Program (ie. 8222, 8291, 9214 etc): 
Course/ Subject: MDIA5003

FULL Name: Derek Fernandez
ie. Jane SMITH

Student ID number: 3328406

Assignment name/number: Assignment 3 – Research Essay

Declaration: I have read the University academic honesty policy at http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/plagiarism/index.html and affirm that this assignment has been completed in strict accordance with this policy.

This is my final draft of this assignment.

Signed: Derek Fernandez

Date: 28-9-2012
Journalism as Socially Connected Information Streams

The landscape of online and mobile media is rapidly changing in complex ways. With approximately 36GB of information being uploaded every day, the ‘attention economy’ (Lesk 2012, p. 907) has been defined, and with it, the inherent nature of attention scarcity. An increasing number of sources are vying for our attention, and it is a sparse commodity. With regard to journalism, issues of trust and credibility come into play as we become more judicious with how and where we spend our time (Coleman et al., 2012, p. 38).

Faced with economic hardships, mainstream journalistic institutions are propagating the ‘enclosed internet’ (Lievrouw 2012, p. 633) through paywalls, and other attempts to keep users within their own website ecosystem. As a result, trust levels held towards these traditional forms of media are declining (Coleman et al., 2012, p. 50).

To survive in this competitive landscape, journalists are being called to ‘innovate’, and ‘brand themselves’ (Este et al. 2010, p. 45). However, the actual process of innovation is less clearly defined. In this paper I will argue that one possible future of journalism is an epistemological shift from its heritage. There is a need to “find new ways to accomplish journalism’s core function of meeting the information needs of a community,” (Lewis, 2012, p. 330). In this research essay I will argue that this can be achieved through transparent and socially connected information streams. I will present a case-study of technology journalist Mathew Ingram and argue that his practice successfully showcases this shift.
Case Study: Mathew Ingram

Mathew Ingram is an award-winning journalist who for the last 15 years has written about business, technology and new media as a reporter, columnist and blogger. He is currently senior writer at GigaOm.com. He describes his blog as ‘at the intersection of media, technology, business and the web’. Through transparency, social connection and the adoption of information streams, I will argue that he successfully breaks down the walls of the ‘enclosed internet,’ (Lievrouw, 2012, p. 633) and in doing so establishes authenticity and trust (Coleman et al., 2012). I will detail each of these areas and will include examples from his personal website, work website and his Twitter feed (@mathewi).
Rediscovering the audience through transparency

Coleman et al., (2012, p. 49) describes transparency within democracy as the process of providing “citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing.” With regards to journalism they argue that citizens should be supplied with ‘sufficient information from which we would be able to form opinions of our own,” (Coleman et al., 2012, p. 50).

The first example of Ingram’s adoption of transparent and community-centric journalistic practice is through his use of hyperlinks. He conscientiously and purposefully provides a plethora of links in his articles. He links to his sources, to previous articles he has written, and also to external articles related to the topic. As Chang et al. (2012, p. 687) writes, these links enhance his articles by creating more “interactivity, credibility, transparency and diversity”.

Lasorsa, (2012, p. 402) has elaborated further by writing that “quality journalism online can distinguish itself from rumor and unchecked information by being transparent, by revealing how information was obtained, so audiences can see through it to its origins and help correct errors.”

Ingram has adapted his writing style to be inclusive of these links, as can be seen in the below Figure 3. He interweaves the links with the article prose. In this example he links to a previous story he has written about the topic. Deuze’s (2006, p. 70) describes this process as ‘bricolage’ and by providing such a high level of hypertextual access, Ingram allows readers to draw their own informed conclusions from the source material of his articles.
He has even written about this practice, “we should be doing the reader a service, by making stories as complete as possible and by providing them with links to further information instead of making them hunt through Google for it,” (Ingram 2011).

**Alternative revenue:** One of the things *The Atlantic* has focused its attention on instead of a paywall is alternative forms of revenue that are related to its content, something that I have argued more newspapers and other traditional media outlets should consider. According to Atlantic Media president

---

**Figure 3.** Ingram’s use of hyperlinks within prose: the blue link leads to a previous story of his

**Social connection**

Ingram has maintained a strong Twitter presence throughout his career with a total of 63,000 tweets to date. Lasorsa (2012 p. 407) has written that certain types of information can lead to greater transparency. Specifically these are categorised as linking, job talking, personalising and lifecasting. Ingram’s information streams span the full spectrum of these categories. By sheer volume alone he has achieved very high level of online transparency, with a tweet of his activity approximately every waking hour. There are work related tweets about stories he is working on, and opinions he has gathered and viewed. More substantially there are also personal and lifecasting tweets. Lasorsa (2012, p. 408) argues that even these personal tweets increase the level of a journalists’ transparency as it is “personal information that shed(s) light on the journalist behind the news.”

---

**Figure 4.** (Left to Right) Ingram’s ‘jobtalk’, personalisation and ‘lifecasting’ tweets
A more direct instance of Ingram’s social connectivity is his frequent use of the social storytelling platform, Storify. Through the platform he has published a number of informal studies into topics which have later become complete articles. As shown in Figure 5, he has archived a Twitter debate regarding the use of hyperlinking. It is an example of journalism as process (Robinson 2011, p. 150) and highlights the circular and mutual relationship between journalism and its audience (Loosen, 2012, p. 872).

Ingram here has encouraged and mediated participation from his readership. As Loosen (2012, p. 875) has written, the Storify process is a type of “inclusion performance” whereby citizen participants have generated ideas and gathered material for unfolding and upcoming stories.
Further to this is a more direct example that highlights how Ingram has managed to socially connect his information streams. In the instance shown in Figure 6 (left), Ingram has directly involved his social network in the process of his journalism. A number of readers requested his views on an instance of plagiarism reported in mainstream media outlets. He responded to these calls with a complete article on the issue which was disseminated to his readership through Twitter and his website.

Finally, Ingram adds a further element of social connectivity through his comments in his articles. As can be seen in Figure 6 (right), Ingram has responded to the question raised by a reader, adding further insight and information to the article. Ingram also frequently adds updates to his existing articles as new information unfolds. Deuze (2006, p. 70) theorises about this evolving journalism practice stating that “completion may be endlessly deferred in the medium in which everything is always ‘under construction.’”

**Figure 6.** Ingram’s response to reader requests (left) Ingram’s comments (right)
Information streams against the enclosed internet

Ingram combines these disparate information streams into one platform through his website. As can be seen in Figure 1 there are sections that represent all facets of his digital life. You can see what he has been reading through his Rebelmouse stream (Figure 7) he has a stream dedicated to his published articles, his Twitter feed and his Flickr stream. There is even a section which shows if he is online, with the option to chat with him through Google Connect. By connecting his “network of public spheres” (Loosen, 2012, p. 871) in one platform he not only achieves an astonishing level of online transparency, but also breaks the barriers associated with the ‘enclosed internet’ and their isolated platforms (Lievrouw, 2012, p. 617). Readers no longer are confined to the original platform on which the content was produced or stored. His site is pulling feeds from a varying sources, and in many ways visitors are now able to experience the journalist as a brand (Este et al. 2010, p. 31).

Figure 7. Ingram available for live chat through website (left) Ingram’s Rebelmouse feed (right)
Aside from the type of content on his website there is also the manner in which this content is presented. Matheson (2004 p. 460) described one possible future of online journalism where online communication between journalist and user was refined to “the transmission of ‘data bits’, of decontextualized nuggets of information.” In essence this summarises Ingram’s information streams. Ingram’s use of Rebelmouse, Twitter, RSS and Flickr feeds have summarised the larger amounts of unwieldy and detailed information into more accessible and attention-friendly portions. Through Rebelmouse he is able to assign rank information to these portions; the information he ranks higher will be displayed more prominently on his site. This is an important distinction from just a mere Twitter feed or blog listing. By assigning a rank or level of importance to an item of information, it allows ‘digital curation’ (Lesk, M., 2012, p. 912) enabling his readers to spend their time wisely. We don’t see the vast number of personal and lifecasting tweets, but only those related to information he has deemed important to his wider readership. Luoma-aho (2009, p. 17) describes journalists as attention workers: “who professionally generate and broker attention.” In the above ways Ingram can be seen to be effective with his readers’ attention on his site.

Conclusion

What we’re seeing through Ingram’s practice is a transformation of journalism to information. He has integrated his social networks, his writing and other media practices into one platform providing almost the ultimate level of transparency for a journalist. By combining these streams into one platform he breaks down the walls of Lievrouw’s (2012, p 617) ‘enclosed internet,’ and in doing so establishes authenticity through transparency and trust through credibility (Coleman et al., 2012, p. 49). Ingram’s substantial and organised online presence can be seen as a successful case study for one possible future for journalism practice.
REFERENCES (Harvard)


