



MUDIA: Multimedia Content in the Digital Age

Workpackage 1: Studies defining the wider context for media innovation

Deliverable 3: Prognostic study of media content usage

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1. Introduction: Definitions and reported trends

This report presents the findings of a study of emerging practices of on-demand media consumption. Among the points of departure of this study were the assumptions that “professional information providers will have to come to terms with changing consumer demands” and that “the public’s assessment of what constitutes news is changing profoundly”. The study aims to find out if, in the context of more immediately interactive media technologies, a demand-driven, or more “dialogic”, information practice can be, or is being, developed, and how this sits with established professional standards.

These questions have been addressed through

1. a review of academic and professional reports of trends in media practice, with particular reference to changing relations with users;
2. case studies of user-driven media practice in 24 online news services across four EU member states;
3. an online questionnaire-based survey of media professionals on their views of users’ roles in media production.

Within the wider field of digital media studies, analyses such as these are most frequently based on models of technology diffusion and adoption, on business strategies, on policy drivers, and on ‘digital culture’. We derived the analytical framework for our study, however, from the theory and history of journalism. In this context, it must be observed that it represents a significant challenge both to received images of journalism within the professional sphere, and to the closely related academic studies of journalism, to put the user/reader/viewer/audience at the centre of the picture. (We shall continue to adopt the IT industry term, ‘user’, although its usage presents some problems that will become evident later.)

From the perspective of online journalism, textbooks for students of journalism appear remarkably vague in their image and understanding of the audience. It is one of the very many valuable contributions of digital media studies to media studies in general that they have drawn our attention to weaknesses and gaps in received theories and models. Mass media have traditionally relied on their own judgement of what stories are worth telling, on a very largely one-way mode of communication and on an internalised image of their publics. This has been little affected by the advocacy of new forms of ‘public journalism’ or ‘civic journalism’ that seek to restate the importance of the journalist’s relationship with the community he or she ostensibly serves.

There was another possible approach to the present study, namely that of audience research, for example, through survey, observation or interview techniques. However, within the time and resource constraints of the present project we could see no viable way of undertaking empirical user studies in several EU member states. The mechanical ease of surveying users of Internet media through the Internet itself is illusory. Achieving representative samples, or even knowing how representative or unrepresentative samples

are, may be near-impossible. We see opportunities for further research based on, for example, qualitative studies of usage patterns of selected examples of online news services, drawing on interview and observation and on capture of Web server data. We shall return to issues for further research in the Conclusions of this report.

It was decided that this study would not focus on statistical trends in media consumption such as, for example, shifts in usage between print, broadcast and online media. Coincidentally, and tragically, the events of September 11th, and their immediate aftermath, offered a possible focus for a study of this kind. It was widely reported that user demand for news about the September 11th atrocities brought the Internet servers of major news organisations to a halt. According to a report from the Pew Research Center, 29 per cent of Internet users attempted to get online news of the attacks on September 11 and 43 per cent said they had "some" or "a lot" of problems reaching the sites they wanted to see. Two months later, reports of an aircraft crash in the suburbs of New York similarly had Web news sites struggling to meet demand; "sites such as CNN, MSNBC, BBC and the Washington Post all experienced problems immediately following the accident as traffic surged beyond capacity," according to a report posted at onlinejournalism.com.

It has also been frequently observed that the demand for multiple sources of information about the war in Afghanistan generated interest in more marginal online news services, as similar demand had done in the 1999 war in Kosovo (Hall, 2001). An Internet survey site, Hitwise, found that British Internet usage from home rose a relatively modest 7.4 per cent in September 2001, but also that British surfers stayed away from entertainment and shopping sites in favor of news and information sites, including those of the U.S. National Infrastructure Protection Center, the FBI, Afghanistan Online, The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan and Islamic Gateway.

What these reports and commentaries tend to obscure, however, is that the demand for *all* media surged in the hours, days and weeks after the September 11th attacks. The circulation of newspapers rose sharply in many countries in September and October 2001, as evidenced in audited circulation figures for the relevant three-month and six-month periods.

The intensified demand for Internet-mediated news represents part of a bigger media picture, not a shift in usage between media sectors and types. Another demonstration of this phenomenon occurred in Ireland in June 2002. The dismissal from Ireland's World Cup squad of the team captain Roy Keane generated more demand on the Ireland.com news service over a period of 24 hours than even the events of September 11th. But it also had had Irish media consumers buying more newspapers, watching more television and listening to more radio.

From the perspective of producer-user relationships in the online environment, the significance of September 11th may lie more fundamentally in the ways in which the 'audience' became part of the stories. The recycling of victims' and observers' e-mails into the pages of newspapers, of their mobile phone

messages into radio, and of amateur video recordings on to television news, brought users into the construction of news in remarkable ways. Similarly, in the Roy Keane case, the consumers became producers, not just through online forums, but also through contributions to very many hours of phone-in radio, and to pages of newspaper 'vox pops' (informal surveys of popular opinion).

These examples draw our attention to a wider problem of trend-spotting which we designate the problem of past, present and future. The historical, or past, problem has been one of discerning the continuity and the novelty in online journalism. The descriptive, or present, problem has been one of determining which of the many strands of emerging and current practice can be taken as representative. The prognosis, or future, problem has been one of distinguishing expressions of aspiration and hope from reasoned projections.

This theoretical and methodological problem has been reflected in the inconsistent use of "will", "may", "should", "can" and in other forms of imprecision in discussion of current and emerging practices. John Pavlik, one of the most prolific US writers on online news practices, has written that the inverted triangle form of news story is "becoming obsolete in the online news world" (Pavlik, 2000). But it is unclear what is the status of that statement, that is, whether it is an extrapolation from observation of past and present trends, whether it is a prediction, or whether it is the expression of a hope.

In the European context, Dutch researcher Mark Deuze has contributed valuably to the literature on online journalism. He bases one analysis on "ideal-typical" forms of online journalism as elaborated by "an increasing number of professionals and academics" (Deuze, 2001). Implicitly, Deuze's reference to increasing numbers attaches to these ideal-typical forms added weight as identifiable practices or trends. But this meaning remains implicit.

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press engages in a quite different kind of trend-spotting through frequent, and comparable, surveys of representative samples of the United States population. The Center found in a 1999 survey of US Internet users, that "three-in-four Internet news consumers (75%) say they get more of their news from traditional outlets, while only 11% say they are now using print and broadcast outlets less" (Pew Research Center, 1999). But British journalism lecturer Jim Hall wrote in the introduction to *Online Journalism: a critical primer*. "Within five years more people in the developed world will get their news from the Internet rather than from a daily paper" (Hall, 2001). Here again, the status of this statement is unclear. The uncertainty is compounded by the use of language: "will get their news" could refer to some, much, most, or all of their news.

These few examples are intended to underline the difficulty of identifying trends and emerging practices, and, thereby, of offering scenarios and prognoses. Some of this difficulty, as reflected in the published literature, may arise from the provenance and purpose of research in this field. Surveying research on online journalism from a European perspective Kopper and

colleagues noted that most such research was conducted by media institutions and most was privately funded (Kopper et al, 2000). It has tended, therefore, to be ad hoc, seeking to address conjunctural business or technical issues rather than offering balanced assessment of what was happening, or what might reasonably be expected to happen, in the sector. Kopper and colleagues wondered, with justification, if public institutions were finding it difficult to “react to the pace of changes in mass communication”. Some years earlier, Deuze noted the residual effect of old media loyalties on research in online journalism: “They [published studies of online journalism] look at online newsmedia with a focus on assumed changes in the function and presentation of the traditional newspaper” (Deuze, 1998). We shall have reason to return later to the subject of pace of change in the conclusions to this report.

2. Changing roles of journalism

The review of theoretical and professional analysis and commentary on trends in media practice, with particular reference to changing relations with users, allows us to distinguish several topic areas within which descriptive and prognostic analysis is conducted:

- New modes of interaction between producers and consumers, that tend to blur the boundaries between them and to strengthen the role of users in the total content-generating process
- New forms of story-telling, in which Web enhancements add user value – context, explanation, illustration – to latest (‘news’) information and facilitate diverse user pathways through the information
- New forms of production based on the gathering and sharing of information among (non-professional) users
- Shifting definitions and demarcations of “journalism” as a professional and social practice

In the first two of these categories, the analyses tend to focus on the practices of the media ‘insiders’, but include how they respond to, and incorporate, the contributions of ‘outsiders’. They look, for example, at applications of interactivity and how media organisations handle user e-mail, facilitate user contributions, and decide on inclusion of other interactive features.

In the latter two categories, the analyses tend to focus on the emergence of new media forms that go beyond Web-enhanced versions of established models, enlarging the field of news production, moving or obliterating the boundaries between journalists and non-journalists, and inviting revision of the inherited definitions of journalism.

In the conduct and analysis of our case studies, we are situating ourselves in the first half of this field, and concentrating on the issues arising in the first of the four topic areas listed above (“new modes of interaction”). Our selection of media organisations included some that actively promoted user contributions,

but all have one or more media professionals operating at their centre, as moderators, but also, crucially, as generators of the primary content.

If this study were to be broadened, we might consider the contribution of community media that are based largely on unmoderated discussion. We might also consider the significance of web logs that are generally the work of enthusiastic individuals who provide signposts – with or without their own added commentary – to sites they have identified as interesting or intriguing. The best-known example of the community site is probably slashdot.com, of whose users' contributions it has been said that they “frequently upstage the 'official' news, and it is a testament to their quality that reading the primary source is often unnecessary” (Priestley, 1999). This observation reflects how the user discussions frequently start in response to conventional media reports or comments but take on a life of their own.

The emergence of these media forms gives new force to the analyses of some years ago that received theoretical models of journalism need radical revision. It was argued, for example, that the defining concepts of gatekeeping and agenda-setting needed to be “synthesised” with a “theoretical approach that explores the role of journalism as a community builder” (Singer, 1998), that the traditional ‘vertical’ model of journalism was challenged by the development of ‘horizontal’ means of mass communication through the Internet (Bardoel, 1996), or that journalists were “losing their importance in communication as authoritative and autonomous producers of messages” (Demers, 1996).

For present purposes, however, we concentrate on the ways in which media professionals exploit the interactive features of the World Wide Web to build new relations with users. In his earlier, more optimistic commentaries on new media developments, John Pavlik foresaw a renaissance of journalism through the adoption and adaptation of Internet-based technologies. He saw that the Internet's features allowed information to be presented in a personally engaging manner – thus, in a new kind of relationship between producer and consumer – and he anticipated that, by use of these means, journalism would be transformed (Pavlik, 1997). Pavlik offered a view of online journalism's development in several phases, progressing through increasing innovation, and through increasing responsiveness to users' interests and inputs. His more recent analyses are rather less optimistic about the capacity of new media, as he once put it, to “transform journalism” but he claims to see “the emergence of ... a two-way symmetric model of communication in 21st century news operations” (Pavlik, 2000).

Other analysts who have attempted to identify waves, or phases, in the development of online news publishing see closer, more active relations between producers and users as a defining characteristic of the current phase. According to J.D.Lasica, a prolific commentator on online journalism, early online journalism “consisted of building elaborate, if unwieldy, news portals to attract a mass audience”, but the latest stage of its development “involves forging deeper customer relationships with users to build customer intimacy, spurring more frequent visits and, eventually, enticing people to open their

wallets” (Lasica, 2002). In this latter stage of development, online journalism embraces various forms of interactivity and personalization. Support for this view comes from Larry Pryor, senior executive editor of Online Journalism Review: “The relationship between network owners and end-users is becoming more of a partnership. Networks are ...Developing new ways to present community news and building more interactivity into their coverage. Many are using forums and surveys tied to stories as ways for users to have a dialogue with each other or with a reporter” (Pryor, 2002).

In the pre-Web era, some new media analysts and advocates – and the differences are not always clear – had developed the model of the user-based medium without professional intermediation. The Daily Me, as it was known, had been proposed as a futuristic project before the development of the Web; with the roll-out of the Web as a medium of commercial publishing, the Daily Me found a viable platform. Media professionals who became technology gurus subscribed to the notion that the function of online media was to give the reader what they wanted, and that the readers’ wants could be captured and met by means of databases and information retrieval software. This was the basis, for example, of the notion of the newspaper “in an edition of one” (Negroponte, 1995).

For social and psychological reasons that ought to have been obvious, the Daily Me proved to be a non-starter. But a modified version of that model was still being espoused in the earlier days of Web news publishing under the banner of ‘pull’ rather than ‘push’ media. Leah Gentry, who moved from newspaper journalism to online services, expressed it this way: “Say you have a user who has set up a customization agent so that he or she gets favourite sports teams’ news and selected stocks. OK, the president is assassinated. That’s a gimme. You override and give them that headline regardless of stated news preferences.” After this apparently reluctant concession, Gentry went on quickly to ask in tendentious terms, “At what point do you stop respecting the wishes of the user and start feeding them what you think is important?” (Harper, 1997)

Established journalists tended to dismiss this kind of highly individualized news service as a denial of news media’s community-building functions (see, for example, Fuller, 1996). A report on the future of newspapers in Europe noted that “the Internet ... allows for discussion beyond the Letter to the Editor page, for contact between journalists, editors and readers, and for relevant information about readers’ preferences and choices” (van Dusseldorp, Scullion and Bierhoff, 1999). But, recalling primary professional journalism values, the report added that “the plurality of opinions is such that one can easily seek out news sources that only ever cater to one’s personal bias, with no desire for objectivity or relevance”.

Considerations such as these, but also user behaviour, mean that even the attenuated forms of personalised news that feature on many online services have not been a dominant feature of those services. According to the Pew Research Center 1999 survey cited earlier, “nearly one-fifth of Internet users

get customized news reports and an equal number receive emailed news” (Pew Research Center, 1999). But, in view of earlier expectations, that “nearly” might well have been expressed as “only”.

So, between the fading faith in the development of a new, more personally engaging journalism, and the failure of the project of personalised media, where have analyses of online news media identified the potential and reality of new producer-user relations? These are, we propose, in the dimensions of practical procedures, production formats and professional values.

Within the realm of practical procedures, online news media have to face the challenge of a changed information environment. Many of the sources used in journalism are themselves active as direct publishers. Many individuals within the publics addressed by journalism are active as information-seekers, some too as information-providers. Users may have access to the source material from which news reports published in newspapers, magazines, and broadcast on television and radio are generated. On this basis, it has been argued that journalists need to re-invent themselves and their practices, giving greater emphasis to the role of orienting readers within a sea of available information than to that of re-telling the stories. In many instances, the most valuable contribution a journalist may be able to make is to provide a map of the various positions with appropriate signposts to relevant material.

Hypertextual and interactive production formats allow news producers to offer users different routes through news material, according to their own previous knowledge of the topic or their level of interest. In this way, users become more active and, across the range of their different expectations and experiences, they assemble multiple meanings from the supplied material. The space in online news media to add context and explanation is, for all practical purposes, unlimited. Allied to discussion forums, this is seen as redefining news as open process, rather than as closed product.

Where media professionals do seek to adapt to an Internet culture of information sharing and exchange, they are immediately challenged in respect of traditional professional values such as the commitment to “balance”, and to authoritative sources. Reviewing early manifestations of online journalism, Jay Black suggested that a new model of journalism might be emerging in which stories are presented as “hypotheses tested and retested from multiple perspectives” (Black, 1996). In other words, the final nails have been driven into the coffin of “objectivity”, as previously understood and advocated. Black went on to urge that journalists should be more willing to accept feedback, give expression to more voices and, overall, be more accountable in their work practices. In a revealing shift from description to exhortation that is characteristic of much writing in this topic area, Black once again draws our attention to the fluid boundaries between trend-spotting, prediction and aspiration.

3. Understanding and applying interactivity

It is clear that richer, dialogic forms of communication between author and reader are possible in the online environment; the reader can have access to the reporter's original data, set the reporter's conclusions alongside their own or the reporter's own point of departure, and can submit their own comments to the authors and to other users. These possibilities and practices give added value to news material, but also facilitate diverse user experiences and producer-user interchanges.

But what proportion of users want to follow these paths to additional information or to exchanges with producers and sources? Some studies of online news suggest that enhancements are not wanted, that users prefer more predictable, sequential forms. Whether for this reason or for reasons of economy, many online news publishers have retreated from innovation in procedures and formats. The news content that is currently – and for some years – ‘king’ is breaking news in short, frequently updated telegrams. News in this traditional commodity form has become a preferred means of attracting users to information-based sites and to keep them coming back.

The Internet is, by definition, an interactive medium but not every communication mediated by the Internet is interactive (Schultz, 1999). Receivers of messages on the Internet “may or may not move fluidly from their role as audience members to producers of messages” (Morris and Ogan, 1996). What role do media professionals play in pointing users to additional information through hyperlinks, in handling readers’ e-mails, and in facilitating user contributions to news sites? An early study of online newspapers found that interactive features were scarce. Despite the potential for hypertext, 94 percent of online newspaper articles contained no links. Only 49 percent of reporters answered their messages (Tankard and Ban, 1998, cited in Schultz, 2000).

A study of English-language Asian newspapers’ online editions noted that “scant use was made generally of the Net’s capacity for ... allowing readers to add their content. Options for interpersonal interactivity were virtually nonexistent. Responsiveness to the user was spare as well, on average” (Massey and Levy, 1999). A 1997 survey of users of New York Times online forums showed that they contributed on average twice a week to those forums, but 74 per cent could not remember receiving any feedback from newspaper staff to their messages to staff or to forums (Schultz, 2000).

A close analysis of 100 US newspaper sites found that 67 percent did not provide direct e-mail links from the stories to the authors and only 10 newspapers provided author e-mail links as a general pattern. Thirty-three ran discussion forums. The author developed a scoring system for interactive features which allowed for a possible maximum score of 15 points; the mean score in the sample of 100 sites was 4.1 (Schultz, 1999).

However, an International Labour Organisation report on information technologies in the media and entertainment industries reported a BBC News

Online executive saying, "We're now getting much greater involvement from the people in the story itself. The journalist's business is becoming much more closely connected to its subjects, and this makes for better reporting and a better relationship between the news organization and its readers. Right now there are four people just sorting through readers' e-mails, so every day we have this immense interaction with our readers. This is fundamentally changing journalism" (International Labour Organization, 2000).

These and other studies suggest there are significant differences between journalists of different generations and professional cultures, and in different media enterprise-types. Some of those who have grown up in, or grown over into, a new-media culture regard reader e-mails as significant source material, or, in the words of Salon founder David Talbot, a means of "keeping us honest". Daniel Kadlec, a columnist with Time, said: "Through e-mail, I have built a library of people out in the world who I can get in touch with to provide different perspectives on financial stories ...It's extra input" (Solomon, 1997).

A review of the self-publishers of 'me-zines' noted the "give-and-take" in the relationships between publishers and readers who "often correct, amend, and elaborate on the things they read" while "the writers often incorporate these new perspectives and bits of information into later items, usually with a nod to the source" (Cunningham, 2001). There are many more traditionally minded journalists, however, who resent the imposition of an additional workload, without compensation. "Online newspapers seem to consider themselves interactive if they provide some hyperlinks and e-mail addresses", according to the authors of a study of interactive features in online newspapers (Kenney et al, 2000). "Even when more thought is given to interactivity, the concept is seldom integrated into a theory of mass communication".

Clues as to the attitudes of European media professional to feedback and interactivity can be found in surveys of Dutch and Flemish online journalists. Interactivity comes second to speed and immediacy in their ranking of four key concepts but over three-quarters of Flemish respondents rated interaction with readers important or very important (Deuze and Paulussen, 2002). Over two thirds of Dutch respondents agreed with the statement that online journalists must sustain a strong interactive relationship with their readers. Nearly three-quarters of Flemish and Dutch respondents rate providing platforms for discussion an important or very important journalistic task. The findings are not unambiguous, however; when compared with Dutch journalists across all media, Dutch online journalists gave significantly less emphasis to such tasks as providing analysis of complex problems (ranked number 1 among journalists of all media) and giving the public a chance to voice their opinions (Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002).

Acknowledgement of the public's role or of the user's importance is an increasing part of a certain media industry discourse. Responding to the invitation of the UK Press Gazette to "name the biggest challenges facing journalists in 2002", the editor of The Guardian, Alan Rusbridger, said: "The readers are in the driving seat: if they want their news on a Personal Digital

Assistant rather than newsprint, that's what we had better give them" (Anon, 2002). This kind of statement echoes the notion of Web usability advocate Jakob Nielsen that "the mouse-clicker is in control". But does Rusbridger's statement mark a real shift in professional attitudes that is reflected in new practices in accommodating users' contributions and meeting their demands? Or is it a form of demagoguery that masks a marketing agenda?

With these elements of uncertain evidence on the changed views of journalists' roles in the online, digital environment, we turn to our case studies of Internet news services in four European Union member-states.

4. Case studies outline and methodology

In-depth interviews were conducted with editors and content managers in 24 online news organizations in four countries: Denmark, France, Ireland and the United Kingdom, with between 5 and 7 case studies in each country. These 24 case studies were chosen according to a number of criteria:

Site origin

The sample included both Net-native and existing media players, though the selection was influenced by the fact that other MUDIA partners had included certain news organisations in their sample. Consequently, in the UK and France, we chose only Net-native services, as other partners were interviewing established media players in these member states. In Ireland and Denmark, where SteM/DCU was the sole research partner, we chose a combination of Net-native and traditional news providers.

Broadly-defined user group

We wished to examine sites that had identifiable user groups and chose, where possible, to include in each country sample sites representing several categories: a health-related news service, a sports news service and a technology news service. This allowed for more accurate comparison between national samples. However, not all sites were as clearly defined as this.

Demand-driven interactive features

Our focus was on investigating the way in which interactive features shaped news content. To be included in the sample sites had to have at least three prominent interactive features. The features we used to identify suitable case studies included: discussion boards, e-mail alerts, subscription newsletters, mobile SMS services and breaking news services. This process offered a clearer picture of the common architecture of news websites. A database (see figure 1.1) was created to record the presence or absence of interactive features and allow comparison between national samples.

An online news service for the purposes of the selection was defined as: a regular, professional and ongoing provider of news and information on key subject areas. The majority of news services sampled provided a daily news service although a small number of weekly news services were included. For the purposes of this research non-professional information services such as weblogs were not included.

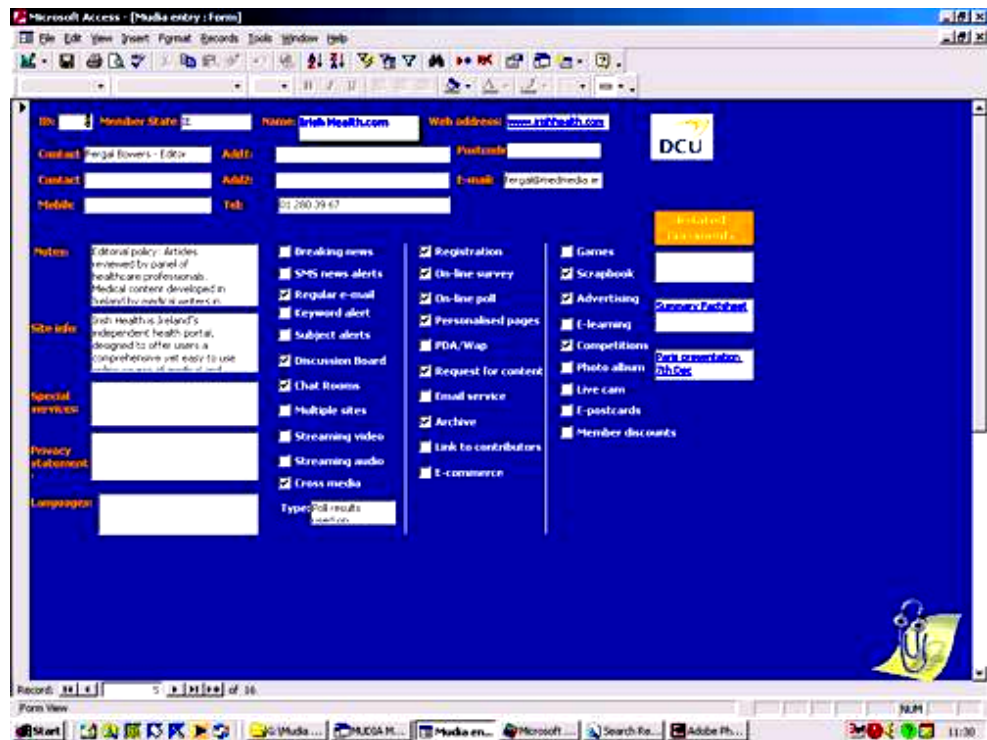


Figure 3.1 Screen shot of database used to record interactive functionality

In order to build a profile of the architecture of European news sites a large number of sites were reviewed from a range of countries. From this it was possible to identify the main interactive features being employed on both general and specialist news sites. This refined our selection process and determined the selection of our national samples.

The following table (figure 1.2) presents a summary of the 24 case studies according to the criteria of:

A) **Origin** – Whether the service is provided by a traditional media player (TM) such as an existing newspaper or broadcaster or Net-native (NN)

B) **Interactive Functionality** – A scored rating derived from recording the presence or absence of 10 specific interactive functions. These are rated relative to their ability to provide opportunities for users to interact with news producers and with other users.

Function	Rating		Function	Rating
Multi-platform delivery	1		Registration	2
News e-mail alert	1		Hyperlinks	2
SMS News alerts	1		Discussion boards	3
News polls	2		Request for content	3
Personalisation	2		Link to reporters	3

Using this scoring method, the following maximum and minimum scores could be recorded for each of the case studies:

Maximum score=20

Minimum score=0

Note: Hyperlinking in stories received a scored rating of 2. This score was awarded only to sites which linked outside their own site. Links to other stories or other content on the same site did not qualify for a hyperlink score.

Each function received a rating from 1 (low level of interaction) to 3 (high level of interaction):

A rating of 1 indicates a low level of interactive functionality.

Example: News e-mail delivery – This function sends news alerts to a user by e-mail which encourages the user to return to the site and in doing so forges a stronger relationship between the user and the news service. However, it does not necessarily encourage them to interact by communicating their opinion or providing other input to the site. Nor does it allow them to interact directly with other users.

A rating of 2 indicates a moderate level of interactive functionality.

The opportunity for direct user response is built into the interactive feature but it is not an independent unimpeded route for providing content. Example: News poll. A news poll asks users to vote yes or no on a specific news topic, usually with the added opportunity to contribute opinion to a discussion forum on the topic posed. However, news polls are strictly controlled by the news service provider. Topics are selected by journalists and the contribution received from users rarely enters into the wider realm of the general news content carried on the site. Nor are users free to discuss other news topics or issues. Therefore the opportunity to interact is restricted.

A rating of 3 indicates a high level of interactive functionality with the user highly encouraged to interact with the news service provider and other users.

Example: Discussion boards. A discussion forum (moderated or unmoderated) which is led by and developed through user interaction can be a highly sophisticated tool for user interaction with news producers and other users.

In Figure 3.2 below we indicate the interactive functionality score allocated to each of the 24 case studies. As will be seen, the scores range from a low of 3 points to a high of 15. It will also be seen that these differences do not correlate unequivocally with either origin of site (Net-native or traditional media) or with country base. However, it is fair to observe that Net-native sites were more likely to achieve a higher (greater than 12) interactive functionality score and to show implementation of all three user-responsiveness strategies, as discussed in the next sections. We will comment further on these, and country, differences in the Conclusions to this report.

C) Three models of user responsiveness:

Based on the analysis of Delivery, User Contribution and Editorial Integration strategies which will be presented in the next section, the 24 case studies were also rated according to whether they were implementing these models. We could speak of a significant trend towards demand-driven news provision if a clear majority of the case studies had developed their user responsiveness in these three distinct ways, and had achieved an interactive functionality score in high double digits. The ultimate scenario would be one where each case study has developed their editorial policies to meet user demand under each of these three models.

Figure 3.2 Case-study summary according to criteria of origin, interactive functionality and model of user responsiveness

Service	Mem state	Origin	IF score	Delivery	Contribution	Integration
Danish Radio	DK	TM	4	✓		
Netdoktor	DK	NN	13	✓	✓	✓
Onside	DK	TM	7	✓	✓	✓
Jyllandsposten	DK	TM	13	✓		✓
Ingenioren	DK	TM	14	✓	✓	✓
Enduring Free.	FR	NN	7	✓	✓	✓
Infoscience	FR	NN	7	✓		✓
Les Penelopes	FR	NN	8	✓		✓
Algeria-Interface	FR	NN	6	✓		
Sport.fr	FR	NN	13	✓	✓	✓
Ireland.com	IE	TM	9	✓		
Ivenus	IE	NN	7	✓	✓	✓
Irishhealth	IE	NN	15	✓	✓	✓
Irishabroad	IE	NN	14	✓	✓	✓
ENN	IE	NN	9	✓		✓
RTE	IE	TM	5	✓		
P45	IE	NN	8	✓	✓	✓
Ananova	UK	NN	14	✓	✓	✓
CE-Review	UK	NN	9	✓	✓	✓
Football 365	UK	NN	11	✓	✓	✓
IWPR	UK	NN	8	✓	✓	✓
Need to Know	UK	NN	3	✓		
Oneworld	UK	NN	14	✓	✓	✓
Outtherenews	UK	NN	14	✓	✓	✓

5. Case studies listed by national sample

DENMARK

www.dr.dk

Interviewee: **Linda Overgaard**, Online Manager, DR.dk

DR Online is the online service of Danmarks Radio, the Danish public service broadcaster. DR offers a large number of radio and television programmes as well as service information including daily news from Radioavisen, TV-avisen and Tekst-TV (tele-text). DR Online is the largest Danish Internet news provider, and offers a 24-hour news service which is widely used by Danes abroad.

www.ing.dk

Interviewees: **Henrik Lilholt**, Managing Editor, and **Kurt Westh Nielsen**, Editor, ing.dk

Ing.dk is the Internet division of the engineering news magazine Ingeniøren, issued weekly with three sections. The magazine sells about 84,000 copies and has 177,000 readers. Set up in 1994 ing.dk was the first Danish Internet media site. In 2001, the Internet editorial team was merged with the news magazine to form a single bi-media editing group, writing for the print and online editions.

www.onside.dk

Interviewee: **Casper Hjorth**, Editor

Onside.dk is the online division of the sports department of TV3, an independent national broadcaster. The most popular sports site in Denmark, it carries content from the television sports news programme, Onside, and complementary news and information. It was initially created to publicise the television programme and to increase credibility and status in the news area. Its news service has since developed to become a core part of the show's overall news provision.

www.netdokter.dk

Interviewee: **Per M.E. Christiansen**, Senior Editor, Netdokter

Netdokter is a Net-native health service originally designed to “break down the medical language barrier” between doctor and patient. Set up in 1998, it developed from being a Danish idea in Denmark to operating in Norway, Sweden, Austria, Germany and the UK. Each country has its own national version based on a structure of news, health factsheets and interactive

features designed to demystify health and build community groups around health issues.

www.jp.dk Interviewees: **Jørgen Schultz-Nielsen**, Editor and **Kartin Leitisstein Hansen**, Journalist, Electronic Media, Jyllands-posten

Jp.dk is the online version of Jyllandsposten, a major newspaper in Denmark. It began in 1995 and now offers a 24-hour rolling news service. Although originating in print it also offers video and audio content of current news stories as part of its realignment as a media organization, as distinct from a newspaper publisher. However, the online division is firmly rooted in supporting the print edition and has operated an integrated newsroom since it began.

FRANCE

(The case studies in this section are Net-native only. For an analysis of the online experience of the traditional media sector in France see the MUDIA report, The European Multimedia News Landscape, prepared by MUDIA partners, the World Association of Newspapers and Newsworld at www.mudia.org)

www.enduring-freedoms.org Interviewee: **Loick Coriou**, Editor

Enduring-freedoms was set up as a new alliance of online publishing initiatives in the wake of September 11th. It is a collaborative news and information service between Reporters Sans Frontieres, Human Rights Watch and the International Federation of Leagues of Human Rights (FIDH) carrying news content from each of these organisations as well as many other partners.

www.algeria-interface.com Interviewee: **Djamel Benramdane**, Editor

Algeria Interface is an independent news and information site created in 1999 and based in Paris and Algiers. It operates to promote freedom of expression, peace, democratic development and human rights in Algeria. It publishes work from journalists, academics, rights campaigners and specialists in a wide range of fields. Its prime objective is to further debate and provide an impartial forum for free expression on issues related to the Algerian situation.

www.infoscience.fr

Interviewee: **Catherine Dubuit**, Director

Infoscience.fr was setup in 1998 and is a Net-native science news and information service. Aimed primarily at researchers, academics and students, the service developed to carry a diverse range of content types.

www.penelopes.org

Interviewee: **Dominique Foufelle**, Editor in chief

Penelopes.org is a Net-native news and information service for women. It was set up in 1996 to ensure that the technology of the Internet was available as widely as possible, and specifically to allow women to participate. It carries news and information on a wide range of social and economic issues with a particular emphasis on women's rights.

www.sport.fr

Interviewee: **Emmanuel Fratteli**, Editor in chief

Sport.fr is a Net-native sport news service in France. It carries content on all major sports and sets its standards by aiming its content at professional sports users. It has a particular emphasis on the economic and legal aspect of sport. It provides a large number of interactive features allowing users to take a more active role in the site.

IRELAND

www.electricnews.net

Interviewee: **Sheila McDonald**, Editor

Electric News Network is an information technology-related news service based in Ireland. It was established in 1999 and publishes about a dozen stories daily, including reviews of web sites, notice of IT industry events, directories of IT-related services and features on new products. It offers a very popular personalized e-mail alerting service.

www.ireland.com

Interviewee: **Deirdre Veldon**, Editor

Ireland.com is the portal site of the national newspaper, *The Irish Times*, which established its Web edition in 1994 and rebranded the site as Ireland.com in 2000. It has been for several years the most used of Irish-based news sites. It recently introduced charges for 'premium' content and for its popular e-mail service.

www.irishabroad.com

Interviewee: **Fiachra O'Murcaigh**, Editor

Irishabroad.com is a Net-native news and information service and was established in 2000. It is aimed primarily at the Irish diaspora, particularly in

the United States. It enters into local partnerships in important regions for the Irish diaspora including providing the online versions of the Irish Voice, the largest Irish-American print publisher, and the Irish Echo, both based in New York. The site has correspondents in a dozen countries around the world.

www.irishhealth.com

Interviewee: **Fergal Bowers**, Editor

Irishhealth.com is a Net-native health news site. It was founded in 2000 by an established medical trade publisher to be “Ireland’s independent health portal.” The site editors provide hard news content and frequently break news stories that find their way to other media. This is supplemented by a range of interactive health packages designed to communicate health issues with a wide range of users.

www.ivenus.com

Interviewee: **Vanessa Harris**, Editor

Ivenus.com is a Net-native magazine and forum for women publishing news and information on a range of subjects such as fashion, travel and music. The site is published in association with Irish Tatler, a print magazine. The publications cross-promote each other but the audiences are considered to be different.

www.rte.ie

Interviewee: **Luke McManus**, Senior online producer

RTE Interactive is the Internet division of Radio Telefis Eireann, the national public broadcaster. Established in 1997, it has developed from a means to promote radio and television programmes to a rolling 24-hour news service today. Much of its content comes from the broadcast channels but an increasing amount of original content is created also.

www.p45.net

Interviewee: **Mick Cunningham**, Editor

P45 is a Net-native satirical news site aimed primarily at office workers in Ireland. Set up in 1999, it is “an irreverent entertainment website for disgruntled office workers in Ireland and further afield”, part of it a “newspaper”, Ballyhoo Examiner, that publishes satirical reports. The core element of the site is the active community discussion boards.

UNITED KINGDOM

(The case studies in this section are Net-native. For an analysis of the online experience of the traditional media sector in the UK see the MUDIA report, The European Multimedia News Landscape, prepared by MUDIA partners, the World Association of Newspapers and Newsworld at www.mudia.org)

www.ananova.com

Interviewee: **Simon Glover**, Editor

Ananova is a 24-hour Net-native news service operated by the mobile telecommunications operator, Orange, but established originally by the news agency, Press Association. It is best known for its virtual newscaster, Ananova, which is a screen-based simulation of a newsreader. It publishes to a range of platforms in order to “deliver real-time news and information to people wherever they are.” It was among the first to deliver news for mobile publishing on PDA and WAP and mobile delivery remains at the core of its publishing strategy.

www.ce-review.org

Interviewee: **Andrew Stroehlein**, Editor/Founder

Central European Review was founded in 1999 to offer new perspectives on Central and Eastern European politics, society and culture. It provides authoritative news and analysis from across the region with the majority of the contributors based in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and thereby bringing a unique perspective to the subject matter of the site.

www.football365.com

Interviewee: **Steve Anglesey**, Editor

Football 365 is the leading football news service in the UK. It aims to publish content for football ‘fans’ rather than simply users. The core element of the service is discussion and comment on news about British and European football. The service reports that users contribute about one-third of the content of the site.

www.iwpr.net

Interviewee: **Yigal Chazan**, Managing Editor

The Institute for War and Peace Reporting supports recovery and development in crisis zones by providing professional training, financial assistance and an international platform to independent media, human rights activists and other local democratic voices. The online news service covers detailed analysis of the conflicts and issues in the regions in which they operate and content frequently finds its way to local media in these regions. It publishes in five languages.

www.ntk.net

Interviewee: **Dave Green**, Editor

Need to Know, is a “sarcastic, irreverent e-zine” covering Internet and cyberculture to an IT-literate audience. It is published in e-mail format, though with extensive hyperlinks to sites across the Web, and is sent to subscribers weekly. The Web version is also plain text plus external links, and the Web site provides an archive.

www.oneworld.net

Interviewee: **Alex Lockwood**, Content Manager

Oneworld is a networked community of over 1,250 organisations working for social justice. It carries news and information from its partner organisations as well as providing a hard news service focused primarily on international news issues. It also provides a daily international news service for YAHOO! The content carried on the site includes detailed analysis on issues related to the environment, human rights and global health issues. It also provides news in video and audio format identifying its role as a media company.

www.outtherenews.com

Interviewee: **Paul Eedle**, Editor/Founder

Outtherenews is a Net-native international news service providing in-depth coverage of international affairs and conflict issues. Using experienced analysts, foreign correspondents and eye-witness reports in areas of conflict, outtherenews publishes news stories which go beyond the traditional format of foreign news reports. The core of the service is its use of Internet technology to allow people in conflict areas to tell their own stories rather than have it filtered through a reporter. Outtherenews provides news content for AOL, Yahoo! and the UK cable operator NTL.

Interview Methodology

The analysis of user-oriented strategies adopted by the news sites selected as case studies was developed mainly from interviews with senior editorial staff at the sampled sites that were semi-structured and lasted approximately 40 minutes. The interviews focused on the way in which the site developed, the relationship it had with its users and the manner in which user demand shaped the content of the site.

The questions posed in the interviews included:

- 1) What knowledge do you have about your user profile? Who are your users?
- 2) How do you build loyalty?
- 3) What interactive strategies are working best?
- 4) How does the user provide feedback? What happens to this information?
- 5) Can the user contribute to news content?
- 6) How does this happen?
- 7) Where does this rank in your over-all publishing strategy

The interview was designed to gather knowledge about the way in which the sites developed since they were created, with particular reference to user interaction. It attempted to build an analysis of the level of responsiveness of online news services to user demand for news and an understanding of the way in which the sites were designed in order to develop a more active relationship with users.

The interview focused on the interactive features of the sites and how these features ranked in the overall publishing strategy of a particular site. The interviews were conducted in the news organizations of the sites publishers during a six-month period (November 2001 – May 2002) in the four member states concerned.

6. Analysis of case studies data

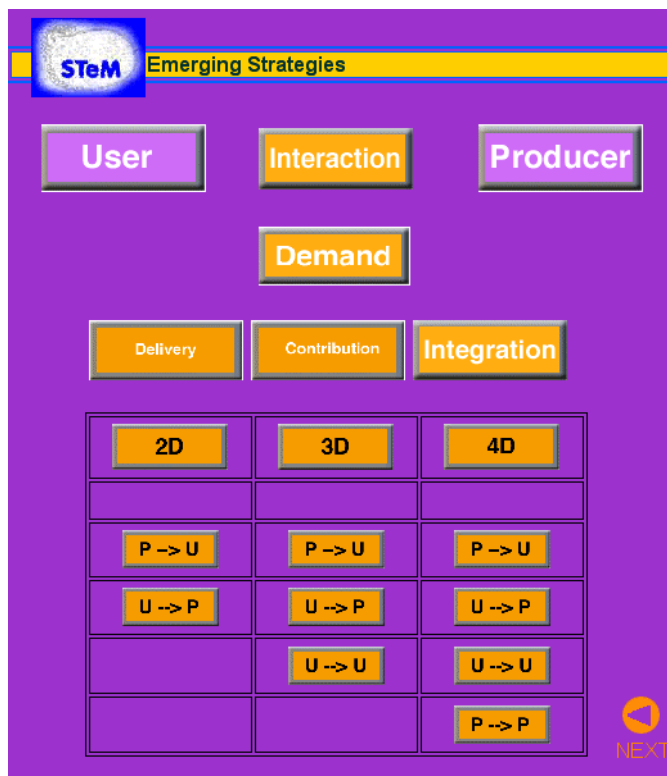
The dominant themes emerging from the interviews concerned the development of the user's role in the production process, including the development of a model of news delivery which involves the user in the production of news content. Developed through interactive features such as online SMS mobile services, e-mail alerts, enhanced discussion boards, breaking news services and personalisation options, user demand and user contribution were reported to influence the forms of news delivery and user contribution was said to have become published content.

Increasingly, it was reported, users are logging on to see how other users perceive or interpret a particular news story as much as to read a journalist's version of events. Furthermore, this user interaction can determine how the story develops or whether it remains active. The relationship between the journalist and the user has become more active and the result creates the potential for more informed, more relevant news content.

While the news delivery relationship is undergoing significant change the structure of editorial organization is largely unchanged. The traditional newsroom model focused on procedures for accurate, reliable and timely collection and presentation of information remains, and the roles of the editor, reporter, sub-editor, copy-editor and production staff are strengthened. The user's role is additional and is not designed to replace an existing news production role.

We found some differences between online news services of existing traditional news providers (print or broadcast) and Net-native providers in the strategies adopted towards users. Net-native sites appeared to be attempting more actively to integrate user contributions in their services; they were more ready to break away from traditional news structures in responding to user demand.

Taking an inclusive view of the case studies across differences of origin, and across the four member states, we identified three distinct models of user responsiveness, summarized in the following chart (figure 4.1) under the headings, Delivery, Contribution and Integration.



Three models of user responsiveness

The diagram illustrates how the interaction between the user and the producer online - relative to user demand - forms the basis of three often interrelated strategies:

- 2D - Delivery:** Based on multiple communication platforms from producer to user and vice versa
- 3D - Contribution:** 2D plus communication from user to user.
- 4D - Integration:** 3D plus communication between producers in different functions

Figure 4.1: Three models of user responsiveness

Three Models of User Responsiveness

1) Delivery

An active relationship between the user and news providers was evidenced in many, but not all, of the case studies. The primary reason for the websites surveyed to exist was to provide a news service. Their core product is news and the architecture of the site is built around this news provision.

"It's always been about personalisation, it's always been about breaking news quickly."

Simon Glover, Editor, Ananova.com

Although this architecture, including discussion boards, e-mail alerts and subscription newsletters, is common to most news services, the manner in which it is implemented is not, and it is through the form of this implementation that a more active relationship may develop.

How the interactive elements of a site function depends on the editorial policy that supports them. Many sites have dormant or ineffective discussion boards and intermittent feedback. Web sites employ a large number of interactive features to encourage users to remain on and return to a particular site. These include competitions, virtual photo albums and e-commerce facilities but in terms of news provision the most commonly used features are discussion

boards, e-mail alerts, SMS news alerts and breaking news services. These tools facilitate community building and user contribution. They are defined as active user-oriented strategies. Referring to this technology, Deirdre Veldon, Editor, Ireland.com, said,

"It really is a good immediate way to get news, but databases, that's really where you want to go. Pull down elective information. I think SMS has great potential for this."

Deirdre Veldon, Editor, Ireland.com

The possibility for interactivity was an incentive for a number of the sites sampled. Sport.fr, in France, saw the inclusion of interactive functionality as a way of building a new sports news service, one more suited to what their users wanted.

"There was nothing equivalent when our site was created. Other sports sites were there but not one that functioned like a directory and around discussion forums. It was the possibility for the user to communicate, to leave their impression of news [on the site] and also for sports organizations to leave their information and be directly consulted through the site."

Emmanuel Fratteli, Editor in Chief, Sport.fr

The majority of sites surveyed claimed that e-mail was still the most successful tool to maintain regular communication with users. All sites surveyed offered a number of e-mail-based news products which required subscription and each reported a large percentage of their users signed up for one or more e-mail product. For example, 80 per cent of users on the Irishabroad.ie news site have signed up for an e-mail newsletter. Similarly, the French news site Enduring Freedoms.net, reported that 80 per cent per cent of their users registered for an e-mail news product.

Oneworld also reported that e-mail was its strongest strategy:

"Oneworld is very strong on content but the other side of the coin is the connection (with users). E-mail is still very much the killer application. We're investing in new technology, group technology, similar to Yahoo groups, which can be organized around certain themes and which can let us make better connections with our users."

Alex Lockwood, Content Manager, Oneworld.net

A development of the e-mail alert is keyword alerting. Based on a personalization model, keyword alerts allow the user to select specific words which trigger interest areas, such as, Science, Ford, U2, or Compaq. When stories are generated by the news service containing these keywords the user receives an e-mail alerting them of their publication. This service allows the user to better manage the information they receive. Instead of receiving e-

mails every day from a news service they receive only news that matches their selected keywords.

“So that builds loyalty, because most of our readers are getting more e-mail than they want to read but our e-mail is a premium one in their inbox because they requested it. It matches their needs. They can rely on us to filter a lot of the noise out.”

Sheila McDonald, Editor, ENN.net

As mobile communication tools such as SMS, PDA and wireless networks develop, the demand from users for delivery of news content to these platforms increases. It would appear that unlike the experience with WAP, the news content providers interviewed will wait for the technology and the mobile industry to further prove itself before they commit significant financial resources to its development. However, they have not ignored this growing aspect of their industry. Many of the case studies have already integrated, or are in the process of integrating, new content management systems which will be XML-based and allow publication to a range of platforms with relatively little additional production input. They claim they will be ready to deliver their content to multiple platforms if they choose to do so and if industry incentives exist to encourage this.

“A lot of the services we have could easily be used on PDA but unless we have someone financing it we simply cannot prioritise it. I think that is the key problem for many sites.”

Pers Christiansen, Editor, Netdoktor.dk

“In the Northern [Ireland] elections we were getting an XML feed of results which was coming into RTE and onto the Web and Aertel [teletext service] at the same time with pretty much no intervention. If it were demanded, we could do it.”

Luke McManus, RTE Online

“We have a PDA version of our site but we don’t work a lot with it. If there is user demand or if there was a business model for payment for fast news then we could prioritise it.”

Henrik Lilholt, Managing Editor, Ingeniøren

In common with hundreds of other sites, Jyllandsposten in Denmark built a WAP site which did not succeed in the market. The financial costs were high and the return low, but although this experience shapes their policies around future mobile delivery, it did not in itself deter the company from planning for multi-platform output. If and when mobile delivery becomes a viable service for their users Jyllandsposten will be ready to provide it if and when it is clear that the cost of implementation relative to return on investment is favorable.

“The tools we have aren’t good enough yet for this. If it is to have any meaning then it is something that you have to have with you all the time and that technology does not exist yet.”

Kartin Leitisstein Hansen, Journalist/Electronic Media, Jyllands-posten

It was reported that employing a diversified strategy for news delivery was vital to build a relationship between the user and the news service. This active relationship allows the second strategy, that of user contribution shaping content, to be viable.

2) User contribution

Most websites will claim to have an active relationship with their users but upon closer examination a variety of relationships can be seen. A key way of identifying this active relationship is by measuring where interaction ranks in relation to the overall publication strategy of a website. Those sites successfully pursuing a more active relationship with their users demonstrate this by displaying user interaction explicitly and this is reflected in their editorial policy:

“We want people to interact with us, we want people to identify with the site. It encourages loyalty. We like them to tell us their news...It’s an important part of our coverage and an important part of what we are.”

Simon Glover, News Editor, Ananova.com

Ananova.com is a Net-native news service owned by the mobile telephone company Orange. Not surprisingly, therefore, its news service is focused on delivery to mobile devices, such as e-mail alert services. Ananova also actively seeks news content from users by mobile communications. The website explicitly requests news content from users in the form of news leads and story updates. A mobile number is given to which users can send text news information directly to editors. Ananova pushes user contribution to the forefront of its news content by encouraging users to comment on running stories.

However, the service’s main focus is on providing breaking news and the editors maintained that the technology they used simply allows them to do this more efficiently and more quickly. The news-gathering process is more active, their users feel a stronger sense of ownership of the site and the news product is made more relevant by the inclusion of user comment and input.

Football365, a UK Net-native website dedicated to football news, puts user contribution at the forefront of its publishing strategy. The site is focused on breaking football-related news stories but the format for this has developed since the site was first created. The site initially reflected the kind of football news coverage which is found in a tabloid newspaper but quickly realised that their users preferred to get that type of information elsewhere and that this wasn’t what they wanted to use the internet for. People were coming to the site to read news but also to put their own opinion forward. This encouraged a

new publishing strategy driven by better utilization of discussion boards and user interaction. User comment is sought on major stories and this comment is published and updated with the stories online. In some cases user comment on a major story can even replace the lead story on the site:

“So the original story will be up there as the lead for one hour, two hours maximum and then we would expect to have what you think of the story as the lead story on the site.”

Steve Anglesey, Editor, Football365.com

Irishhealth.com, a news-led health website based in Ireland, built its publishing strategy around user contribution. The site editors provide hard news and frequently break news stories that find their way to other Irish media but they also ensure that the user contribution remains an integral part of what they do. All stories are published with a request for user comment and feedback and all of this is published online. User contributions determine the way in which future stories are dealt with and facilitate the creation of richer, more detailed content.

“In a sense they are tailoring the site, the site is being tailored to what people want. They are doing that, we’re not controlling it, we’re simply allowing them a forum for it to happen.”

Fergal Bowers, Editor, Irishhealth.com

Special consideration is also needed for areas such as teenage substance abuse and the psychiatric needs of young offenders, it added.

"Because of their developmental stage, many adolescents may find it difficult to engage with the services. It is crucially important that our adolescent psychiatric services are accessible, appropriate and user-friendly for young people and their families", said Dr Halpin.

Your View

Type your message/comment in the box below:

News Item: Teens need own psychiatric service

Your Name: Gary (garyquinn)

Anonymous: Check this box if you don't want your name to show on the message

Comment: Type your comment in this box

Notification: Check this box if you wish to receive e-mail notifications of further posts on this topic

[How to use this feature](#)

- Alcohol and young people
- Drugs and young people
- Cannabis
- Inquiry into death of 15-year-old at St Ita's
- Teens appointed to govt council
- New body to ensure rights of psychiatric patients
- Bise in infant deaths reported

Irishhealth Psoriasis Clinic

Figure 4.2: ‘Your View’ - A request for comment dialogue box is provided at the end of each news story on irishhealth.com

Oneworld.net also puts the user’s role at the forefront of its publishing strategy. Representing NGOs and civil society groups, Oneworld adopts a partnership approach to publishing. However, they have had an impact in the commercial publishing sphere; their news content is syndicated to Yahoo! Weekly and daily e-mail digests of news content are part of the strategy to keep their user relationship active. Oneworld has discussion boards on all subject areas and is preparing to launch a new online collaborative radio and TV project (figure 4.3). Billed as a new form of open documentary making this

will seek video and audio content from users on key subject areas, which will be interwoven with other elements to create distinctive content.

“It’s very much open source. A collaborative project to get filmmakers, activists, interested people and students to contribute video clips of thirty seconds or more to feed into streams of stories. It’s collaborative story-telling via video.”

Alex Lockwood, Content Manager, Oneworld.net



Figure 4.3: Oneworld.net are launching a collaborative video project which will allow users to create and upload their own digital video content

The traditional newsroom structure as support

This method of news-gathering and content creation with user contribution works with the support of a traditional newsroom structure. In all of the sampled services implementing collaborative publishing the newsroom provides the safety net; the editorial team remains in a gatekeeper role ensuring that everything which is published is factual, up to date, not libelous and within the law. However, those sites not implementing this model claim it is the traditional newsroom structure itself which prevents this model from working for them. Their relationship with their users appears to be less active and built on a traditional one-way communication from producer to consumer.

In the case of services carrying content from an existing offline product, such as a newspaper or TV station, the existing identity of the product appears to restrict the opportunity for change when publishing online. Users of an online version of a newspaper, for example, are considered to know the original product well and it is therefore considered not possible or desirable to modify it.

“People know what the Irish Times is. It works. We don’t want to tamper with that.” Deirdre Veldon, Editor, Ireland.com

Similarly, the online version of Jyllands-posten, a daily newspaper in Denmark, although implementing a very successful publishing strategy overall does not include strategies for user contribution to shape content. They build their news site around selling the newspaper. Although their site is one of the most successful online publications in Denmark and they are increasingly building loyalty and user numbers, their focus is on supporting the print edition. Like most online versions of newspapers and broadcasters, their core content comes from the offline edition and this is supplemented by breaking news stories on a 24-hour cycle. However, major lead stories are retained for the print edition and go online only after print publication.

Electric News, which exists only on the Internet, also chooses not to build discussion boards into its publishing strategy. While this is primarily a manpower issue it was also a decision based on the editor’s experience of discussion boards.

“Rumour, foundless (sic) accusation and slurs reign supreme. Bullies take over the discussion and frighten other people away. I think it is the opposite of what journalism should be.”

Sheila McDonald, Editor, enn.net

Despite this the editor was clear in her belief that discussion boards could build traffic and give users a sense of ownership in the site. Money was a key factor but not the only one:

“I would rather keep it pure for the journalists only and if you want us to cover something we’re good enough to see the news value in that.”

Sheila McDonald, Editor, enn.net

Those respondents who said discussion boards did not have a place in their publishing strategy admitted that these were popular and important tools in online communication. They stated that smaller news organizations with more focused news content could more easily implement discussion forums and facilitate user contribution to content. For them – mostly generalist news services of established media enterprises - the type and range of news content they produced was not conducive to user interaction.

A number of these respondents' online services included a daily user poll (figure 4.4). User polls are found on many news websites. A typical poll is a general question posed by the news service on a topical subject and which allows users to vote according to a small number of options, using 'yes' or 'no'. Some services also provide an opportunity for users to submit their opinion of the topic, which is then published for other users to read.

Although these are popular and provide a certain degree of user interaction they are strictly controlled by the news provider and are much less interactive than open discussion boards or ongoing requests for feedback or comment. They also rarely feed into news content and in fact Jyllands-posten in Denmark admitted that their journalists rarely visit or read these polls or user opinions.

The impact of such polls, as a vehicle of user contributions, is limited. Instead of being an active space for users they become a supervised playground for users where their contributions never impinge on or shape the news. The fact that these playground spaces are popular with users illustrates that users want to take part in news-based discussion. The difficulty is that they are participating in something which is structured to exclude them, being built upon the traditional view of professional journalists as producers and users as consumers.

This example does not mean that traditional media providers are ignoring user demand altogether, for it is in the examination of the online experience of some traditional news providers that evidence of a third strategy of demand-driven news delivery emerges.

3) Editorial integration

Note: Although this section focuses on editorial integration within traditional media organizations the Net-native case studies also demonstrate integration



Figure 4.4: An example of an Ireland.com daily news poll. This service receives an average of 3,000 votes per day

in their newsrooms. They do not have an off-line newsroom to integrate with but they do all report that they operate a newsroom model in which individuals in traditionally separate roles work closely together, or interchangeably.

The integration strategy is implemented within the newsroom to develop the online role and to affect the way in which media professionals approach news production, in order to create a product better suited to user demand.

Typically, the online service of an established publication or broadcaster is shaped around reformatting of existing content. In the earlier phases of online publishing, it was common for online divisions to be physically removed from existing newsrooms. This allowed the online division to build their independence as a new form of news delivery and to develop their market but it also marginalized the online newsroom - despite the fact that much of the content carried by the websites of traditional media producers was created in the traditional newsroom. More recently, it has become increasingly common among traditional media producers to develop strategies which reintegrate the online division within the traditional newsroom.

“It’s one of our successes. Other publications often have different companies, they live miles from each other. There’s no culture, no bond between them.”

Jurgen Schultz-Neilsen, Editor, Jyllands-posten

This reintegration is happening in ways and for reasons that are tailored to meet user demand:

a) To diversify content

The most important innovation arising from the reliance on repurposing of supplied content was the development of breaking news services. This allowed print or broadcast producers more usually confined to static or scheduled news deadlines to offer a 24-hour online news service to their readers/viewers. However, this model has its limitations. A small news team can produce only a certain amount of content and at a lower level of detail. Furthermore in a defined news area, such as sport, a small news team of one or two reporters simply cannot produce the breadth of content required to service a very diverse group of users.

Onside.dk, the online edition of a popular sports programme produced by the Danish broadcaster TV3, tackles this problem by utilizing an integrated newsroom model and rota system which ensures that all staff, who are primarily broadcast journalists, spend a percentage of their time working on the online service. They do this to ensure that the content is as well informed as that created for broadcast. They reported that they could have had a full-time person working a 40-hour week but then that person would have been involved in the creation of 60 per cent of the content of the site. That content could not have been as diverse as that produced by a much wider news team on the broadcast edition.

“There is a sense of snobbery, that it’s better to do the TV part rather than the Internet. But we have a rotation system and it is one of our strengths.” Casper Hjorth, Editor, Onside.DK

The online edition is produced in the television channel’s sports department and can draw on the large resources and expertise of this department. Utilising this rota system, Onside.dk can produce content online equal in quality and quantity to its broadcast content.

b) To engage with producers of offline material:

Traditional news production is shaped by the specific media in which it is engaged. Broadcast journalists are trained to produce news in a visual or aural format. Their thought processes when formulating a story are focused on the product they are creating. Similarly, print journalists structure a news story in a format that suits the printed page. If the online edition of a media company is in another building, or indeed another company, and does not engage with off-line journalists, then these journalists will not be in a position to produce content which will work to its best ability online.

Ingenioren in Denmark operated its online service for some years with a separate, dedicated team. Through user surveys and other interactions with their target groups, they realized that they could serve their users better by bringing together in close physical proximity the established print journalists with their specialist knowledge and the online journalists with their keen sense of user demand. Users were reported to appreciate the resulting greater breadth of news.

“I think even the most conservative journalist today can see that the newspaper cannot keep up with the pace of the Net ... and this makes it an exciting place to work. Since we made this fusion of the two staffs it has been very successful.”

Kurt Westh Nielsen, Ingeniøren

Jyllands-posten, also in Denmark, operated an integrated newsroom from the start of its online publishing activities. The online team is situated at the centre of the traditional newsroom and literally surrounded by off-line staff.

“We are one of the most successful newspapers in integrating our online news staff. Our news editor sits in the middle. He is the most central person in our newsroom.”

Jørgen Schultz-Nielsen, Editor, Jyllands-posten (jp.dk)

Consequently, they can engage with journalists as stories are being planned in order to ensure that offline journalists are thinking about how their story will be produced online. Jyllands-posten have also begun to integrate video and audio content into their site. To do this, journalists who were trained in print journalism had to begin to think in a way which suited broadcast genres. Within an integrated multimedia news structure this brings benefits to the Internet edition.

7. Media professionals' survey: methodology, analysis and discussion

One of the general features emerging from the case study interviews was the lack of detailed information held by the respondents on user demand and user profile. Only a small number of the 24 news organisations had conducted recent user surveys. The others were relying on older surveys many of which had been conducted by the marketing department and so were focused on the business model and not on identifying specific user demand for news content. Also, due to a general reluctance to implement mandatory registration, sites tended not to be gathering information from their Web servers about user profile.

Consequently, the strategies being developed to meet user demand are largely based upon the producers' perceptions of that demand. To examine this perception more closely we conducted an online survey of news professionals on this subject area. Online surveys present several methodological issues that affect their representivity, and there is little that researchers can do to eliminate those difficulties. We are making no claims that the survey responses can be generalized to online journalists in the four member states, but these responses do provide some comment and counterpoint to the findings of the case study interviews.

The survey was conducted among media professionals engaged in producing online news content in the four member states selected for the case studies. There were two samples: online staff working for the news organizations in our case studies, and a wider group of online professionals working in other news organisations. Notice of the survey was sent to contact persons in each of the case study enterprises for further distribution to their staffs, and to mailing lists and web sites dedicated to discussion of online journalism. The survey was available to respondents online for forty days.

The questionnaire sought responses under five headings: 1) Personal Information; 2) User Profile; 3) Loyalty; 4) Interactivity 5) User contribution. In sections 2-5, respondents were asked to rank their opinion of a series of statements as to whether they: Strongly agree (coded 5); Agree (4); Mixed feelings (3); Disagree (2); Strongly disagree (1).

The following table presents the attitude statements along with the respondents' collated average score. These results are based on 138 responses. The statements are presented in descending order of respondents' strength of agreement, expressed as an average score across the 138 completed surveys. Also presented are the average scores of the individual samples for comparison.

Statements listed in order of agreement – Highest rated agreement first 5= Strongly agree 1=Strongly disagree	Combined average	Case average	Ex-Case average
Including hyperlinks can make a news story more valuable to users	4.32	4.30	4.33
Accuracy and reliability in news are the best way to build user loyalty	4.23	4.34	4.16
Email alerts about news help encourage users to return to a site	4.09	4.32	3.95
I welcome direct user feedback on my work	4.01	4.03	4.00
Users of our site have more opportunity now to interact with reporters than they did five years ago	3.92	3.88	3.94
It is important for editors and writers to read user contributions to discussion boards and online polls	3.89	3.98	3.84
I think about hyperlink possibilities when working on a story	3.86	3.71	3.95
Users want to feel they are part of the site	3.84	4.07	3.69
Publishing user contributions on a story on the site can make a story better	3.78	3.73	3.81
My knowledge of the users profile informs the work I do	3.69	3.94	3.54
User contribution can add to the substance and structure of a story	3.63	3.65	3.61
I am well informed about the types of information our users access most	3.63	3.67	3.60
Personalisation features such as SMS services help encourage users to return to a site	3.55	3.75	3.47
I know the profile of our site's users	3.51	3.88	3.29
Users want to interact directly with reporters and editors online	3.47	3.53	3.44
User contributions will be even more important when users start submitting audio and video	3.16	3.44	3.00
I am well informed about usage of our service through user tracking	3.15	3.28	3.08
I leave it to users to make their own judgment about the relevance of links	3.11	3.09	3.12
News is created by media professionals; user contribution should be controlled in the manner of reader's letters to newspapers	2.96	2.75	3.09
User loyalty is built mainly through marketing and brand awareness	2.67	2.67	2.67
Users want to use a single trusted source for online news	2.54	2.65	2.47
User profile is not an important factor when selecting news	2.33	2.17	2.43

Note: 20 of the 24 case studies returned responses to the survey

Demographic breakdown of respondents (Total: 138)

Country	Num/%	Profession	%	Gender	Num/%
Denmark	63 (46%)	Reporter	46	Male	91 (66%)
France	22 (16%)	Editorial	40	Female	47 (34%)
Ireland	27 (19%)	Manager/Director	8		
United Kingdom	26 (18%)	Other	6		

Because the overall rate of response was low it cannot be claimed that the survey is representative. However it does serve as a useful indicator of trends in professionals' perceptions of user demand. The insignificant differences between the trend of the responses from the case study organizations and that of the response from the wider online journalist community suggests that the selected case studies were broadly representative of the sector.

Although the same methodology was used in each of the four member states, the response rate varied. The rate of response in Denmark was much higher (46% of total responses) than the other three member states. Danish respondents submitted completed surveys more quickly and in greater number. This was the same for both the case study sample and the wider journalist community sample in Denmark. The slowest rate of response was from France and the weakest rate of response from within the case study sample was also in France. The majority of the French responses were from the wider journalist community and not the case studies sampled in France. (It should be pointed out that the survey form was distributed in English and French.)

There was a relatively equal split between the two main professional categories of respondents with 45% identifying themselves as reporters or writers and 40% working as editors or sub-editors. Content managers and other managerial roles represented only 8% of respondents. 6% identified themselves as 'other professions' within journalism such as photographers, press officers and administration staff. The gender breakdown of respondents was 66% male and 34% female.

General trends of survey responses

User profile: User profile is considered an important factor when selecting news. Respondents generally agree that they know who their users are and that this knowledge informs their work. There is less agreement about the knowledge obtained through user tracking although respondents tended to agree that they knew what type of information users were accessing most.

Loyalty: There was strong agreement that accuracy and reliability are the best way to build user loyalty and that users want to feel part of the site. Respondents felt that users do not want a single source of news and that marketing and brand awareness are not the most successful way to build loyalty.

Interactivity: Respondents said they thought about hyperlink possibilities when working on a story and agreed that they can make a story more valuable to users. However, there were mixed feelings as to whether users should be left to make their own judgement about the relevance of links, rather than – and this option was not made explicit – having the news services provide guidance to users. Respondents agreed that they welcomed direct user feedback on their work but were less inclined to believe that users actually wanted to interact directly with staff. It was agreed that email alerts encourage users to return to a site but were marginally less agreed that SMS mobile services were as successful. There was general agreement that interactivity on their sites has increased over the past five years.

User contribution: Respondents disagreed – but only just – with the statement that news is created by news professionals only. There was general agreement that publishing user contribution on a story can make the story better and that it can also add to the substance and structure of a story. Respondents agreed that it was important for editors and writers to read user contribution to discussion boards and online polls. Respondents had mixed feelings as to whether user contribution will be more important when technology allows users to submit audio and video as user contribution.

It is striking that the statement of opinion attracting strongest support was that concerning the value to users of hyperlinks. The strength of support for this statement is underpinned by stronger-than-average support for the statement, “I think about hyperlink possibilities when working on a story”. However, few, if any, of the case study sites systematically added hyperlinks to news stories. Many, indeed, published the majority of their news stories in standardized text formats without hyperlinks, much less any multimedia elements. This apparent contradiction between what online journalists believe is the right thing to do and what the published evidence indicates they actually do is perhaps one of the more revealing results of the survey. It recalls the finding of a survey of journalists working for the online services of German newspapers that, in the majority, they wished to have more discretion than company policy and considerations of author rights allowed to re-work stories for the Web (Neuberger et al, 1998).

With further study, it might emerge that our survey points to other similar contradictions. For example, the strong support for the proposition, “I welcome direct user feedback on my work”, does not appear to be matched by acknowledgement of, or willingness to act on, such direct feedback. That, at least, is what is indicated in the published studies of interactivity mentioned earlier. It is perhaps revealing that respondents were much less inclined to agree with the proposition that “users want to interact directly with reporters and editors”.

Our own interviews point to another contradiction between the stated opinion of online journalists and their usual practice, this time in respect of the proposition that “it is important for editors and writers to read user contributions to discussion boards and online polls”. This statement ranked sixth most strongly supported of the 22 statements of opinion, yet, as we reported earlier, in one of the more user-responsive of the case study organisations, it was admitted that the journalists rarely visit the discussion areas or read the online polls. If this was true for that particular site, it is almost certainly true for many more of the case studies.

8. Conclusions: Dominant trends and possible scenarios

In the Introduction to this report, we noted the observation that public institution researchers may not be able to respond adequately to the pace of change in mass communication. The experience of this study would tend to underline this difficulty; in the eight months since the interviews for the case studies started, there have been significant changes in the status of several of the enterprises, including:

- Ireland.com introduced charges on its previously free-access site, first for its 'premium' e-mail service, then for most of its news content and archives. In the same period, the company laid off most of the staff in the online service.
- RTE cut back staff in its online service; this was part of wider rationalization at the national broadcaster but the cuts in the online division affected a higher proportion of staff than in most other divisions.
- Transfert ceased online publishing.
- Infoscience.fr temporarily ceased publishing.
- Central European Review suspended publication, but returned in a new collaborative venture under the umbrella of Transitions Online.
- Ananova re-oriented itself even more firmly to delivery to mobile communications devices ceasing to deliver email alerts and routing all news alerts through SMS and other mobile services.
- Outtherenews/megastories ceased daily updates.

Although business strategies and commercial factors were not part of our study, they imposed themselves as major considerations. Reduction in staff resources tends to mean a reduced effort in developing interactive features of web sites and promoting effective interaction between producers and users. One of the casualties of the cut-backs at the web site of the Irish state broadcaster, RTE, was one of the few parts of the site that did not directly mirror broadcast activities, namely an entertainment magazine, Ace, that included more Web enhancements than those found elsewhere on the RTE site, and that was building a tangible relationship with a defined community of interested users.

These developments add further to the difficulty, already mentioned in more abstract terms, of extrapolating trends, much less scenarios, from the study of individual online news publishers. Had we done these studies two years ago, our conclusions might have been very different and we might have felt greater confidence in pointing to future possibilities or probabilities. What we can say with some confidence is that, as long as present uncertainties in the Internet economy prevail, innovation in publishing models is likely to be very limited. It also seems probable that, as long as a viable business model for Net-only services remains so elusive, movement towards a more strongly demand-driven practice will be slow; it is the larger, multiple-media enterprises that

have the greater capacity to survive, or to justify their online activity as delivering a less tangible promotional benefit to other services. And it is they who have the more conservative approaches.

With these qualifications in mind, we offer some initial, and necessarily tentative, observations.

1. We see little evidence of a “new paradigm” emerging in online news. The “new paradigm” generally refers to disappearing boundaries between producer and user, or to a gradual merging of professional journalism with a range of non-professional activities, or to a combination of both of these things. In our case studies and survey – in contrast to the theoretical literature – we found only a weak echo of this notion.
2. The adoption by online news services of the range of possible forms and expressions of interactivity with users has been limited and uneven. In our case studies, there was evidence that, under pressure of business and other factors, exploration of interactivity has retreated as well as advanced over time.
3. The traditional communication model of professional journalism as a form of authoritative story-telling shows considerable durability. While this may be expected in the online service of traditional media companies, where deliberate efforts have often been made to ensure the transfer of the established ethos to the new medium, it was also found that some Net-native services were also guided by a traditional, hierarchical journalism outlook and practice. However, Net-native services were disproportionately well represented among the case studies implementing user responsiveness strategies most comprehensively and showing the highest levels of interactive functionality. Also, online services with a more specialist orientation - whether in sports, health, science or global issues – tend to show higher levels of user responsiveness
4. There is a discernible difference between, on the one hand, what online journalists believe they should be doing and maybe believe they are doing, and, on the other hand, what the measurable evidence of their activity indicates they are, in fact, doing. Even allowing for self-reporting in our survey of online professionals, the respondents expressed a stronger commitment to various forms of interaction with users than is evidenced in their practice.
5. Online news services show markedly weak interest in tracking usage of their sites as a basis for redesigning those sites and rethinking their publishing practices and user relationship. In this sense, too, the traditional journalism model based on a mental image rather on evidence of the audience survives. The survey of online journalists tended to confirm that professionals in online media were not confident

that they knew their users well, despite the means which online publishing offers to develop that knowledge in detail.

6. There were discernible differences along member-state lines between the case studies reported here, in terms of the adaptation to a demand-driven model of journalism. In general terms, Danish online journalists appeared most open to incorporating user contributions and to professional and organizational innovation, and French online journalists appeared least user-responsive and least innovative. British and Irish media professionals were in the middle ground. (It may be significant that Danish online journalists were also the most actively interested and French least actively interested in responding to the interviews and to the survey undertaken for the present study.)

These observations point to some of the more pressing research needs. Case studies such as those reported here could be considerably strengthened by research based on data capture at Web servers, online surveys of service users, close observation of usage patterns, content analysis of user contributions, and focus group study of users' experience and expectations. To test more comprehensively for evidence of the "new paradigm", the field of case studies needs to be extended to include explicitly user-driven services such as community sites and non-professional media such as weblogs. To explore more fully the national-cultural and journalist-cultural differences affecting the adoption and adaptation of the Web as a news publishing platform, more extensive interviews and focus groups with media professionals and with the new recruits to online media, who may not have gone through conventional professional studies, would likely be fruitful.

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