

## Ecology and Democracy: Citizen Journalism in the Digital Age

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The symbiotic, often fragile, and constantly evolving relationship of a free press and the functioning of American democracy is a fundamental premise of this paper. Following a description of James Carey's view on the relationship between journalism and democracy and the window he provides to better understand the evolution of that relationship, current definitions of both journalism and the media are examined as a method to release journalism from its often derogatory labeling as "the media." This historical and theoretical background provides context for the development and introduction of an ecological news model. Using the new two-way digital tools, the public can now easily and cost-effectively produce news. However, the ecological news model demands more: it challenges the public to view news production and consumption systematically. It is not enough to report or to know: a working democracy demands engaged citizens who act on their knowledge and beliefs.

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ON Tuesday, October 23, 2007, as wildfires raged throughout California, Harvey E. Johnson, FEMA's deputy administrator, held a press conference in Washington D.C. to update the nation's press corps on his agency's response to this national emergency. Johnson told the small group of reporters assembled—who had been given less than 20 minutes advance notice of the event—that he was very happy with FEMA's response to the fires so far: "And so I think what you're really seeing here is the benefit of experience, the benefit of good leadership and the benefit of good partnership—none of which were present in Katrina," said Johnson.

In fact, what astute journalists soon revealed was that the press conference was staged: standing behind a podium in front of television cameras, Johnson answered six questions from his colleagues, who were posing as reporters. This "error in judgment," as it was later described in a FEMA press release, was soon widely reported in a variety of news outlets. It appears from these and other recent events, such as the outing of former CIA agent Valarie Plame, brilliantly reported by PBS's "Frontline," and the recent release of Jeremy Scahill's 400-plus page book on Blackwater, that the watchdog function of the fourth estate is still in great demand.

Indeed, serving as "an independent monitor of power" is the fifth of nine principles Bill Kovach and Tim Rosenstiel outline in their seminal, *The Elements of Journalism*, one of the clearest statements about the purposes of American journalism today. "What is journalism for?" we may ask: "Journalism is for democracy," according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001, p. 16) The symbiotic, often fragile, and constantly evolving relationship of a free press and the functioning of American democracy is a fundamental premise of this paper. To build my

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argument, I will first briefly describe James Carey's view on the relationship between journalism and democracy and the window he provides to better understand the evolution of that relationship. Next, I closely examine current definitions of both journalism and the media. This is a critical piece of my analysis because it helps release journalism from its often derogatory labeling as "the media." Following the separation of the practice of journalism from the media structures and systems that deliver the news, I introduce the ecological news model.

My main argument is that using new two-way digital tools, the public can easily and cost-effectively produce news. However, an ecological model demands more: it challenges the public to view news production and consumption systematically. Ideally, citizen journalists are also consciously consuming information and, most importantly, are energized to act on their knowledge. It is not enough to report or to know: a working democracy demands engaged citizens who act on their knowledge and beliefs. Finally, I believe this balanced, holistic, and ecological approach to news production, consumption, and energized action will inform and ultimately improve both the social practice of journalism and the government structures it supports.

### **James Carey on Journalism and Democracy**

**I**N his ritual theory of communication, the late James Carey, former CBS Professor of International Journalism at Columbia and a stellar media ecologist, pioneered a dynamic, culturally, and technologically aware approach to news dissemination and delivery. Unlike more scientific, sterile, and objective viewpoints, Carey believed that newspapers were "a form of drama" and that news "was not pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces in the world." In his 1993 article "The mass media and democracy: between the modern and the postmodern," Carey reminds us that journalism and democracy are intertwined, historically variable, and greatly dependent upon the affordances of current communicative technologies:

The media have changed decisively in the last 20 years, both as technologies and institutions. Yet democracy has changed also; the ends of political life have been reconceived in recent years. There is a widespread demand for less pro forma political representation, whether by the press or elected officials, and for more real participation. Yet these changes only signal that the meanings of democracy and communication are historically variable. The meaning of democracy changes over time because forms of communication with which to conduct politics change. The meaning of communication also changes over time depending on the central impulses and aspirations of democratic politics. Neither communication nor democracy is a transcendent concept: they do not exist outside history. The meaning of these terms varies with available media and with whatever concrete notions of democracy happen to be popular at any particular time. (Carey, 1993, p. 1)

Key to this analysis is Carey's notion that both democracy and journalism are fluid and flexible concepts grounded in specific histories and times and dependent upon available technologies. Significant social, economic, and cultural trends, such as technological innovation, globalization, and political unrest, have created a new media environment and a new model for news production and delivery. The legacy model, which moved news from producers to

consumers in a primarily unidirectional way, is now being replaced by a much more fluid, flexible schema, which finds citizens producing as well as consuming news and information.

### A Preliminary Description of the Model

**T**HE structural characteristics of the legacy media system, which was historically designed and built in an analog, print, and electronic broadcast media environment, include centralization, filtering, one-to-many distribution, and profitability. In contrast, the ecological model, which exists in the digital environment supported by the technological affordances of the Internet and the World Wide Web, is decentralized, unfiltered, many-to-many, and egalitarian. What we are seeing here is not only a powerful and rapid shift in the media environment but in the communicative transactions it supports.

Shifts and trends in communicative transactions include user-generated content, which in the Journalism discipline is often described as the Citizen Journalism movement. Many insightful scholars are breaking new ground in the area of user- and citizen-generated content including Bowman & Willis (2205), Bye (2006), Cooper (2006), Hiler (2002), and Olgod (2006). Of particular interest to this analysis is the work of Stephen Cooper: in *Watching the Watchdog: Bloggers as the Fifth Estate*, Cooper extols the societal value of user-generated communicative forms such as blogs, which transcend their primary function to create and disseminate news and information:

This author is inclined to think that social structures which evolve through the voluntary interactions and exchanges among people—such as the blogosphere—tend in general to be more beneficial than structures created through the deliberate exercise of power, however well-intentioned—such as regulatory bureaucracies... For our purposes, we can simply note that the blogosphere would seem to be a near-perfect instantiation of the ideal discourse. (Cooper, 2006, p. 302).

In describing these discourses as “voluntary” and “more beneficial,” Cooper has identified a critical component of the ecological model: the value of individual responsibility in the process. Much like natural selection in the biological world, the internally-motivated drive to both search for *consume*—as well as create—*produce*—meaningful and relevant news and information is the crux of the ecological model. Even more to the point, Cooper describes the ideal situation as “Darwinian: “...the fittest ideas prevail because they are based on the strongest arguments, which are the arguments most persuasive, and hence most acceptable to the participants” (p. 279).

To date, most analysis, discussion, and scholarship has focused on either the consumption of news and information in detailed audience and content analysis studies or on the emerging ability of ordinary citizens to create, publish, and distribute content; but these two occurrences have not been viewed as a holistic system. This analysis is an initial study of the relationship of these two processes. When viewed as an ecology, news is not a product to be consumed but a conscious act to engage and produce shared information that has value in a community: this is how cultures and societies create their histories. Thus, news is not an economic transaction but a social and cultural practice involving knowledge generation, information creation, and public distribution.

### Disentangling Media from Journalism

**G**IVEN this new media environment, it is not surprising that journalists now have a whole host of descriptors for their profession and practice. In addition to “Internet Journalism,” used by Wikipedia to define Matt Drudge’s work, the term journalism is often preceded by descriptors, such as advocacy, citizen, community, online, public, precision, video, and way new. There are adjectives used to describe the practice and function of journalism—participatory, investigative, or civic; adjectives used to describe media that deliver news—print, video, digital, online, broadcast, or print; adjectives used to describe the genres of journalism—sports, celebrity, science, and environmental; and adjectives used to point out the profession’s flaws—yellow, ambush, gonzo, and gotcha.

Correspondingly, there are a host of descriptors to define current media outlets and practices including mainstream media, alternative media, independent media, social media, and, finally, emergent media. Describing media as emergent is particularly useful in this analysis because it foregrounds the evolutionary process whereby media come into existence. It also more accurately depicts the existing technological affordances, distribution channels, and communicative forms now being used to conceive, design, share, publish, and distribute news. Finally, given the variety of adjectives used to describe journalism, it emphasizes the social constructive aspect of media and thus provides an important perspective for defining news as an ecosystem.

Coverage of the July 7, 2005 London subway bombings included video clips from survivors cell phones. These grainy but powerful images were almost instantly broadcast to global audiences on television and the Internet. This event exemplifies the current media landscape, which is experiencing tumultuous change since the advent of digital technologies in the early 1980s. Change, innovation, and experimentation is so predominant now that it has become exceedingly difficult to distinguish the communicative form that delivers the news from the practice of journalism, which motivates individuals to both create and consume news. This is a vital distinction and worthy of serious deliberation because the results of both these endeavors—the product of the media and the product of the practice of journalism—are not the same.

Too often media is substituted for or used interchangeably in discourse with journalism, journalistic practices, and news and information delivery. In the analysis that follows, I make a clear distinction between media, which I define as the communicative form in which the news is conveyed, and journalism, which I define as the discipline, practice, and ethical and democratic responsibility for communicating news to an appropriate public. For example, mainstream media (MSM) is most often associated with the major television networks, the media conglomerates, and large publishers that produce and distribute most American newspapers. In most current popular usage, it also refers to the practices and procedures that produce those products. But they are not synonymous. The social practice of journalism is not the media industry. This is a critical distinction: if the organizations and institutions that currently produce a majority of the news product consumed are structurally flawed, the practice of journalism is not.

This distinction is necessary for many reasons. First, it is important to distinguish the communicative form that delivers the news from the practice that created it. This will help to clarify the complex interrelationship of the two and further elucidate how both consumers and producers of these communicative forms manipulate and design them. Second, this approach may help rescue the profession and practice of journalism from its association with large media conglomerates, whose marketing agenda is degrading the quality of information that most mass audiences consider news. I will first clearly define media and journalism, explain their complex

and often symbiotic relationship, and then offer different language and a novel approach to explicate the current and future state of news generation, consumption, and use.

### An Evolving Definition of a Medium

**H**ISTORICALLY, a medium of communication was originally thought to be a distribution channel or a representational form, and a transmission model dominated journalism and media, and rhetorical studies. This concept of a medium as simply a container, channel, or delivery mechanism is now obsolete: it is also historically inaccurate. As comprehensive histories of media development, such as Paul Starr's *The Creation of the Media* (2004) and Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979) and *The Printing Press in Early Modern Europe* (1983) accurately demonstrate, communicative media have always had a dynamic quality. However, in the past, their form (stone, writing, paper, and print) often took many years to be developed and assimilated, so their dynamic quality was not easily recognized. Media are not simply channels or roads by which messages (news included) travel. Instead, a medium is a fluid and flexible form—a *dynamic choice* reporters, writers, and producers make when they are designing and composing a news story.

The advent of digital technologies has made the dynamic quality of media readily apparent. Computer-mediated communication is removing the temporal and spatial constraints of legacy forms and precipitating the rapid emergence of many new communicative media forms, which have created unprecedented access to news and information all over the world. Given this current media environment, news currently takes many forms including oral, textual, visual, and audio. As has been historically demonstrated, it can be delivered to mass audiences in cost-effective and powerful ways, which is the key focus of the news industry.

Cathcart (1993) builds on the historical understanding of media as channels—"a medium is not only a channel or channels of communication"—and extends the definition to include the context and reciprocal quality of media—"but it is also a learned, shared, and arbitrary system of symbols" (p. 292). His definition is useful here because it also requires us to foreground form as the key to "disentangle the content of modern media from their technical forms" (pp. 304–5). It is exceedingly challenging to separate the medium from the message and the message from its cultural ancestry. Rhetorician Kenneth Burke claims it is impossible to separate form and content: however, Cathcart turns to Burke for the answer to this difficult dilemma: he claims that we now need a Burkeian philosophy of media form to complement his philosophy of literary form (p. 304). It is an insightful point because it challenges rhetoricians and media theorists to first understand that there are forms "peculiar to each medium," and second to be able to identify those medium-specific forms (Gumpert & Cathcart (1985, pp. 28–9). As these steps are taken, we will evolve toward a fuller understanding of precisely how news is rhetorically integrated into its consumption and use.

### An Evolving Definition of Journalism

**T**HE goals and principles of journalism are concretized in the Project for Excellence in Journalism's (PEJ)<sup>1</sup> statement of purpose:

The central purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society. This encompasses myriad

roles—helping define community, creating common language and common knowledge, identifying a community’s goals, heroes and villains, and pushing people beyond complacency. This purpose also involves other requirements, such as being entertaining, serving as a watchdog and offering voice to the voiceless. (PEJ 2007).

In addition to this definition, PEJ also lists nine journalistic principles. These include: an obligation to report the truth; loyalty to citizens; dedication to verification; independence; monitoring of power; providing a forum for citizen debate and discussion; striving to be interesting and relevant; keeping the news proportional and comprehensive reporting; and finally, exercising a personal conscience—a moral compass directed by ethics and responsibility. (PEJ 2007). These are things journalists are expected to do and to believe they are the practice and the process and the profession’s abiding principles. They do not include profit margins, conglomerates, buy-outs and by-ins, the industry, the media and the media monopoly. This is a very important distinction: the practice and profession of journalism is not the business of delivering news, a product generated by The Media and “sold” to national, international, and global audiences. We have to define journalism separately from the news industry if we are to recognize citizen journalists.

In *The Sociology of News* (2003), Michael Schudson devotes an entire chapter to defining journalism and does not exhaust the topic. He concludes with this definition: “[Journalism] is information and commentary on contemporary affairs taken to be publicly important” (p. 14). Similarly, in an opening-day address to Columbia’s journalism students, James Carey clearly defines journalism, explicates its role, and distinguishes the field from the media industry:

Like the novel to which it is at every historical point connected, Journalism converts valued experience into memory and record so it will not perish... Journalism takes its name from the French word for day. It is our daybook, our collective diary, which records our common life. That which goes unrecorded goes unpreserved except in the vanishing moment of our individual lives. Here you will study the practice of journalism. Not the media. Not the news business. Not the newspaper or the magazine or the television station but the practice of journalism. There are media everywhere ...there just isn’t all that much journalism. (Carey, 1996, pp. 1–2)

In defining and distinguishing the practice of journalism from the media industry, Carey can be seen also to frame the role of the citizen journalist. Given the recording and memory-making role of journalists, it follows that this function can be assumed and has historically been assumed by ordinary citizens. This was indeed the case for much of the history of American journalism until the 1830s, when distribution of news shifted from periodic journals sold by subscription to penny papers sold daily on street corners (Carey, 1989, p. 17).

### Introducing Citizen Journalists

**J**UST as digital technologies are creating revolutionary effects, the penny press similarly signaled the inauguration of a commercial revolution in the practice of journalism as well as the rise of news making as an industry and a business enterprise. This understanding is

critical because it helps address some of the structural problems Robert McChesney (1999) identifies in the operation of the American media: “If we value democracy, it is imperative that we restructure the media system so that it reconnects with the mass of citizens who in fact comprise ‘democracy.’ The media reform I envision ...can take place only if it is part of a broader political movement to shift power from the few to the many” (p. 3). This shift McChesney advocates is indeed happening now, and it is often described as the citizen journalism movement.

In an ironic and paradoxical twist, technological affordances, which previously allowed the mass distribution of news and information to large, increasingly homogeneous audiences, are now giving that same power to individuals. Low barriers to entry provided by the Internet and computer networking technologies, as well as new genres, such as blogs, offer a new media landscape for twenty-first century journalists. Freed from large investments in distribution and production equipment (known as the long tail in marketing terms), individuals and grass roots organizations are pioneering a host of new journalistic styles and practices and generating new communicative media forms, such as YouTube and hyper-local geographically-based Web sites, as well as refreshing older forms, such as obituaries.

One of the most clearly and fully articulated discussions and explanations of the citizen journalism movement can be found in the Winter 2005 issue of Harvard’s *Neiman Reports*, which is devoted entirely to citizen journalism. An excellent summary of the current status of the movement is found in Shayne Bowman’s and Chris Willis’s essay, “The Future Is Here, But Do News Media Companies See It?” In addition to lessons learned from successful citizen media efforts and a very important graphic, “The Emerging Media Ecosystem,” Bowman and Willis explain what citizen journalists actually do: “Citizens everywhere are getting together via the Internet in unprecedented ways to set the agenda for news, to inform each other about hyper-local and global issues, and to create new services in a connected, always on society” (p. 6).

Lessons gleaned from projects, such as Wikipeida.com and Ohmynews.com, also demonstrate that the communicative form and the content are inextricably linked. For example, the news that citizen journalists choose to share is intrinsically different from the news professional journalists have been trained to report. Thus, it is more important than ever to ask the following questions when studying emergent journalism practices, such as the citizen journalism trend:

- Which conventions from legacy media are being adopted?
- What journalistic practices are being used?
- What new communicative forms are emerging?
- Which of these new forms are medium specific?
- How do these forms work rhetorically? Are they effective?

### **News as an Ecosystem: A Developing Model**

**A**s an apparently never-ending succession of innovative Web sites and news delivery systems, such as Wikinews, Google News, and Indymedia demonstrate, the ability for citizen journalists to seize the potential of digital technology and create novel and effective ways to deliver news and information is unprecedented. However, a systemic and environmental approach to news—the development of an ecology of news—requires more. In addition to embracing the power and potential of producing news, citizen journalists must also

embrace their power and potential as consumers of news. This is not something that is regularly mentioned in discussions of the citizen journalism trend or in the literature on media ecosystems. This can be traced, in part, to the fact that the citizen journalism trend and its resulting “products” are still often viewed through the framework of legacy and MSM. For example, in “Journalism as a Conversation” (2005), Jean K. Min, director of OhmyNews International, says: “We believe bloggers can work better with professional assistance from trained journalists. On the other hand, we also believe professional journalists can expand their view and scope greatly with fresh input from citizen reports” (p. 18).

Bowman and Willis (2005) also use legacy media to frame their discussion of emergent media in the accompanying text to their graphic, “The Emerging Media Ecosystem.” They state:

The relationship between citizen media and mainstream media is symbiotic. Information communities and weblogs discuss and extend the stories created by mainstream media. These communities and the blogosphere also produce citizen journalism, grassroots reporting, eyewitness accounts, annotative reporting, commentary analysis, watch-dogging and fact-checking, which the mainstream media feed upon, developing them as a pool of tips, sources, and story ideas. (p. 7)

Finally, the BBC’s Director of World Service and Global News Division remarked in the *Neiman Reports* (Winter 2005) that “We don’t own the news anymore”. I believe these remarks and examples show that even the most robust citizen media formats are still often framed within the MSM and legacy models. What is now needed is an ecological approach, which includes the symbiosis Bowman and Willis identify. However, an ecological approach must be complete; it must include both the product and consumption of news in the model.

In addition to the work of media ecologists such as James Carey, Walter Ong, and Neil Postman, who recognized the power and potential of emergent media forms, their dangers, as well as their capacity to be shaped with humanism, other scholars are helping to define the ecology of news. Sociologist Kathleen Carley and communication theorist David Kaufer eloquently reinforce the need for an ecological approach to studying communicative forms such as news. According to Kaufer and Carley (1993), “Without a systematic ecological perspective...the impact of communication technologies are often misunderstood” (p. 88). They then go on to explain how such an ecology works: “Content, context, agents and the communicative transaction are inextricably bound into a single ecological system such that affecting one ultimately effects all” (p. 88). Finally, they submit a lens in which to frame the present and continuing study of this process:

Despite a growing acceptance in the literature that individuals, social structure, culture, technology, and language are somehow related as mutually defining elements, the literature has mainly been silent on positing a specific mechanism tying them together. [What is now needed is] an operational model of communication that is sufficiently detailed or precise enough to permit formal analysis. (p. 206)

Kaufer and Carley have closely analyzed the communicative transaction process, and their definition offers a launching point to build an ecological model of news and information



delivery. In *Communicating at a Distance*, they illustrate the role of concurrence within the communicative transaction:

...the communicative transaction takes place within an ecology consisting of not only concurrent transactions, but their content, context, and agents. Individuals adapt during a transaction, and because of the reciprocity between interaction and cognition, such adaptations lead not only to new mental models but to new sociocultural positions (and hence roles). Through concurrent and recurrent transactions, changes at the level of the individual collectively construct social and cultural changes. In response to interactive-cognitive reciprocity at the individual level, social structure and culture co-evolve. (Kaufer and Carley (1993) p. 160)

This definition clearly locates the communicative transaction as the interface between the individual and the larger environment. The key components of this interface are content, context, and agents: these components are useful to construct an individual's news transaction. When viewed as an ecology, news is not a product to be consumed but a conscious act to engage and produce shared information that has value in a community: this is how cultures and societies create their histories. Thus news is not an economic transaction but a social and cultural practice involving knowledge generation, information creation, and public distribution.

The ecological news model foregrounds quality not quantity. Consumption of news, as defined here, is a conscious choice necessitating informed thought. It requires the audience to question, and it sheds a different light on the traditional concept of news judgment. It allows the audience to question, and it requires their participation. By questioning traditional news judgment, audiences can set an alternative agenda and close the loop, if you will, in the consumption-production components of this ecological approach. A good working example of this still emerging process currently exists in the beta version of the Web site, "NewsTrust.net." Unlike "Digg," "Reddit," "Googlenews," and other news aggregate sites, which asks viewers to simply rate a news story or calculate views and access, "NewsTrust.net" is designed to evaluate the news value of a story and to critique the way the story was reported. This requires readers to consciously exercise their news judgment.

"If the 'wisdom of the crowds', to invoke an overworked phrase, is to be brought to bear on the news, NewsTrust may point the way," said *The Guardian's* Dan Kennedy (retrieved from the NewsTrust "About" page available at <http://www.newstrust.net/about/>). According to Kennedy, "NewsTrust.net" is a pioneering practice in the exercise of news judgment. In addition to submitting stories to the site for inclusion or review, readers actually rate stories based on traditional news values. They also rate the reliability of news organizations and fellow users. The "NewsTrust.net" review form asks readers questions such as: "Do you trust this publication?"; "Is this story informative?"; "Is this story fair?"; "Is it well sourced?"; "Does it show 'the big picture'?" "Does it provide factual evidence?" "Is this an important topic?"; "Does it present all key viewpoints?"; "Is it well presented?"; "Who much do you know about this topic?"; and "Is it accurate?"

On November 9, 2007, NewsTrust.net featured "Bogus Cancer Stats, Again," a story written and reported by Lori Robertson and Jess Henig from Fact Check, a Web site sponsored by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. NewsTrust.net first describes the story, "Giuliani stubbornly repeats a claim about prostate cancer that authorities call very

misleading,” and then links to the full-text of the original reporting of the story. This is not simply reporting: it is, more accurately, reporting on the reporting process itself: this is the key affordance of this site, which is integral to helping readers become more conscious consumers of news.

### **New Ways to Exercise News Judgment: The Consumption Component of the Ecological Model**

**H**OW will this change be evidenced? Exactly how will individuals affect existing and emerging news outlets and production centers? What new consumption patterns will be seen? These are appropriate and progressive questions, and it is evident that a simultaneous focus on both consumption and production—an ecological approach to news—allows us to open up public discourse to the collective level in new ways. While innovative social networking news sites, such as NewTrust.net, “Digg,” “Reddit,” “Del.icio.us” and others are shifting the conventional consumption of news, *Wired’s* “Assignment Zero,” “newassignment.net” and “OffTheBus.net” are pioneering open-resource reporting, beat blogging, and other innovative journalism practices, which are prompting changes in the traditional production of news.

Unlike traditional reporting, which is highly competitive and focused on scooping the competition, open-source reporting embraces a collaborative model: a community of readers with access to multiple resources working together to report news in a highly transparent and flexible environment. In a typical open-source practice, reporters inform readers of a topic under investigation and then ask readers to contribute leads, sources, tips, and ideas—to actually join in the real reporting. Historically open-source reporting is not a new journalism practice: news organizations have offered “tip lines” for years. Instead, the innovation comes from new genres of news, such as blogs and forum, which allow for an unprecedented level of transparency. One such open source reporting site, OffTheBus.net, features “campaign coverage of those who aren’t in the club.” To prove that fact, the site features detailed, biographic information on its writers and reporters. A good example of this feature is the detailed information offered about Nancy Watzman, who wrote, “A Question for you Mr./Ms. President” on November 8, 2007. She is pictured with her child and her biography reads, in part:

Nancy Watzman is research and investigative projects director for Public Campaign, a national advocacy and educational center dedicated to campaign finance reforms that reduce the power of big money in elections and amplify the voices of ordinary voters within the political process. She also blogs at Muckraking Mom, whose slogan is, ‘because MUCK doesn’t scare MOMs.’ Over the course of her career, she has worked for a number of Washington-based watchdog and advocacy groups, including the Center for Responsive Politics and the Center for Public Integrity.

Detailed reporter profiles, such as this one, reflect the open, transparent ethos of such open-source reporting sites, whose goal is collaboration and community building. In addition to open-source reporting, other innovative practices such as distributed reporting, which allows readers to submit actual reports to a story that are then collated in a database and distributed. These and

other pioneering practices are also current examples of an ecological approach to news creation, construction, and distribution.

### **Conclusions and Directions for Future Research**

**T**HIS is a highly exploratory initial discussion and analysis: much more work needs to be done to fully develop an ecological model of news. However, I believe this perspective is quite promising because it builds on the untapped potential of human imagination to generate new communicative forms. It also helps locate older forms that have outlived their usefulness. As news matures and extends its global reach, it is exciting to consider that ecology can inform and extend our traditional notions of democracy as the formative ideology of the American media structure. Writing after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, Carey (2006) asked: “Can we get globalization, democracy, and open communication at the same time or does one of the triad have to be sacrificed to the other—for example, globalization but with a sharp democratic deficit, or enhanced democracy but with necessary restrictions on open travel and communication? (p. 105). Perhaps an ecological democracy, with citizens responsible for news creation and consumption, and fully conscious of the consequences of their irresponsibility, begins to answer Carey’s question.

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<sup>i</sup> The Project for Excellence in Journalism was formerly associated with Columbia University and is now affiliated with the Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C., which is composed of journalists.