FROM TRADITION TO CHANGE: TRENDS IN DIGITAL NEWS REPORTING

MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

From Tradition to Change:
A Study of Journalistic Trends in Digital News Reporting

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The Major Research Paper is submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Professional Communication

Ryerson University
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Submitted August 14, 2013

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Abstract

The birth of the World Wide Web has made it convenient and cheaper to produce and transfer information to the receiver. Many online news sites provide information for free and the Internet and social media have brought on the affordance to self-publish and engage with the media. New media tools have made it easier to produce a variety of online blogs, magazines, digital papers and content aggregators. In the wake of the information era, journalism has developed into niche news sites, producing different types of news writing.

By analyzing news accounts from the same event, this Major Research Paper compares how news language, content and structure deviate between traditional and alternative online news sites. The study reveals that alternative news sources tend to report their news in a more subjective manner, deviating from the goal of being objective, a fundamental element in traditional journalism. Analysis of how information is structured in the news articles also reveals that alternative news sites deviate from traditional forms of the inverted pyramid style (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 82), reporting in a narrative, chronological fashion.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Wendy Freeman for her guidance throughout this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Catherine Schryer for her invaluable feedback and insight in news language and rhetoric. And finally, a special thank you to Paul Knox from the Ryerson School of Journalism for his encouragement and support in my pursuit of this emerging topic – the changing field of journalism.

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Introduction

With the sudden growth of the Internet and social media, the way we obtain information is rapidly changing. Online publishing tools have provided a venue for the emergence of digital journalism and the development of niche news sites such as *blogTO* and *Torontoist*.

With the development of niche news sites, the notion of a homogeneous journalism no longer exists. Instead, we are seeing news sites aggregate content from traditional news sites and also report their own news. And as methods of news reporting continue to change, so is the way news is written.

For this Major Research Paper, “traditional” media and journalism refer to news values and forms indicative of print-based newspapers and their online counterparts and “alternative” media and journalism refer to news values and forms that solely employ digital tools, such as blogging and social media as self-publishing platforms.

This Major Research Paper compares different news accounts of the same event in order to determine how traditional news sites — *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Sun* — and alternative news sites — *blogTO* and *Torontoist* — report their news differently. In the information era, many traditional newspapers have adopted an online platform. Meanwhile, the Internet has also provided a venue for new, emerging websites and blogs that also report news. This research paper explores how digital journalism sites differ in language, content and structure.

Background

The Globe and Mail, described as “the most authoritative news in Canada,” (Wikipedia, The Globe and Mail, 2013) began as a newspaper broadsheet before they launched an online platform in 1995. Initially, their online presence was merely a duplication of their print articles; however, in recent years, they have adopted their own digital presence separate from the content and staff of their printed newspaper. *The Globe and Mail* generally has a “conservative voice” (Wikipedia, 2013). Between the 1990s and 2000s, *The Globe and Mail* mainly supported the policies of Canada’s Liberal Prime Ministers. Following the 2006 federal election, the paper has been known to endorse the Conservative party (Wikipedia, 2013). *The Globe and Mail* mainly uses staff reporters to report their daily online news.

The *Toronto Sun* was first published in 1971 as a conservative broadsheet after the *Toronto Telegram* shut down and many staff and reporters shifted to the *Toronto Sun*. The *Toronto Sun* holds a populist conservative editorial stance and launched their online presence in the late 1990s. The *Toronto Sun* publishes news stories in a tabloid style, which “tend to be much shorter than those in other newspapers, and the language Sun journalists use tends to be simpler and more conversational than language used in other newspapers” (Wikipedia, Toronto Sun, 2013). As a traditional news site, they also employ mainly staff reporters to report their daily online news.

blogTO, on the other hand, exists purely as an online new media site. *blogTO*, analogous to its name, resides as a blog written by “...a group of obsessed artists, musicians, photographers, politicians, advertising and media types, dancers, tech geeks, food lovers, aspiring film directors, fashionistas and people for the ethical treatment of

animals” (About blogTO, 2013). Writers tend to blur between staff contributors and citizen journalists.

Torontoist, established on the Internet in 2004, aims to “capture the tenor and texture of life in Toronto, to evoke the daily experience of the city in words and images.... We try always to be faithful in our rendering of Toronto, and to be fearless in advocating for what we think might make it better” (About *Torontoist*, 2013). They define their content as “somewhere between that of a blog, a newspaper, and a magazine...” They “defy categorization” (2013). *Torontoist* welcomes citizen journalists, freelancers and contributors.

The growth and emergence of digital news sites have created multiple venues for news gathering and reporting. The idea that the Internet has provided a public sphere for information gathering and exchange provides a framework for this Major Research Paper (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 10).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach for this Major Research Paper is based on the Critical Tradition, in particular, Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere. Habermas's theory of the public sphere calls for a democratized public where people can freely discuss their opinions to reach a common goal.

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas states that prior to the emergence of the public sphere in Europe, a "representative publicness" existed where "the people functioned as a backdrop before which the ruling estates, nobility, church dignitaries, kings, etc. displayed themselves and their status" (Calhoun, 1992, p. 7). At the beginning of the 18th Century, the "establishment of civic rights... and the emergence of a free press gave rise to ...coffeehouses and salons and to literary journals where citizens could enter into free public discussion" (Finlayson, 2005, p. 11). Habermas's concept of a bourgeois public sphere was born through the emergence of coffeehouses and salons where "the literary public" could engage in dialogue and debate by discussing information distributed in the weekly journals. This type of critical, free discussion formed the essence of a democratic public sphere, where the public could actively contribute their thoughts and opinions. However, the rise of mass media, advertisement and government control brought on the decline of the public sphere as citizens became passive consumers (Finlayson, 2005, p. 12).

Habermas's theory of the public sphere provides a framework for examining whether the Internet provides a new type of public sphere, allowing for the emergence of alternative online news and the re-emergence of a more active, engaged public. In *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond*, author Axel Bruns notes that traditional news

corporations face political and economic pressures and restrictions (2008, p. 70-71).

Therefore, they are often unable to fulfill the role of a democratic public sphere. Blogs and alternative news sites are now claiming to fill this gap as they take on a more progressive role, using the Internet to actively update and inform the public on social issues not regularly covered in traditional news. Online social media tools, such as citizen journalism sites and discussion boards, have provided a venue for public dialogue similar to the coffeehouses of the 18th century. This research paper examines whether new media sites provide a public sphere that offers more engaging and subjective news writing, similar to the subjective weekly journals that helped shape the salons and coffeehouses of the 18th century.

Literature Review

This literature review will explore fundamental factors that influenced news language, content and structure, tracing the origins of objectivity in traditional journalism to the rise of alternative forms of journalism through technological advances in new media.

In *The Elements of Journalism*, authors Kovach and Rosenstiel define “news” as information that has been shared or exchanged. People have an instinctive desire or curiosity to know what is going on. Journalism is simply a device used to supply new information (2007, p. 2).

The language and structure of news has changed over time. Perhaps the greatest influence in news writing came with the invention of the printing press. What began as “news books,” in 17th century Europe, gave rise to the first newspapers in Germany, France and England. This type of information-sharing allowed people to be more informed, and gradually, “the notion grew that even the lowliest person in a community had the right to a personal opinion and that opinion should be heard in the councils of government” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 16). The birth of the newspaper and public opinion gave rise to a democratic public sphere, which also provided new forms of language — news narratives. News narratives were identified with the editorial voice, a voice that evaded censorship and created sensation (Schudson, 2011, p. 68). Language was subjective, often told from the viewpoint of an individual. With subjective language came forms of opinion, evaluation and speculation (Bell, et al., 2004, p. 277). During this time period, information in news articles was displayed “chronologically, with the most dramatic facts revealed toward the end” (p. 68).

The invention of the telegraph in 1844 introduced a new method of information-sharing, where short bites of information could travel over long distances instantly. The idea of news correspondence through letter writing and first-hand observance was replaced by the telegraph and a new form of news reporting emerged, where news was seen as a “factual product independent of the observer writing it” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 17). Within two years, newspapers formed a nonprofit cooperative called the Associated Press. News stories from the Associated Press contained information that “had to be suitable for any newspaper to publish” (p. 17). News reporting shifted from a narrative, chronological voice to a simple, neutral voice. Word choice was simplified and sentences were terse since they were “billed by the word when transmitted” (p. 17). A new technique for organizing news, the inverted pyramid, was adopted for news articles, where the most important facts were listed at the top of the article and the least important information at the bottom (see Figure 1). The inverted pyramid style begins with a lead paragraph that usually answers the “who, what, when, where and how” of the article, followed by the body, which contains facts and crucial details to support the main topic and the tail, which is generally background or extra information related to the topic (Wikipedia, Inverted Pyramid, 2013).

Figure 1: The Inverted Pyramid

Faure, C. (2001). Newspaper Production. *Media Studies: Content, audiences, and production*. Lansdowne: Juta Education, p. 2.

Prior to the twentieth century, journalists adopted realism. Realism was a form of telling the truth, “where the truth would reveal itself naturally by digging out the facts and ordering them together” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 82). Realism was born roughly the same time as the inverted pyramid.

Traditional journalism shifted from realism to objectivity during the early 1920s. At the beginning of the twentieth century, “reporters and editors were becoming more aware of the rise of propaganda and the role of press agents” (p. 82). In 1919, Walter Lippmann, associate editor for the *New York World*, became a spokesperson for the ideal of objectivity. Lippmann “urged reporters to fuse their professionalism with claims to objectivity” (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch, 2009, p. 92). His link between objectivity and truth-seeking was eventually accepted by journalists as a method to convey a sense of professional journalistic integrity. Though many journalists have argued that it is

impossible for any person to be objective, the ultimate goal of being objective is what moulded the impartial, neutral style of newswriting employed by traditional news organizations today. Canadian journalists adopted many attributes of American journalism, including the Associated Press style.

However, the impartial, neutral tone adopted for news writing did not come without criticism and debate. Many journalists claim that this form of news writing is not a fundamental principle of journalism, but merely a “device, to persuade the audience of one’s accuracy or fairness” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 83). In *Objectivity and Journalism*, author Steven Maras, argues that the concept of journalistic objectivity is both an ideology and a cloak. Maras reviews the history of objectivity in news corporations such as the BBC. “[T]hrough World War II ‘the BBC’s claim to accuracy and objectivity was, in itself, a propaganda weapon — a demonstration of the superiority of democracy over totalitarianism” (p. 181). For much of the 20th century, the goal of being objective became a mark of fair and balanced news.

In 1917, newspaper publishers in Canada branched off from their dependence on the Associated Press and formed the Canadian Press to facilitate the exchange of news across the country (Tasko, 2004, p. 3). In 1940, the Canadian Press, in consultation with national news organizations, published the Canadian Press (CP) Style Guide, to ensure language and style consistencies for newsrooms across Canada. The CP Style Guide is founded on the principle of objective reporting. Although the Guide avoids using the phrase “objectivity,” the Guide’s principles focus on being “honest, unbiased and unflinchingly fair” (Tasko, 2004, p. 13). With over 20 editions since its original

publication, the CP Style Guide continues to be widely adopted by traditional news organizations today.

From Tradition to Change

In 2007, the *Innovation in Newspapers World Report* predicted that in 2012, “...the Internet would be a major source of information” (Siapera and Veglis, 2012, p. 353). The immediacy of the Internet opened doors to new forms of information-sharing. “Many news consumers, especially the young, are moving away from the traditional media and toward new media technologies” (Sheffer and Schultz, 2009, p. 3). A shift from paper-based to online news created multiple staff layoffs, folding many newspaper dailies across North America, as reported by newspaperdeathwatch.com.

As newspapers turn to online reporting, they face competition with alternative online news organizations that have harnessed new media and online self-publishing tools to report their news. With digital and new media tools, such as blogs and other forms of social media, anyone can report and publish their news instantly. The technological affordance of online publishing tools has allowed for various forms of news writing and reporting. These forms break through and challenge traditional journalism values, including the goal of objective news reporting. In an era of 24/7 news and online journalism, news values are being “dismissed, challenged and modified, but also defended and reinvented” (Maras, 2013, p. 176). As digital journalism is changing, so are online news values.

In *Why Objectivity is Impossible in Networked Journalism*, author David Michael Ryfe argues that the future of objectivity for online journalism is in doubt mainly because the Internet is “not a mass medium; rather, it is a networked medium,” (2012, p. 196).

Ryfe argues that traditional journalists try to hold onto objectivity, ignoring the increasing subjective messaging which citizens are more attuned to in an online environment.

Journalistic blogging, written in first-person narrative form, provides a relationship between the writer and reader where one is “speaking to” the reader instead of “talking down.” Journalistic blogging seems to follow a combination of three main norms, mainly, transparency, accuracy and advocacy (Ryfe, 2012, p. 189). With blogs, truth arises through discursive process, similar to a conversation or dialogue between two people. Ryfe claims that with journalistic blogging, readers can “triangulate on the truth in a way that traditional journalism cannot, because of its objectivity ideology” (p. 189).

Varying types of news reporting also came about during a new age of journalism that grew in the 1960s, where social changes spawned a type of narrative, non-fiction journalism called New Journalism. New Journalism, although highly criticized at the time, brought new perspectives to journalism — investigative journalism and literary journalism. These journalistic writing styles covered a wide range of news writing subjects — sports, war, arts, youth, crime and gave birth to alternative magazines such as *The Rolling Stones*. It “even had an effect on the *N.Y. Times*, whose articles increasingly included profiles and people-oriented stories” (Nicholson, 1976, p. 56). The Internet has not only spawned new venues for digital journalism, but new methods of reporting news that may defy traditional norms.

In contrast, traditional journalism has merely shifted its platform from print to online, where there is no dialogue or engagement between the writer and reader. “Readers are primarily positioned in a passive manner, reading the news” (Siapera and Veglis, 2012, p. 167).

The challenges that traditional journalism faces with adapting to an online platform is what author Axel Bruns argues as the “industrial modes of news production” (Bruns, 2008, p. 71). Due to economic constraints, newspaper corporations must find a way to stay commercially viable. In *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond*, author Bruns states that in order to stay economically afloat, industrial news production imposes a strict model of gatekeeping on its newsroom process (p. 71). With gatekeeping, a strong level of information control takes place in the traditional newsroom. A familiar term in mass communications, gatekeeping is defined as anyone who decides whether or not information is presented to the public (Dimitrova, 2003, p. 402). For over 50 years, the gatekeeping theory has informed the study of traditional journalism.

As shown in Figure 2, the gatekeeping model exemplifies the traditional newsroom process. News is gathered by staff journalists, and the gatekeepers, otherwise known as the editorial board, are the ones who decide which issues should be known to the public and which should not (Siaperia and Veglis, 2012, p. 292). The gatekeeping process is also evident in the physical constraints of printed newspapers, such as what dictates a story as front page or headline news. News is selected “according to what is most likely to attract the largest market share for the news product” (Bruns, 2008, p. 71).

Figure 2: Stages of Gatekeeping in the Traditional News Process

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., p. 71.

In this case, information is displayed in a top-down, one-way fashion, with little to no contribution from the public except in a controlled environment, such as letters to the editor or comments to an article. Even in these situations, comments are carefully screened and filtered by an online editor. The hierarchical gatekeeping practice in traditional journalism is reflective in the structure of their inverted-pyramid news articles where information flow is one-directional.

From Gatekeeping to Gatewatching: the Role of Citizen Journalism

Citizen journalism, also known as public or participatory journalism, allows audience members to become contributors of information. The rise of new media journalism has challenged traditional journalistic values as their audience members turn into active producers of news content, creating a blur between producer and consumer. Bruns argues that with citizen journalism, the conventional models of media production, distribution and consumption are no longer relevant (Bruns, 2008, p. 79). As we move from the industrial age to the information age, we have transformed into a “networked, heterarchical environment characterized by multiple information flows” (Bruns, 2008, p.

79). Bruns states that citizen journalists create a greater sense of dialogue because they do not require the same gatekeeping parameters prevalent in traditional news.

In contrast to gatekeeping, gatewatching “relies on the ability of users to decide for themselves what they find interesting and worth noting and sharing with their peers” (Bruns, 2008, p. 74). Sometimes a citizen journalism site might advocate for a cause that is not covered by traditional news sites. “[M]any of the processes of citizen journalism beyond the initial story submission by gatewatchers are fundamentally based on discussion, debate, and deliberation in the community” (p. 75). Initial news stories may point to new information available elsewhere on the Internet, but citizen journalism creates an extension of the news story by allowing its online communities to comment, contribute and build a more detailed, communal understanding of the story’s context and impact. Citizen journalism also allows contributors to evaluate information contained in the initial story and combine or contrast it with other available information (p. 75). Figure 3, below, illustrates the various stages in the gatewatching process. The response stage concludes into a circular, open-ended forum for the public to discuss or contribute additional information. With gatewatching, the restricted, top-down news selection process is absent.

Figure 3: Stages of Gatewatching

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., p. 79.

In many ways, the gatewatching model is similar to a public sphere, where there are “no limits on the ability of users to become contributors” (Shuri, 2012, p. 42). Bruns’ research has also shown that “news bloggers and citizen journalists have shown persistence and determination both in uncovering political and other scandals and in highlighting the shortcomings of professional journalism” (p. 86). Citizen journalism sites can report on more ad hoc, citizen-generated news, contributing to a more democratic public sphere when compared to traditional news sites.

With citizen journalism, the blur between consumers and contributors may also contribute to various forms of writing. Ad hoc and online blogs may include a hybrid between staff contributors, freelancers and citizen journalists. The freelancers and citizen journalists may not have had training in traditional journalistic writing and their written articles may move away from the traditional goal of objectivity. In Michael Schudson’s book, *The Sociology of News*, Schudson argues that the digital age has changed “everything we thought we once knew about journalism” (2011, p. 205). The definition

that embodies what “a journalist” is and what distinctive qualities define “a newsroom,” is called into question.

As we see citizens become news writers, editors, online bloggers, photographers and artists, similar to the editorial descriptions of the *Torontoist* and *blogTO*, uniformity in news language and style is called into question. Kovach and Rosenstiel equate this style with the emergence of modern journalism in the early eighteenth century. Digital journalism has become a more democratic process reflective of the coffeehouse conversations that existed almost four hundred years ago, where a more dialogic, subjective rhetoric was presented in the weekly journals (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 21).

The “grey period” and a New Frontier for Digital Journalism

Although many traditional newspapers have transitioned online, most of them are still in a state of flux, a sort of “grey period,” where they are publishing information in the gatekeeping fashion that they would for print. One issue is the absence of a unique language especially created for web journalism (Siapera and Veglis, 2012, p. 355). As newspapers are quickly shifting to digital platforms, a new type of news language will emerge. This type of language has been defined as one of the major goals of 21st century journalism. “It must include text, audio and video, use the interactive possibilities of the Internet and facilitate the permanent refreshing of news in such a way that is attractive to readers” (p. 355).

In the chapter on “Online Journalism Language” in *The Handbook of Global Online Journalism*, Canavilhas states that traditional writing techniques that developed from printed newspapers have conditioned the way news is written in online news

(Siapera and Veglis, 2012, p. 356). One example is the adoption of the inverted pyramid style. The inverted pyramid style was a technique that transferred into online journalism, however “other authors argued for the adoption of different techniques depending on the type of news” (p. 356).

A new method of organizing online information is the tumbled pyramid structure. In print, article word lengths are dictated by page and column width, but with online journalism, the space is infinite and the reader can decide his or her own reading path (Siapera and Veglis, 2012, p. 359). The tumbled pyramid structure allows the reader to decide his or her own path. By focusing more on a quantitative perspective (the diversity of information), instead of a qualitative perspective (what is important according to the journalist), the tumbled pyramid is based on the principle that online news should be less linear, more interactive, and more connected with other websites.

As shown in Figure 4, the tumbled pyramid involves four levels, each building on one another through text, narrative, video, imagery and sound, and level of detail. As each level opens to more information available online, the reader will be able to set his or her own narrative path, satisfying their level of curiosity. In the exploration level, the reader can view additional details to complete the news narrative, including external sites that provide more information. This format works against the one-way model of traditional news models, but partially parallels with citizen-generated sites where ad hoc information and collaboration are key.

Figure 4: The Tumbled Pyramid

Siapera, E., Veglis, A. (Eds.). (2012). Contribution to an Online Journalism Language: Multimedia Grammar. *The Handbook of Global Online Journalism*. Hoboken, USA: Wiley & Sons, p. 360.

Overlapping genres: what is news?

Canavilhas' tumbled pyramid structure presents many information pathways for a reader, blurring information provided by traditional media and citizen or ad hoc sites. In a similar fashion, news genres are also beginning to overlap online, begging the question – what is news?

The proliferation of niche news sites and citizen-generated sites on the Internet has brought competition between writers and news corporations, each seeming to offer unique news angles or genres to reach a specific audience. In *What Is Happening to News: The*

Information Explosion and the Crisis in Journalism, author Jack Fuller writes that in the early half of the twentieth century, before the explosion of choice was offered by cable television, the traditional journalism model reached its influential peak (2010, np). Cable TV did not change news, but increased competition by offering an alternative. With competition, newspapers will forcefully "...cater to the prejudices of their readers" (np). This type of competitive spirit is echoed online today as traditional models of journalism compete with alternative models of digital journalism, including citizen journalism. Fuller writes that the dispassionate, unemotional language evident in traditional journalism will cease to compete with an online audience seeking emotional entertainment. "People of all educational ...levels watch ...cable news shows that follow the story models with a vengeance. Emotional presentation succeeds across all class lines and has attained wide legitimacy" (np).

In addition to emotional entertainment, research has shown that younger people essentially consume news in a steady stream of information bites as shown on social media platforms, such as *Twitter*. "With news organizations convinced that ever-shortening attention spans require ever-shorter stories, it is difficult for a reporter to get the space and time necessary to tell a story right" (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 190). The result is a merger between an interesting story and the facts, producing a new genre – infotainment. Getting the attention of the reader is even more important as information on the Internet is instant and space limitation is infinite. Instead, an increase toward infotainment, or as Fuller declares, sensationalistic writing, has become a recent phenomenon. "In 2005, on the Los Angeles Times' Website, a story about the world's ugliest dog ranked among the top ten most looked-at items" (Fuller, 2010, np). As news

and entertainment collide in digital journalism, existing genres, such as news, gossip and opinion will begin to merge. Kovach and Rosenstiel declare that infotainment has given rise to the text narrative, edging on tabloidism and sensationalism.

Changing News Values

Overlapping genres in digital journalism can also infringe upon an organization's news values. "News values are essential tools of the trade of journalists...[t]hey are the informal 'ground rules' that journalists work with which enables them to select and write stories that are appropriate for their news organization" (Steel, 2012, p. 171). News values sets informal rules on what a journalist would value as publishable news for their news organization. Most traditional journalists still grasp onto traditional journalistic values such as objectivity and credibility. But citizen journalism and alternative news sites are born out of the informal needs of the audience and are based on discussion, debate and deliberation in the community (Bruns, 2008, p. 75). This deliberate need to fulfill the role of the public voice may in fact evolve into a different set of news values, defying traditional values of objectivity. In the journal article, *Are Blogs Changing the News Values of Newspaper Reporters?* authors Sheffer and Schultz reveal that journalists writing blogs for traditional news media "seemed reluctant to abandon accepted journalistic practices such as objective reporting" (2009, p. 10).

The evolving set of values that continue to define news will be explored in this Major Research Paper as news language, content and structure are compared and contrasted between traditional and alternative online sites.

Research Questions

The theoretical background and literature review suggest the following research questions:

RQ₁: How is subjective language conveyed in traditional and alternative news sites?

RQ₂: How do traditional and alternative journalism sites report their news differently?

Method

This study involved an analysis of news articles published under the same topic. To conduct a thorough analysis of news language and structure, a controversial topic was chosen for the analysis

In August 2009, an incident between a cyclist and a driver on Bloor and Yonge Street resulted in the death of the cyclist, Darcy Sheppard and criminal charges against the driver, who happened to be the former Attorney General of Ontario, Michael Bryant.

To fight these charges, Bryant hired a team of high profiled criminal justice lawyers and a well-known public relations firm. On May 25, 2010, the Crown dropped the charges against Bryant. This caused an uproar among friends and family of Sheppard and the cycling community in Toronto who felt that Bryant should not have gotten away with the charges.

This topic was chosen for the analysis because it triggered a strong emotional response from the public. It was also one of the first local incidents in Toronto that triggered a strong social media response on *YouTube* as passersby were able to film the incident on camera and post it on various social media and citizen-generated sites. It was during this incident that local alternative news sites, including cycling advocacy sites and citizen blogs created a flurry of information, publishing their own views about the incident. For this Major Research Paper, a comparison of traditional and alternative news sites will be conducted.

Sample:

Over 150 different stories — from citizen blogs to traditional news articles — were published about the Bryant-Sheppard incident. The publication of the articles ranged

from Bryant's arrest on August 30, 2009 to his book tours, which took place in September and March 2012. Various news venues, including community newspapers, as well as online collaborative and citizen sites reported on the Bryant-Sheppard incident.

The articles selected for this study concentrated on one pivotal moment — when the charges were dropped against Michael Bryant on May 25, 2010.

As previously mentioned, articles stem from two traditional news sites:

- The Globe and Mail
- The Toronto Sun

And two alternative news sites:

- Torontoist
- blogTO

After reviewing several traditional news sites, including the *Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Sun* and the *National Post*, the news articles from the *Toronto Sun* and *The Globe and Mail* were chosen. Both *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Sun* included subsequent articles about Michael Bryant and Darcy Allan Sheppard on May 25, 2010. For consistency, only articles categorized as “news” and focused on the prosecution withdrawing criminal charges against Michael Bryant in the death of Darcy Allan Sheppard were used as data (see Appendix A).

After reviewing several alternative news sites, including *Huffington Post*, *Rabble.ca*, *Torontoist* and *blogTO*, the news articles from the *Torontoist* and *blogTO* were chosen because they published their own news articles on May 25, 2010, which focused on the same topic — the prosecution withdrawing criminal charges against Michael Bryant in the death of Darcy Allan Sheppard. *Rabble.ca* and *Huffington Post* did not

published their own news articles, but rather, aggregated information from traditional news sites and created a discussion board. As a result, they were not chosen for the study.

Analysis

The research method includes an analysis of language, content and structure in articles categorized as “news” within each publication. It is important to note that *blogTO* categorized their article under “News Flash.” The article categorized under “News Flash” was considered in the sampling as it is the closest existing category for news on the site.

Language

In *Are Blogs Changing the News Values of Newspaper Reporters*, authors Sheffer and Schultz conducted a study on opinion-based variables in journalistic blogs, measuring phrases of personal opinion, attribution and first person reference. To address the first research question — how is subjectivity conveyed in traditional and alternative online news — this paper will draw from aspects of Sheffer and Schultz’s study to analyze descriptions of bias or judgment in the texts of each article.

(i) Judgment and bias in non-cited text

The degree of judgment or bias can be determined by analyzing the use of nouns, adjectives and verbs used to describe the characters (or “actors”) in each article.

To explain the analysis and use of codes, a few definitions are described below:

Definitions and Examples

Non-cited text: Any words in the headline, subheadings or bodytext of the article that is not quoted or linked to a source.

Actors: Michael Bryant, Darcy Allan Sheppard.

Descriptors: Labels, phrases or objects associated with the actor. (E.g., “An intoxicated Sheppard...”)

Non-cited text will be analyzed by identifying the nouns, adjectives and verbs used to describe each actor and categorizing the information as the following:

- the frequency of positive descriptors for Michael Bryant [MB+]
- the frequency of negative descriptors for Michael Bryant [MB-]
- the frequency negative descriptors for Darcy Sheppard [DS-]
- the frequency of positive descriptors for Darcy Sheppard [DS+]

Positive descriptor: In the study, “positive descriptor” means language that labels the person or information related to the person in a positive light. It also refers to language that characterizes the person as the innocent victim or creates sympathy for the person.

Example:

“Michael Bryant, a former Harvard Graduate...” is coded with [MB+].

Negative descriptor: In the study, “negative descriptor” means language that labels the person or information related to the person in a negative light. It also refers to language that characterizes the person as the guilty aggressor, attacker or perpetrator. In general, it generates an overall negative description of the actor.

Example:

“The prosecution has withdrawn criminal charges of dangerous driving and negligence against former attorney general Michael Bryant in the death of troubled bicycle courier Darcy Allan Sheppard, 33, last summer” is coded with [DS-].

In both instances, metaphors, clichés and phrases exhibiting sarcasm (in relation to the news organization’s editorial position) are considered in the coding.

Example:

“Bryant’s cowboy resolve” is a negative descriptor and coded with [MB-] as it displays sarcasm toward the actor, portraying him in a negative light.

By conducting a quantitative analysis of positive and negative descriptors for each actor, it can be determined if a certain news article is more or less biased toward an actor, conveying subjectivity.

(ii) CP Style Guide for attribution in cited text

In journalism, attribution is the identification of the source of reported information. To identify subjective language, the verbs of attribution will be analyzed.

Early CP Stylebooks described “say and said as honest and inconspicuous” (Tasko, 2004, p. 153). The CP style states that “[s]ay and said should be attached to words and ideas that exactly mirror the speaker’s, not an interpretation or extension.” The CP style also states that words such as “indicate” or “suggest” are mandatory where interpretation is involved, such as for opinion polls.

By doing an analysis of the verb “said” and other verbs used in direct and indirect attributes, we can see where certain news articles have deviated from the CP style guide’s preference of using “said” as an objective and inconspicuous form of attribution that does not incite interpretation, bias or opinion.

Definitions and Examples

Direct attribution: refers to attribution of cited text.

Example:

“He has to take some responsibility because there’s a man who is dead,” Mr. Young said outside the courthouse.

Indirect attribution: refers to attribution of paraphrased text.

Example:

Mr. Peck told court Tuesday that Sheppard was struck when he blocked Mr. Bryant's car.

Calculation: For each respective article, percentages were calculated based on the number of times the verb type occurred in the article divided by the total number of verbs associated with attribution in the article.

(iii) First person reference in article bodytext

First person pronouns were examined as an identifier of possible subjective language. First person reference (I, we) is often used in dialogue with an intended audience. Sheffer and Schultz included first person reference as an “opinion-based variable” (2009, p. 7) where the author is attempting to engage with the reader or express his/her opinion.

Example:

We will never know for sure what went through Bryant's head for those few seconds at the end of last summer.

Content

In addition to analyzing subjective language, an analysis of how content is structured in each article was also conducted.

(i) Hyperlinks related to the news article

A comparison of the hyperlinks in each article can determine how links to other information and other websites are structured within each article. An analysis of hyperlinks revealed how each organization constructs the information in their news stories. A quantitative analysis of hyperlinks to internal content and hyperlinks to external

content was conducted. As well, an analysis of external pages linking to traditional media sites was also conducted.

The positioning of the hyperlinks was also analyzed to show how information and content is conveyed to the reader. Hyperlinks embedded in the body text of each article were analyzed as well as hyperlinks related to the article that were placed around the news articles. Appendix D shows one example of hyperlinks placed outside of the article body and another example of hyperlinks used as hypertext in the article body.

Definitions

Internal content (*I*): information on webpages that exist within the organization's site.

External content (*E*): information on webpages that exist outside of the organization's site.

(*E_T*) **Traditional Media Sites**: a site owned by a traditional news organization (e.g., *The Globe and Mail, Toronto Sun, Toronto Star, National Post*).

(*E_O*) **Other sites**: a site that is not owned by a traditional news organization. These sites can include social media, citizen-generated sites (Youtube.com) or other public sites.

Structure

A close analysis of the narrative structure of each article will determine whether they adapt to the inverted pyramid structure or a different type of structure. Each paragraph of information in the news articles was compared against elements of the inverted pyramid style: the lead, body and background information (a diagram of the inverted pyramid style is shown in Figure 1). An analysis of the news narrative in each article shows how traditional and alternative online sites report their news differently.

Results

An analysis of subjective language and hyperlinks for each news article provided some interesting patterns, revealing how traditional and alternative news sites report their news differently.

Language

An overall analysis of subjective language in the non-cited text, cited text and first person references in each news article reveals that *Torontoist* has the highest rate of subjectivity followed by *blogTO*.

The *Toronto Sun* followed shortly behind with a slight bias against Darcy Allan Sheppard and *blogTO* with a greater bias against Michael Bryant. Both *Toronto Sun* and *blogTO* articles showed a low deviation in the types of verbs used for attribution. *The Globe and Mail* had the lowest rate of subjectivity, deviating only minimally from the CP Style guide for attribution.

(i) Judgment and bias in non-cited text

Through an analysis of the nouns, adjectives and verbs that convey bias in non-cited text of each article (see Table 1), it was determined that *Torontoist* was the most biased, followed by *blogTO*, *Toronto Sun* and *The Globe and Mail*, respectively. *Torontoist* had the greatest variation between positive and negative descriptors for the two actors — Darcy Allan Sheppard and Michael Bryant, as shown in Table 1. Following behind the *Torontoist* is *blogTO* with the second highest variation, then the *Toronto Sun* and finally, *The Globe and Mail*, which had the smallest variation between positive and negative descriptors for each actor. The results reveal that the alternative online platforms (*Torontoist* and *blogTO*) showed greater bias and opinion in their non-cited text than the traditional online platforms (*The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Sun*). The alternative news

sites were both biased against one actor, Michael Bryant, where as the *Toronto Sun*, a traditional news site, showed greater bias against Darcy Allan Sheppard.

TABLE 1: Nouns, Adjectives and Verbs that Convey Judgment in Non-cited Text

	The Globe & Mail	Toronto Sun	Torontoist	blogTO
TOTAL	1 MB+	2 MB+	9 DS+	2 DS+
	1 DS-	4 DS-	12 MB-	5 MB-
Bias	neutral	greater bias against DS	greater bias against MB	greater bias against MB

Note: For the codebook and full results, see Appendix B.

(ii) CP Style Guide for attribution in cited text

As represented in Table 2, in each respective article, the frequency of verbs of attribution is represented as a percentage of the total verbs of attribution in each article.

Example:

In the news article for *The Globe and Mail*, “said” was used three times in direct citations. The total number of direct citations in *The Globe and Mail* article was four (see Appendix C for a full breakdown of verbs used in cited text for each article). Using the number of times “said” was used in direct citations divided by the total number of direct citations resulted in a frequency of 75% for the verb “said,” in direct citations for *The Globe and Mail* article.

Table 2 provides a full summary of the verbs used in direct and indirect citations for each article, including a list of the types of verbs used and their frequency.

TABLE 2: Verbs of Attribution in Cited text

	The Globe and Mail			Toronto Sun			Torontoist			blogTO		
Citation type	Verb	Occurrence (n)	Frequency (%)	Verb	Occurrence (n)	Frequency (%)	Verb	Occurrence (n)	Frequency (%)	Verb	Occurrence (n)	Frequency (%)
Direct citations	said	3	75%	said	4	80%	said	2	40%	said	1	25%
	read	1	25%	told	1	20%	read	2	40%	explained	1	25%
							commented	1	20%	offered	1	25%
										noted	1	25%
Indirect citations	said	3	75%	said	4	80%	indicated	2	33%			
	told	1	25%	heard	1	20%	assured	1	17%			
							insisted	1	17%			
							added	1	17%			
							concluded	1	17%			

Note: For full results, see Appendix C.

An analysis of the types of attributions that deviated from the CP Style Guide revealed that *Torontoist* and *blogTO* deviated the most from the use of the CP Style Guide, with the lowest percentage of their use of the phrase “said” in their attribution (see Table 2). In contrast, *Toronto Sun* and *The Globe and Mail* adopted most of the CP Style preference of using the neutral “said”.

Torontoist used the verb “said” 40% of the time in their news article and only in direct citations. As noted by the CP Style Guide, “indicated” and “suggests” are used for opinion polls. *Torontoist* used “indicated” in their indirect citations as well as “commented”, “assured”, “assisted” and “concluded”. *Torontoist* also used more indirect citations than direct citations.

blogTO used only direct citations but only employed the verb “said” 25% of the time in their news article. *blogTO* employed a variety of other verbs for attribution, including “explained”, “offered” and “noted”.

(iii) Use of First Person Reference

As shown in Table 3, an analysis of first person references has revealed that *Torontoist* was the only news article that included the use of first person pronouns, in particular, the use of the pronoun “We”. The result suggests that the news article in *Torontoist* deviated from the third-person omniscient voice that is used in objective news reporting.

TABLE 3: Use of First Person Reference

	The Globe and Mail	Toronto Sun	Torontoist	blogTO
First person references	--	--	We (x3)	--

Content

(i) Hyperlinks related to the news article

An analysis of hyperlinks used in relation to each article revealed that the traditional news sites – *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Sun* – did not include links in the bodytext of their news articles but rather placed them adjacent to or below their news article. In addition, the links that were present only linked within their own site.

An analysis of hyperlinks for the *Torontoist* and *blogTO* revealed that links were used within the article bodytext (see Table 4). For *Torontoist*, a majority of the article linked to content from external sites, including content from traditional news organizations. *Torontoist* included two links to internal information within their site as well as one link to an external social media site (listed as “other”). For *blogTO*, a majority of the article linked to content from traditional news organizations with one link to an internal site.

TABLE 4: Related Hyperlinks

	The Globe and Mail		Toronto Sun		Torontoist		blogTO	
Positioning	Type	Frequency	Type	Frequency	Type	Frequency	Type	Frequency
Outside of article bodytext	<i>I</i>	8	<i>I</i>	19				
Within article bodytext					<i>I</i>	2	<i>I</i>	1
					<i>E_T</i>	5	<i>E_T</i>	3
					<i>E_O</i>	1	<i>E_O</i>	
TOTAL		8		19		8		4

I = internal content, *E_T* = traditional media site, *E_O* = other site

Structure

The structure of each news article was analyzed against the inverted pyramid style, as shown in Figure 1. A full analysis (see Appendix E), reveals that both the news articles

for *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Sun* present new content in their lead paragraph, followed by background information. Figure 5a shows an example of the inverted pyramid style used in their news articles.

Figure 5a: Inverted Pyramid Style for *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Sun*

The *Torontoist* defied elements of the inverted pyramid style. Their information was in the form of a narrative, beginning with a story, followed by supporting information and paralleling the story with another story to form an argument. In the end, the story in the beginning parallels with the fate of Darcy Allan Sheppard's, shaping the article into a circular narrative. Figure 5b shows a circular style used in the *Torontoist* news article.

Figure 5b: Circular Structure for *Torontoist*

The news article used by *blogTO* also defied elements of the inverted pyramid style. Their information was chronological, beginning with a lead, but followed by real-time updates. Each real-time update reported new information revealed in court. The article finishes off with an announcement for a memorial for Darcy Allan Sheppard, with the statement “more coverage to follow.” Figure 5c shows a semi-hierarchical linear news structure for *blogTO* as every new item of information was presented in real-time with more information to follow.

Figure 5c: Chronological Structure for *blogTO*

An analysis of the news narrative shows how the alternative news sites have deviated from the inverted pyramid style and formulated their own narrative structure.

Discussion

The first research question focused on how subjective language is conveyed in traditional and alternative news sites.

Table 7 shows a summary breakdown of subjective language analysis for each news article.

TABLE 5: Summary Breakdown of Subjective Language Analysis

	The Globe & Mail	Toronto Sun	Torontoist	blogTO
Bias in non-cited text	neutral	greater bias against DS	greater bias against MB	greater bias against MB
Deviation from CP style attribution	low	low	high	high
First person reference	none	none	present	none

DS=Darcy Allan Sheppard; MB = Michael Bryant

Subjective language and news values

An analysis of the non-cited text, cited and first person reference in each article, showed greater use of subjective language in the alternative news sites – *blogTO* and *Torontoist*. Having originated as digital news sites, these alternative news sites do not exist in the same historical framework as traditional media sites, *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Sun*. *blogTO* and *Torontoist* originated as digital sites, without the need to adhere to traditional news values, such as objectivity.

In contrast, the traditional news sites emerged as paper-based newspapers, establishing a digital counterpart due to competitive trends in technological developments. Traditional news sites hang onto paper-based traditions due to their need for journalistic professionalism. “[T]he demands of [the] new media environment have not forced journalists to accept lower standards of objectivity” (Sheffer and Schultz, 2009, p. 13). Today, news organizations are still hanging onto traditional news values. “[A]s the

distribution of news goes through a technological revolution, the content of that distribution still seems strongly grounded in the past” (p. 13). In the digital world, traditional news values and journalistic ground rules no longer exist as the Internet provides infinite space for information.

Differing agendas

Traditional journalism is deeply grounded in its goal toward objectivity to create a sense of professionalism. The traditional news articles are labeled as hard news, which are “supposed to count as true, not stylized accounts of the real world” (Zelizer, 2004, p. 131). *blogTO* and *Torontoist* have a different agenda. Their editorial focus is to cater to the Toronto community, or as *Torontoist* boldly defined in their editorial: “We try to be... fearless in advocating for what we think might make it better” (About Torontoist, 2013). In order to cater to a niche audience and advocate against the acquittal of a politician responsible for the death of a cyclist, the alternative online news sites employ subjective language as a means of persuading and creating empathy in the reader. *Torontoist* uses the first person pronoun “We”, three times in their news article. “In political discourse, it is the inclusive ‘we’ which often predominates as it helps to share the responsibility for actions that are controversial” (Simpson and Mayr, 2010, p. 44). The intention is to not only include the reader, but create empathy for a particular actor (in this case, Darcy Allan Sheppard).

The analysis of direct and indirect cited text revealed that the traditional news articles mainly adhered to the CP Style Guide. For the alternative news sites, a much larger deviation from the CP Style Guide meant a greater variety of verbs used in attribution. The variety of verbs used for attribution may reveal that looser editorial

policies exist in the alternative news sites or are not strongly enforced. The alternative news sites also employ citizen journalists and freelance reporters who may practice different standards of traditional journalistic news reporting. The greater variety of verbs also revealed greater interpretation by the writer, moving away from the traditional notion of objectivity.

Alternative online news and citizen journalism

Both *blogTO* and *Torontoist* reported greater bias against Michael Bryant, a well-known Canadian politician and more support toward Darcy Allan Sheppard, the bicycle courier. In contrast, *Toronto Sun* presented greater bias against Darcy Allan Sheppard and more support toward Michael Bryant. In this case, both alternative news sites supported the bicycle courier, contrasting the support the traditional news sites gathered toward the more powerful political figure. The alternative news sites advocated for the “underdog”, a marginal individual with lower-income status, revealing characteristics similar to citizen journalism sites. Citizen journalism sites also build on stories that are of most interest to the community and cover news topics that may not be covered by traditional news organizations where gatekeeping parameters filter out certain news topics (Bruns, 2006, p. 75). Much of this need for marginalized or ad hoc online journalism derives from the fact that traditional journalism continues to adhere to a gatekeeping model that fails to translate and engage readers online. The defiance toward traditional journalistic policies is one of the driving reasons for citizen-generated and alternative news sites to exist, where they can report their news driven by the needs of the community, creating a different set of news values that cater to their digital readership.

Subjective language and the public sphere

Habermas' theory of the public sphere provides a framework that helps explain why alternative news sites exist on the Internet, as they provide a greater venue for discussion, information-sharing and public opinion. However, the subjective language used in alternative news sites do not suggest a democratic conversation between consumers and producers, but rather a different type of conversation geared toward a niche audience. The subjective language is used to rouse emotion and create empathy toward a certain individual. This type of subjective language is also reminiscent of the 18th century Europe's political press, where they began to use "new forms of language and even political metaphor to evade censorship and challenge the crown" (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 16). The dialogic, frank language parallels the use of personal opinion and judgment characteristics in blogs today. However, as noted above, the use of the inclusive "we" and other characteristics of subjectivity also borders on sensationalism as alternative online news begin to blur news and entertainment writing, creating what Rosenstiel and Kovach define as "infotainment." In this case, the alternative news sites are also reminiscent of citizen journalism sites that report on ad hoc information, unveiling news that traditional news sites may not report on due to their gatekeeping news process (Bruns, 2008, p. 79).

Subjectivity and gatekeeping

As the notion of objectivity begin to evolve online, so does the traditional gatekeeping model. In *Gatekeeping in the Digital Age*, author Kirsten Johnston argues that information is now "streaming into newsrooms at a faster and faster rate" (2012, p. 225). As information flow increases, "decisions about whether or not to include a point of

view in stories may get overlooked” (p. 225). Johnson argues that user-generated content, such as blogs and social media tools, are eroding traditional gatekeeping practices.

Alternative online sites, that include a mix of citizen-generated articles may “often create [their] content with a point of view since they do not feel bound by the notion of objectivity... and organizational gatekeeping practices – they are normally only bound by their own notions of what should be disseminated” (p. 225). New forms of news reporting have emerged, which addresses the second research question on the differences between the way traditional and alternative media sites report their news.

In the study, these differences are shown by the way hyperlinks are employed in each article and the way information is structured in each article. Table 8 shows a summary breakdown of how content is structured in each news article.

TABLE 6: Summary Breakdown of Structural Analysis

	The Globe & Mail	Toronto Sun	Torontoist	blogTO
Hyperlinks	Internal only	Internal only	Internal and external	Internal and external
Structure	Inverted pyramid	Inverted pyramid	Circular	Chronological

Hyperlinking as gatekeeping

As shown by the positioning and type of hyperlinks used in each news article, it is clear that the traditional news sites continue to keep their information flow inwards, adhering to traditional forms of gatekeeping, where they “cite the need to keep tight control on content so as to maintain credibility in their profession” (p. 222).

In *Hyperlinking as Gatekeeping* author Daniela Dimitrova and her team, compared 15 newspaper websites by measuring the characteristic hyperlinks that accompanied the same news story. The results “suggest that online newspapers use hyperlinks as a gatekeeping device because they are unlikely to offer external hyperlinks” (Dimitrova,

2003, p. 401). Dimitrova's results parallel with the results shown in this study. *The Globe and Mail* revealed 8 links to other related *Globe and Mail* articles. *Toronto Sun* revealed 15 links to other related *Toronto Sun* articles. Neither site revealed any links to external sources. Dimitrova hypothesizes that news editors are making conscious gatekeeping decisions to limit visitor information due to their "unwillingness to give up control of the visitor's news experience" (p. 409). In her study, *The New York Times* even provided a warning before "allowing a reader to leave the site for a 'third party' link" (p. 490).

Possible reasons for the lack of external hyperlinks in traditional news articles may be due to the time and effort required for journalists to find relevant outside information to accompany their stories and the issue of credibility. "[J]ournalists may be unwilling to take responsibility for the accuracy of information provided on someone else's website" (p. 410).

Both traditional news sites positioned their hyperlinks adjacent to the article while the alternative news sites included them as hypertext. Dimitrova cites that reasons for the lack of in-text links could be because "online newspaper editors are uncomfortable writing in hypertext" (p. 409). The hyperlinks in traditional journalism are displayed similarly to a one-directional gatekeeping model, keeping within the parameters of the news corporation and lacking the ability to take advantage of the external Internet environment (p. 410).

Information access and the public sphere

In contrast, both *Torontoist* and *blogTO* embedded their hyperlinks as hypertext to support their news content. Rather than employing the gatekeeping model to show truth and objectivity, the credibility of their news is shown through direct citation. *In Are Blogs*

Changing the News Values of Newspaper Reporters? authors Sheffer and Schultz model the use of hyperlinks in blogs as a measure of transparency. “In blogging, transparency means the inclusion of web-links within a blog post” (2009, p. 5). In this case, their goal is not to be objective, but to show transparency. *Torontoist* and *blogTO* use a collaboration of hyperlinks from traditional news organizations to external sites to support their news articles. In this case, it’s not a top-down approach, but rather a collaborative approach, where the reader can decide to click on a link to an external website to gather more information.

Both *Torontoist* and *blogTO* linked heavily to traditional news sites in their news bodytext. In *From “Public Journalism” to the “Public’s Journalism”? Rhetoric and reality in the discourse on weblogs*, author Tanni Haas writes that “several studies have found that topics discussed on weblogs follow the narrow range of topics featured in mainstream news media” (p. 389). This finding supports the finding that *Torontoist* and *blogTO* had the most external links pointing to traditional media sites, such as *Toronto Sun* and *Toronto Star*. The results suggest that not only do the links show transparency, they also show that blogs and alternative news sites rely on traditional media as resources to provide credibility to their story.

The variety of internal and external hyperlinks resembles the exploration level in the tumbled pyramid model. In the tumbled pyramid model, the reader chooses between newspaper archives and external sources, giving them a chance to “...explore information both inside and outside the publication” (Siapera and Veglis, 2012, p. 361). In this case, the structure and variety of hyperlinks used in the alternative news sites work similarly to a democratic public sphere, where gatekeeping parameters do not keep a reader from

visiting other sites. In contrast to traditional news sites, alternative news sites take full advantage of the external Internet environment, linking to a variety of sources, rather than staying within their gatekeeping parameters. The mix of information linked from traditional and citizen-generated social media sites shows that the alternative news sites behave more as gatewatchers. “Gatewatching describes the continuous, communal observation of the output gates of conventional news organizations... possibly also combining [information] with further, other reports from a variety of alternative sources as well as... background information related to the story” (Bruns, 2008, p. 74).

News structure and storytelling

A close analysis of the structure of each news article revealed that the news articles from the traditional news sites used the inverted pyramid style of storytelling, similar to the news style used for print. *blogTO* and *Torontoist* deviated from the inverted pyramid style. *blogTO* reads like a chronological journal, reporting new information along with times and dates. Each new piece of information was building on the next. Their report, told chronologically, is reminiscent of the 17th and 18th century news narratives, or “personal dispatches” that were often written chronologically, with the most dramatic facts revealed toward the end (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 17).

The *Torontoist* employed a different type of storytelling method in their news article. The circular narrative is a narrative that ends where it began. In this case, the author wrote about Virgo, a truck driver who died as a result of street-racing. Coincidentally, the former Attorney-General Michael Bryant, made a statement shortly after Virgo’s death and fought against street-racing and aggressive driving. The author parallels the death of Darcy Allan Sheppard as an ironic twist of fate for Michael Bryant,

making the connection that perhaps Darcy Allan Sheppard died at the hands of Michael Bryant as a result of his aggressive driving. His narrative style, fraught with subjective verbs and adjectives, was a rhetorical strategy to persuade the reader into understanding his point of view.

The interest in narrative journalism began with New Journalism in the 1960s. Narrative journalism was controversial during its time because it moved away from traditional journalistic practices of objectivity. The article in *Torontoist* worked against the traditional journalistic model and employed a narrative style to not only advocate for Darcy Allan Sheppard and cyclists, but to also create an emotional connection with the reader. An analysis of journalistic narratives on the Internet revealed an informal type of “collaborative journalism,” where the narratives of online news provided “an alternative twist to the ways news had been traditionally presented,” showing new forms of “storytelling attributes” (p. 138).

Reporting online

Table 9 provides a brief summary of the findings for language, content and structure in each news article. The traditional news sites showed greater consistency in their goal toward a less subjective and more objective news language. Their hyperlinks, employed outside of the article bodytext only linked to pages within their news site and their news articles distinctly used elements of the inverted pyramid style.

The alternative news sites, on the other hand, used more subjective language, included links to pages within their own site, but also linked heavily to external websites, including traditional news sites and citizen-generated social media sites. The structure of each news article did not follow the inverted pyramid style, but rather, they employed

their own news narrative. *blogTO* revealed a chronological, journalistic structure (listed by date and time), while *Torontoist* employed a circular narrative structure.

TABLE 7: Summary of Findings

News site	Language	Content (Hyperlinks)	Structure
Traditional news	less subjective	internal	inverted pyramid
Alternative news	subjective	internal and external	circular / chronological

These findings reveal that news articles on the traditional news sites continue to hold onto traditional paper-based journalistic norms, such as objectivity, the gatekeeping model of only linking within their site and top-down inverted pyramid style. The alternative news sites, based solely in digital form, have developed their own method of connecting with their audience through a more subjective, conversational language, openly linking within their site and also heavily relying on external content to support their news content and deviating from traditional norms of storytelling to formulate their own narrative structure. Their ability to take advantage of the infinite amount of content and methods for structuring news online reveals that alternative news sites are further ahead than traditional news sites when it comes to adapting to the range of elements that the Internet can provide.

Conclusion

“We’ve been here before.” One of the first few opening lines in Kovach and Rosenstiel’s book, *Blur: How to know what’s true in the age of information overload*, summarizes how the introduction of new technology has changed the way news is being gathered, reported and received.

As we have seen in news articles written in *Torontoist* and *blogTO*, the language and content in their articles reflect the “...older more, personal dispatches, frequently presented as letters from a particular person” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 17). This type of language is reminiscent of earlier forms of journalistic reporting prior to the twentieth century, before the rise of professional news values and objective reporting became instilled in journalistic practice.

With the onset of new technology, we’ve come full-circle in the way we report our news. Technology has given birth to varying degrees of writing, including new genres, such as infotainment. As many newspapers transition to purely online platforms, the way news is reported will vary as well.

The results of this Major Research Paper have shown that the presence of new forms of digital self-publishing tools and citizen-generated sites, has given rise to new styles of generating and sharing information. With a greater venue and choices for sharing information, new and old forms of news writing have emerged. Through an analysis of the same news event reported by traditional and alternative news sites, the study suggest that we may be moving away from traditional values of objectivity and toward more subjective news reporting due to emerging trends in alternative digital journalism.

And as news language is evolving, so is the way news is reported. As shown in this study, alternative news sites report their news in various narrative and chronological formats, deviating from the traditional inverted pyramid style. By employing a wide array of hyperlinks to other websites, the study has shown that alternative news sites do not adhere to the gatekeeping parameters that traditional news sites hold onto. The traditional news sites continue to hold onto news values employed by traditional paper-based news. As traditional news sites continue to find their own identity online, alternative news sites have already taken advantage of the infinite and collaborative platform that the Internet offers.

The Internet is fluid. Social media and citizen-generated sites have created the opportunity for dialogue within a community and the ability to generate one's own news story. Just as emerging social media tools, such as *Storify*, allows the public to post their own photos and videos to tell a story, it would be interesting to explore how *blogTO* and *Torontoist* continues to evolve as content on the Internet emerges and reshapes into new forms everyday.

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Appendix A: Sample Description of News Articles Used in Study

	Globe and Mail	Toronto Sun	Torontoist	blogTO
Article	Reinhart, A., Vu, L. (May 25, 2010). All charges dropped against former Ontario A-G Michael Bryant. <i>The Globe and Mail</i> . Retrieved from http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/all-charges-dropped-against-former-ontario-a-g-michael-bryant/article4320411/	Pazzano, S. (May 25, 2010). Bryant gets reprieve in cyclist's death. <i>The Toronto Sun</i> . Retrieved from http://www.torontosun.com/news/torontoandgta/2010/05/25/14079301.html	Aalgaard, T. (May 25, 2010). Michael Bryant, Darcy Allan Sheppard, and the "Twenty-Eight Seconds That Changed Everything" and Nothing. <i>Torontoist</i> . Retrieved from http://torontoist.com/2010/05/darcy_allan_sheppard_michael_bryant_twenty-eight_seconds/	Flack, D. (May 25, 2010). Charges dropped in Michael Bryant case. <i>blogTO</i> . Retrieved from http://www.blogto.com/news_flash/2010/05/charges_dropped_in_michael_bryant_case/
Category as published	News/Crime	News	News	News Flash
# of words	633	492	1,183	385

Appendix B: Nouns, Verbs and Adjectives in Non-cited Text**Codebook**

Category Name		Example	Codes included in category
Nouns	Characterizes Michael Bryant in a positive light	"Bryant's detractors call the Harvard graduate's penning of the book..."	MB+
	Characterizes Michael Bryant in a negative light	"The <u>cowboy resolve</u> behind those words was that of Michael Bryant"	MB-
	Characterizes Darcy Allan Sheppard in a positive light	"Sheppard died a <u>hero</u> ..."	DS+
	Characterizes Darcy Allan Sheppard in a negative light	"Bryant had a run-in with an intoxicated Sheppard – a <u>bike courier</u> with a history of altercations with motorists..."	DS-
Adjectives	Characterizes Michael Bryant in a positive light	"Michael Bryant, a <u>Harvard-educated</u> lawyer."	MB+
	Characterizes Michael Bryant in a negative light	"...weeks leading up to the <u>fateful</u> altercation with Mr. Bryant."	MB-
	Characterizes Darcy Allan Sheppard in a positive light	"Cycling groups around the city will gather at the <u>makeshift</u> memorial to Sheppard located just east of Avenue Road..."	DS+
	Characterizes Darcy Allan Sheppard in a negative light	"Bryant had a run-in with an <u>intoxicated</u> Sheppard – a bike courier with a history of altercations with motorists..."	DS-
Verbs	Characterizes Michael Bryant in a positive light	"Bryant was <u>swerving in an attempt to dislodge</u> Sheppard, who struck a fire hydrant."	MB+
	Characterizes Michael Bryant in a negative light	"Bryant, for his part, <u>emphasized</u> how fast the incident happened (28 seconds) and thanked those who offered him support..."	MB-
	Characterizes Darcy Allan Sheppard in a positive light	"Outside the library, a group of bike couriers and supporters <u>made sure</u> that Sheppard wasn't forgotten."	DS+
	Characterizes Darcy Allan Sheppard in a negative light	"Sheppard <u>hurled</u> his backpack, striking either the windshield or hood of the car."	DS-

Data Analysis

Category	Language	Globe and Mail	Toronto Sun	Torontoist	blogTO
Michael Bryant (MB)	Nouns			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The <u>cowboy resolve</u> behind those words was that of Michael Bryant (MB-) ...then Attorney-General and a <u>rising star</u> of Ontario's legislature (MB-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bryant's <u>contention</u> that it was a stalled engine that led his car to lurch forward... (MB-)
Darcy Allan Sheppard (DS)	Nouns			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...details of the <u>incident</u>, familiar if not lucid to most Torontonians... (DS+) Sheppard died a <u>hero</u>... (DS+) Sheppard... was the <u>posthumous target</u> of widespread scrutiny (DS+) Already <u>fractured along divisions</u> like those between cyclists and motorists... (DS+) Sheppard, an <u>icon</u> for better or worse...(DS+) <u>A man</u> on the <u>perceived fringes</u> of society in conflict with its upper echelons... (DS+) <u>A man</u> on the perceived fringes of society <u>in conflict</u> with its upper echelons... (DS+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...a <u>traffic accident</u> involving bike courier Darcy Allan Sheppard. (DS+)

FROM TRADITION TO CHANGE: TRENDS IN DIGITAL NEWS REPORTING

Michael Bryant (MB)	Adjectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Harvard-educated</u> lawyer (MB+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bryant was in a “<u>state of panic</u>” (MB+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The embodiment of a government apparently fed up with the whole issue, <u>all but promising</u> that the gloves had come off with respect to dangerous driving of any kind. (MB-) • ... in contrast with the <u>sparkling, button-downed success</u> of Michael Bryant (MB-) • Bryant stared <u>stone-faced</u> into the lenses of the national media... (MB-) • ...a man whose <u>meteoric rise</u> was evinced in his rhetoric of June 2007... (MB-) • a politician with <u>terrible evidence</u>... (MB-) • ...was the result of <u>dangerous driving</u> (MB-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special prosecutor Richard Peck addressed the court with the <u>surprising news</u> earlier this morning. (MB-) • ...weeks leading up to the <u>fateful</u> altercation with Mr. Bryant. (MB-)
Darcy Allan Sheppard (DS)	Adjectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...<u>clearly threatening</u> behavior of Mr. Sheppard (DS-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...<u>troubled</u> bicycle courier Darcy Allan Sheppard... (DS-) • a <u>drunken, violent</u> Sheppard (DS-) • <u>menacing</u> other motorists along Bloor St. W. (DS-) • Sheppard <u>became enraged</u> (DS-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheppard... a <u>troubled would-be comic</u> (DS+) • But the <u>young</u> courier’s death... (DS+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycling groups around the city will gather at the <u>makeshift memorial to Sheppard</u> located just east of Avenue Road... (DS+)

FROM TRADITION TO CHANGE: TRENDS IN DIGITAL NEWS REPORTING

Michael Bryant (MB)	Verbs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bryant was <u>swerving in an attempt to dislodge</u> Sheppard, who struck a fire hydrant. (MB+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two years later, Bryant <u>found</u> himself on the wrong side of his own policies...(MB-) ...<u>ignoring</u> or <u>forgetting</u> the obvious difference between a car and a ten-speed (MB-) he used <u>his vehicle's inertia</u> to <u>force</u> a thirty-three-year-old man into the other lane, to the curb and ultimately, to his death. (MB-) ...with an <u>angry</u> or fearful foot on the accelerator (MB-) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special prosecutor Richard Peck addressed the court with the <u>surprising</u> news earlier this morning. (MB-) Bryant, for his part, <u>emphasized</u> how fast the incident happened (28 seconds) and thanked those who offered him support... (MB-)
Darcy Allan Sheppard (DS)	Verbs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sheppard <u>hurled</u> his backpack, striking either the windshield or hood of the car. (DS-) 		
TOTAL		1 MB+ 0 MB- 0 DS+ 1 DS-	2 MB+ 0 MB- 0 DS+ 4 DS-	0 MB+ 12 MB- 9 DS+ 0 DS-	0 MB+ 5 MB- 2 DS+ 0 DS-

Appendix C: Verbs of Attribution in Cited Text

	Globe and Mail		Toronto Sun		Torontoist		blogTO	
	direct	indirect	direct	indirect	direct	indirect	direct	indirect
Body	read	saying [said]	told	said	read the news... [read]	concluded	explained	
	said	said	said	said	...was commenting on.... [commented]	Adding that... [added]	offered	
	said	said	said	said	read	indicated	noted	
	said	told		heard	said	Indicating [indicated]	say [said]	
		said	said	said	said	assured		
			said			insisted...		
TOTAL	said (x3) read	said (x4) told	said (x4) told	said (x4) heard	said (x2) read (x2) commented	concluded added Indicated (x2) assured insisted	explained offered noted said	

Appendix D: Examples of Hyperlink Positioning in News Articles

Example of related hyperlinks outside of article

Home News Commentary Business Investing Sports L

Site Map

National Politics Toronto British Columbia World Vi

Try Globe Unlimited - 1 month for just 99¢ And g access

Home News Toronto

All charges dropped against former Ontario A-G Michael Bryant

The Globe and Mail
Published Tuesday, May. 25 2010, 10:06 AM EDT
Last updated Thursday, Aug. 23 2012, 3:32 PM EDT

Comments closed

AA

COME ALONG FOR THE RIDE

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The Crown has withdrawn charges against former Ontario attorney-general Michael Bryant in the death of a cyclist.

Mr. Bryant was charged last September with criminal negligence causing death and dangerous driving in the death of bike courier Darcy Allan Sheppard.

Police alleged Mr. Sheppard, 33, died after grabbing onto a car in downtown Toronto following an altercation with the driver.

MORE RELATED TO THIS STORY

- **GLOBE EDITORIAL** Michael Bryant: a good day for justice
- Michael Bryant speaks to media
- **THE STORY** A cyclist dead, a political star tarnished

Mr. Sheppard death's led to an outcry from the city's cycling community and raised questions about whether or not Mr. Bryant had received

Hyperlinks placed outside of the article.

Example of related hyperlinks used within article bodytext

NEWS FLASH

Charges dropped in Michael Bryant case

Posted by Derek Flack / MAY 25, 2010 121 Comments

All criminal charges have been dropped in the case against former Attorney General Michael Bryant.

Bryant was originally charged with criminal negligence causing death and dangerous operation of a motor vehicle causing death in connection with a traffic accident involving bike courier Darcy Allan Sheppard.

Special prosecutor Richard Peck addressed the court with the surprising news earlier this morning. *The Sun* is reporting that the reason for the announcement is that the prosecution didn't believe that there was a reasonable possibility of conviction in the case.

More to follow.

Update, 2:10 p.m.

Special prosecutor Richard Peck has explained the reasoning behind his decision in greater depth, highlighting the key pieces of evidence that convinced him a conviction in the case would not be possible.

Chief among these is Bryant's contention that it was a stalled engine that led his car to lurch forward and contact the cyclist from behind (as is seen in the video evidence) and the fact that Sheppard had no less than six other incidents with motorists in the days and weeks leading up to the fateful altercation with Bryant.

"The evidence establishes that Mr. Sheppard was the aggressor in the altercation with Mr. Bryant," Peck explained to the court earlier today. "He was agitated and angry, and without any provocation from Mr. Bryant or his wife. The defence position that Mr. Bryant was deeply frightened and panicked is supported by the available evidence, including Mr. Sheppard's history of aggressiveness towards motorists and others."

Allan Sheppard, the victim's father by adoption, offered an ambivalent response to today's news. Although he noted that he was "content with the result as it came," he also had this to say: "I don't know what justice is in this circumstance. I'm not happy with the result. I'm not sure what would have made me happy."

Bryant, for his part, emphasized how fast the incident happened (28 seconds) and thanked those who offered him support throughout the ordeal. When asked about the possibility that he received preferential treatment as the former Attorney General of Ontario, he responded that "the system worked with excruciating independence."

Cycling groups around the city will gather at the makeshift memorial to Sheppard located just east of Avenue Road on Bloor Street at 5:30 p.m. for a vigil.

Coverage of this to follow.

Hyperlinks placed within article bodytext.

Appendix E: Comparison of news content with the Inverted Pyramid style

Inverted pyramid style	The Globe and Mail	Toronto Sun	Torontoist	blogTO
Lead	Charges dropped against Michael Bryant	Charges dropped against Michael Bryant	Opening narrative about David Virgoe and how he died a hero and a victim due to street-racing	Charges dropped against Michael Bryant
Body (supporting details)	Additional information on why charges were dropped	Additional information on why charges were dropped	Transition into incident between Michael Bryant and Darcy Allan Sheppard	Information about the court case and why the Sun is reporting on the case, coverage to follow
	Details of the court case	Recap of the incident in September 2009	The life of Darcy Allan Sheppard and his childhood, growing up as a foster child	Updated time: Reasons for why charges were dropped
Background information	Background information on Michael Bryant		Information on cyclists and how they are vulnerable on the road	Information on a memorial for Darcy Allan Sheppard, coverage to follow
			Details of the court case	
			Final argument in support of Darcy Allan Sheppard and how he died a hero and a victim	