parish has a blog on our site. The president of the

NAACP has been very active. But The North Shore is so exceedingly white and well off you can't draw any conclusions from it. It is the most Republican parish. But Jefferson parish is our next target for this [blogger feature] and they are in the other direction. More 50/50. More of a range.

What has surprised you most?

I'm trying to think if I've had any surprises. The same spirit and energy that motivates people to get involved is exactly the same thing we ran into in my career with letters to the editor.

What about fact-checking? As an editor there's no way you can fact-check everything that comes in?

[Laughs]. Let's just say that as someone who has trained young reporters…I will tell you young reporters have no special skills over a decently educated American citizen, it's just not true. We hold ourselves to be experts in covering news but if you take a newspaper and look through it the overwhelming majority of what it in a paper could have been done by a monkey. I've been interested in the guy who has been hiring people in India to cover the city council meetings in this small town. They are doing it by watching the video, the web screen of the city council meeting and they are writing stories. Your first instinct, "Come on." But remember when a report goes to cover a city council meeting, when you are talking about the suburbs, that is probably going to be one of your most junior reporters. They haven't paid their dues yet. That's why they are sitting there. You are trusting that reporter to sit through the meeting... You have to trust that reporter to come back and say, "This is the most important thing that happened." If I have a blogger cover it that blogger is obviously going to be from that town so what ever is happening is going to personally affect that blogger more than it is the junior reporter. Sometimes the Times Picayune reporter and the blogger are at the same meeting and holding them up side by side generally the blogger tells a better story. Because he has more background on the situation and—if they are talking about drainage for example—he can back fill with details about the flooded yard and roads and what's happened since they cleared that big field for a housing development. He's got all that stuff in this memory. That's his life. But to me the important thing is how you label it just like everything else. We don't expect editorials to be totally objective. We hope someone at some point has really rationally considered both sides but we label it very clearly as editorial for exactly this reason. We are not putting a stamp on this saying, "This is true." We are saying, "This is how people feel." So in all of our user-submitted stuff, we make very clear to say, "These are our users. This is their stuff." You take it for what it is. There is an active philosophy out there among the online journalism geeks from Jarvis to whoever that there is a thing out there called The Wisdom of the Crowd. That is if you take a camera and take pictures all over the city and stick 'em up on the wall like a mosaic you are going to get a fairly accurate picture of what's out there, a fairly authentic idea of what that city is. And it works the same way with users. We take all of the user content that we've gotten during and after Katrina and you get a very authentic accurate view of what life is like here.

So does The Wisdom of the Crowd come from their numbers? That they are able to accomplish more than any professional group could?

It's a scientific principle. If you do one test on one test tube it will come out one way or the other but it doesn't necessarily prove your case. If you do ten thousand tests on ten thousand test tubes and 70% of the test are the same, then you know 70% of the time the medicine is going to work. That's the scientific principle. You do lots of experiments on lots

of subjects and then you come out with a general view of the way things are mostly. One of the problems with journalism, and a problem a lot of people have with journalists is that they have the idea that they are smarter than the average people. They're not. There are some journalists who may have become very expert in their field, but as a general rule, journalists are people who have been trained to stand back and observe and tell a story…one of my bloggers in Kenner is a retired police detective. He is by fair the most skilled investigative reporter I've ever worked with. He digs through documents…He would be a good investigative journalist for any newsroom, except he can't write very well. But he sends stuff to me and asks, "Can you proof my post." And I do, and he's good…Out there in the community something has happened in last two years and that's the wide availability of digital equipment. The Times Picayune has twenty photographers. I like to tell them, "You all have twenty photographers. I have twenty thousand." [Laughs]. A lot of those photos may not be worth the digital space they are taking up but a lot of them are good too. There are times where the Times Picayune has back-published some of their [users'] photos. And that's one of the goals of the company. It was a big issue last year with the story of all the people who got tattoos after Katrina. And this is on the lighter side. Rather than having a reporter look into this, The Times Picayune had us put a solicitation on our front page: If you felt strongly enough about Katrina to get a tattoo, send us a picture and your story…we got hundreds and hundreds of photos you couldn't imagine. And they did a front-page story from it. There were maybe two grafs by a reporter to lead it off and from there on out it was just the voice of the public.

So then *The Times Picayune*, as an example, is making money from advertisers and these people are basically working for them for free. Are there any ethical issues with that?

I would say first that sounds a little Marxist. [Laughs]. I have been to college, but the interesting things is…I have had to retrain a lot of journalists and the reason that's true is because college is a great place for abstract theory, but has nothing to do with the real world. I don't mean to put down college education, I just mean to say it's only a start…NOLA has a lot of ads. We have so many ads, we have to turn them away. You have to be on a waiting list to advertise on NOLA. That's a good thing. That means five years from now we'll still be here for people to do that. We are fulfilling a basic human need. And we are making money to allow me to get my paycheck and for me to feed my family, and for the fairly significant cost it takes to produce this…Certainly I am not going to apologize for the fact that all life is about supporting yourself and getting your family fed. And anyone who thinks that journalism or what we do can be done for free is fooling themselves. In all the conferences I went to last year, two main things stick out. One was hot-blooded young student shrieking at the media because they were corporations and they could not perform journalism objectively. And the other thing was, well how are we supposed to support ourselves and have food to eat! [Laughs]. And the answer is, well if you are against making money then you are not going to eat…one thing is who is going to do good old-fashioned investigative reporting when the paper fail? Even television can't support that kind of staff. Only newspapers and news magazines can do that. So that's a good question because we are getting close to the tipping point for newspapers because you have to have this much advertising and this much circulation to put out a paper at all. It's not a question of how many people are in the newsroom.

Do you think that crowdsourcing could fill that role?

Well, that's one thing we are trying to find out. I'm very interested in Assignment Zero because some very smart people are trying to find an answer to that question. We don't

know the answer yet. But if we can't... If anyone has the idea, that the general public is going to pay for investigative journalists, they're wrong. As a matter of fact, investigative journalists are often unpopular. Woodward and Bernstein were unpopular with the public…They brought down a presidency and set an example of what the fourth estate really could be. But the fact is when they were doing that, the public hated them. This is the same public that voted Nixon into his second term in [one of] the most overwhelming landslide[s] in American history…If the public doesn't support you, they're not going to pay for you. Investigative journalism is always…I don't know of a single case I can remember where they were popular for doing it. Woodward and Bernstein…that could only have been done by a paper who said, "Screw what's popular. We want to do what's right." And doing what's right rarely pays off. And anyone that thinks part of the public is going to pay for that very important part of journalism, is fooling themselves. If it paid, then TV would be doing it. We've got to figure this out before newspapers die…The public can fill in in a lot of these places with crowdsourcing journalists, but in the end someone's got to pay a very high-level talented reporter for months--sometimes years--of investigating a single story. That takes money. Whatever your opinion is on corporations, corporations have provided the only investigative journalism that has ever been done in this country. I'm hoping someone comes up with a better model, but it isn't going to be done with Marxist rhetoric. And by the way the Soviet Union never had investigative reporters and they don't now. If they try, they get taken somewhere. [Laughs].

Any thoughts of where this trend may be going, what the future could look like?

I think there's always a danger that even sites like NOLA could become irrelevant unless we tap into our communities. I think we've got a window right now because of our connection with the newspapers and their traditional links to the community…With so many tools coming out, and people being able to do things socially on the Internet, there's every possibility for a localized Google or a more in-depth Craig's List to take our place, so we have to reach out and we have to reach out actively. I'm very much against the idea that if you build it, they will come. I have not had that experience. All of our success has been due to active missionary work in the community before and after Katrina…A lot of time people don't get involved because they don't feel like anyone is paying attention to them. And naturally people want other people to pay attention to them. That's natural thing. And that's what we're banking on. Just real, natural human needs. And that's it.

Anything else to add?

You are in London, right? Great signal. Pick up any paper and look at how many of those stories needed to be written by a trained journalist. Forget about writing. I've spent so much time editing and re-writing stories from poor writers. Some of the best reporters are poor writers. Take that out of it. And then look at the stories and think, "How many of these really needed to be written by someone with a journalism degree?" You'll find there's really not that much in a daily paper that needed to be written by someone with a journalism degree. But that's what we've traditionally made our money off of. And the public is not dumb. They are not stuck in the 18th century. To a great extent we are. Certainly the 19th century.

APPENDIX 5

How often did you participate on Assignment Zero (more than just reading)?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Multiple times a day	12.8%	11
Once daily	1.2%	1
Less than daily, but a few times a week	22.1%	19
Once weekly	10.5%	9
Less than weekly, but more than once a month	16.3%	14
Once monthly	5.8%	5
Less than once a month	31.4%	27
answered question		86
skipped question		1

I spent my time on Assignment Zero (click all that apply):

	Response Percent	Response Count
Posting new content	41.2%	35
Commenting on other content	21.2%	18
Reading	72.9%	62
Editing	17.7%	15
Other (please specify)	18.8%	16
answered question		85
skipped question		2

I participated on Assignment Zero because:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly agree	Response Count
It is entertaining	5.3% (4)	10.5% (8)	32.9% (25)	42.1% (32)	9.2% (7)	76
It is intellectually stimulating	1.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	5.2% (4)	61.0% (47)	32.5% (25)	77
I can converse with other users	5.5% (4)	20.5% (15)	34.2% (25)	28.8% (21)	11.0% (8)	73
There is a possibility of financial gain	22.7% (17)	40.0% (30)	21.3% (16)	12.0% (9)	4.0% (3)	75
I get a kick out of seeing my writing "in print"	6.5% (5)	7.8% (6)	35.1% (27)	42.9% (33)	7.8% (6)	77
I think others will benefit from my contributions	2.6% (2)	5.2% (4)	19.5% (15)	59.7% (46)	13.0% (10)	77
I feel a sense of belonging to the Assignment Zero community	5.3% (4)	19.7% (15)	23.7% (18)	34.2% (26)	17.1% (13)	76
					answered question	78
					skipped question	9

When I participated on Assignment Zero it was because (click all that apply):

	Response Percent	Response Count
I had some free time	50.0%	38
I had something to say	40.8%	31
I read something worth sharing with others	35.5%	27
Other (please specify)	32.9%	25
answered question		76
skipped question		11

I posted (click all that apply):

	Response Percent	Response Count
Links to, excerpts from, or summaries of news from other sources	35.5%	22
Blog entries in the form of my own opinion pieces	21.0%	13
Forum messages to converse with other users	32.3%	20
Original reporting/articles	40.3%	25
Q and A's	33.9%	21
Editing	29.0%	18
Other (please specify)	16.1%	10
answered question		62
skipped question		25

When you posted content, was it written in the first-person?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	31.2%	19
No	36.1%	22
My style varied	32.8%	20
answered question		61
skipped question		26

How often did you include your own opinion or personal commentary in your postings?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Never	25.8%	16
Almost never	16.1%	10
Seldom	14.5%	9
Sometimes	17.7%	11
Usually	22.6%	14
Almost always	1.6%	1
Always	1.6%	1
answered question		62
skipped question		25

When you read an article on Assignment Zero, how important do you consider these qualities?

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Response Count
Correct grammar, spelling, punctuation	5.8% (4)	43.5% (30)	50.7% (35)	69
Factual accuracy	0.0% (0)	8.8% (6)	91.2% (62)	68
Objectivity	11.6% (8)	37.7% (26)	50.7% (35)	69
Author's passion	14.5% (10)	53.6% (37)	31.9% (22)	69
Urgency/Timeliness	14.7% (10)	55.9% (38)	29.4% (20)	68
Engaging content	1.4% (1)	15.9% (11)	82.6% (57)	69
answered question				70
skipped question				17

Have you ever made money from your involvement with Assignment Zero?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	1.5%	1
No	98.5%	67
answered question		68
skipped question		19

Do you believe you may, in the future, make money from your involvement with Assignment Zero?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	23.9%	16
No	76.1%	51
answered question		67
skipped question		20

How often did Assignment Zero staff or administrators communicate with you (including commenting on your posts)?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Never	10.6%	7
Almost never	10.6%	7
Seldom	9.1%	6
Sometimes	25.8%	17
Often	25.8%	17
Very often	9.1%	6
Always	9.1%	6
answered question		66
skipped question		21

Are you currently or have you ever been employed (paid) at a news organization?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	48.5%	33
No	51.5%	35
answered question		68
skipped question		19

Do you have any formal journalism training or education?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	47.1%	32
No	52.9%	36
answered question		68
skipped question		19

Are you:

	Response Percent	Response Count
Male	57.4%	39
Female	42.7%	29
answered question		68
skipped question		19

Your age:

	Response Count
	69
answered question	69
skipped question	18

Marital Status:

	Response Percent	Response Count
Single	47.0%	31
Married	47.0%	31
Separated	1.5%	1
Divorced	4.6%	3
Widowed	0.0%	0
answered question		66
skipped question		21

Highest level of education completed:

	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than high school	0.0%	0
Some high school	0.0%	0
High school	5.9%	4
Some college	10.3%	7
College	23.5%	16
Some post-graduate	17.7%	12
Post-graduate	42.7%	29
answered question		68
skipped question		19

What country are you from?

	Response Count
	68
answered question	68
skipped question	19

Race:

	Response Percent	Response Count
White	80.9%	55
Black	2.9%	2
Hispanic	2.9%	2
Middle Eastern	0.0%	0
Asian	4.4%	3
Other (please specify)	8.8%	6
answered question		68
skipped question		19

Political affiliation:

	Response Percent	Response Count
Liberal	58.5%	38
Moderate	20.0%	13
Conservative	3.1%	2
Other (please specify)	21.5%	14
answered question		65
skipped question		22

Income (in USD):

	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than $10,000	16.1%	10
$10,000-$19,999	6.5%	4
$20,000-$29,999	3.2%	2
$30,000-$39,999	9.7%	6
$40,000-$49,999	17.7%	11
$50,000-$59,999	3.2%	2
$60,000-$69,999	11.3%	7
$70,000-$79,999	6.5%	4
$80,000-$89,999	6.5%	4
$90,000-$99,999	0.0%	0
$100,000 or greater	19.4%	12
answered question		62
skipped question		25

APPENDIX 6

Excerpt from email sent by Assignment Zero editor soliciting survey responses. Sent July, 2007.

"…We also have a member of our community who we can all help now.

One of our contributors is working on her Master's thesis at the London School of Economics, and Assignment Zero is a main focus of her project.

She has created this short (takes roughly three minutes), anonymous survey and she will share the results of her survey with us when her thesis is complete.

So if you have a spare moment, please take her survey:
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=P4u0jBG5jmNlxyjaOEKOiw_3d_3d >"

APPENDIX 7

Brief questionnaire emailed to willing AZ participants. Sent July, 2007.

Hey xxx,

Thanks so much for getting in touch, and offering to help me out a bit more. The survey provided me some great insights, but I'd love to zero in (no pun intended) on a few areas I'd like to know more about. I have a few questions here…I'd love to hear what you have to say! As little or as much as you have time to answer would be so appreciated. Also, if you read or have contributed to any other crowdsourced news websites, feel free to draw from those experiences, as well.

Best,
Melissa

In your experience as both a reader and contributor to citizen journalism:

1. What, if anything, do amateurs bring to the table that professionals lack?

2. Should citizen journalists strive to be "objective" ? Why or why not?

3. What makes an amateur's story great (or terrible)?

4. Do you believe in "The Wisdom of The Crowd"? Why or why not?

5. Is it still important for professional journalists to be involved in these pursuits? If so, in what capacity?

6.Anything else you'd like to add about your involvement in Assignment Zero or other projects?

APPENDIX 8

Logit Regression Results for Inclusion of Personal Commentary in Reporting

Independent Variable	(I)	(II)	(III)	(IV)	(V)
Employed	-1.1786*	-1.1846*	-1.2533*	-1.2262*	-1.2368*
	(0.073)	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.062)	(0.059)
Age		0.00857			0.49631
		(0.667)			(0.640)
USA Dummy			0.52587		
			(0.513)		
Factual Accuracy Very Important				0.5181	0.0098
				(0.642)	(0.636)
Constant	-0.69315	-1.039	-1.0700	-1.1202	-1.4929
	(0.063)	(0.251)	(0.115)	(0.316)	(0.179)
Prob>chi^2	0.0728*	0.1537	0.1930	0.1350	0.1752
Pseudo R^2	0.0519	0.0541	0.0593	0.0595	0.0623
Observations	63	63	63	62	62

Dependent Variable: Inclusion of Personal Commentary Binary Variable (1 if the respondent said she/he included personal commentary in story posting, 0 if otherwise). Independent Variable: Employed = 1 if the respondent was or is currently employed at a news organization, 0 if otherwise. USA Dummy = 1 if respondent is from USA, 0 if otherwise. Factual Accuracy Dummy = 1 if respondent claimed factual accuracy was very important, 0 if otherwise. Model used was a logit model. * indicates significance on a 90% confidence interval . Robust p-values in parenthesis.

Commentary:

- On the whole, the above models are rather weak in that they only explain 5-6% of the variation in the data. Only Model 1 has an F-statistic which is significant on a 90% confidence level, which means one can reject the null hypothesis that the beta coefficients for all independent variables are zero (i.e. all the independent variable do not have an effect). The other four models do not pass this test on a 90% interval so it would be unwise to make overwhelming claims about how the independent variables affect personal commentary.
- Despite the fact that most of the models above are insignificant, according to the F-test, the beta coefficient for the employed independent variable is robust and significant across all models.

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