The Rise of Citizen Journalism: Its impact on professional journalism’s traditional ideal of objectivity

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Stuart McGuckin
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Abstract

Recent technological advancements have created a change in the public sphere that has enabled more people to create, publish and disseminate material that could be considered journalism.

This rise of so-called ‘citizen journalism’ has caused a fundamental shift in the role of the wider population in public discussions. As the public becomes more involved in discussions, their relationship to professional journalism has been altered. In turn it seems inevitable that the traditional roles of journalism will be similarly adjusted. The changing of these traditional roles in professional journalism may be indicative of changes to long held guiding ideals.

Objectivity has long been one of the guiding ideals of professional journalism and is often considered to be a key distinction between professional and amateur journalism practices.

This thesis sets out to answer the question of what impact the rise of citizen journalism has had on the traditional journalistic ideal of objectivity. It will examine whether the increased proliferation of citizen journalism has had an effect on the traditional practices and roles of professional journalism. A range of professional and citizen journalists took part in a series of interviews. Their responses provided insight into the approaches they take and the ideals they seek to adhere to. The interviews also sought to define ‘citizen journalism’ and ‘journalistic objectivity’ in an effort to improve the understanding of how the terms are practically applied.

By considering, comparing and collating the responses of the participants and the relevant literature, this thesis is able to draw conclusions about the lasting impact of
citizen journalism on traditional journalism practices and ideals. The modern public sphere in which professional journalists now operate does not allow the same old practices to be as effective as they once were. In order to continue as a paid service, journalism—as a professional craft or industry—needs to adapt to the new way audiences consume news information and not expect that the same ideals that have guided them through the last century are the only way to get their message across.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Journalism is a staple element of societies that has developed to satisfy the basic desire of human beings to keep up-to-date with things that happen around them.

Alongside democratic societies it has grown, and plays a necessary role in their function by simultaneously speaking to, and for, the wider population. Given this necessary function, journalism has become a professional craft that systematically manages its responsibilities while delivering information so that the widest possible audience can comprehend it. Fundamentally this was built on a one-way flow of information from professional journalists to passive and reliant audiences, which would base much of their second-hand knowledge on that information delivered by professional journalists.

The rise of citizen journalism has meant professional journalists are no longer the dominant source of news dissemination they once were. As it becomes cheaper and easier for ordinary people to make contributions to the public sphere, the journalism landscape has changed. Advances in technology have simultaneously enabled people to access, create and spread more information than ever before. This has shaken the foundations of many of the professional journalist’s traditional roles. As the wider public begins to experience news in a different manner, it is no longer satisfied by news being treated in the same manner.

In the past professional journalism, as an industry or craft, has already faced and adapted to new game-changing technologies—such as radio and subsequently television. The difference this time is that the changes more directly affect how the
audience acts, as opposed to directly altering how professional journalists deliver information. This necessitates a more complicated and drastic shift in journalism practices, when compared to previous adjustments to new mediums, in order for it to remain viable as a profession.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to answer the question of what impact the rise of citizen journalism has had on professional journalism’s traditional ideal of objectivity.

One part of this study was to assess how the rise of citizen journalism is affecting professional journalism practices. By exploring how traditional roles and approaches have been changing, and comparing them to traits more typical of citizen journalism, it was hoped connections could be established. With further investigation the traditional journalistic ideal of objectivity, and how it was changing in light of citizen journalism’s rise, became a focus. The ability to be objective is often considered a primary distinction between professional and amateur journalists; it was therefore considered that any changes within professional journalism that could be attributed to citizen journalism, would most likely be found in an examination of this ideal.

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature in an effort to better understand the notions of ‘citizen journalism’ and ‘journalistic objectivity’. Building upon these understandings it examines how some roles, traditionally reserved for professional journalists, are changing. Finally, it considers what those changes might indicate in terms of shifting guiding ideals within professional journalism, with an overt focus on the ideal of objectivity.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology undertaken as part of this thesis. Specifically it examines the reasoning behind the chosen interview method and
illustrates the rationale behind the questions asked of the participants. It also places the participants within their varied roles, enabling their subsequently explored responses to be better understood.

Chapter 4 analyses the data gathered through the interview process by covering five broad areas. These areas are: the definition of key terms; objectivity in journalism as practiced; the significance of the audience; priorities and guiding principles of journalists; and the perception of changes within journalism practices. Responses from the participants are analysed, discussed and considered within the context of existing literature theories.

Chapter 5 draws conclusions from the study before making recommendations for further and continued research.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

In order to answer the question of what impact citizen journalism has had on traditional journalism, there was a need to establish a context of theories and ideas within the wider journalism landscape by reviewing the previous literature. This chapter begins by establishing an understanding of the key terms ‘journalism’, ‘citizen journalism’ and ‘journalistic objectivity’. It then proceeds to explore ideas concerned with changes to journalism’s traditional roles—or perceived changes—before finishing with an examination of how objectivity might be shifting as a dominant ideal in journalism.

What is Journalism?

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007, 2) positioned journalism as an important and necessary result of human societal existence.

We need the news to live our lives, protect ourselves, bond with each other, identify friends and enemies. Journalism is simply the system societies generate to supply this news.

A link between journalism and society means changes in one are reflected in changes to the other. When examining changes to traditional journalism’s ideals and practices, this is a vital link to consider. In a similar manner to the important systematic consideration of journalism, Harcup (2014, 148) considers it to be a set of practices by which new, topical information is uncovered and subsequently made publicly available. Although useful in establishing the importance of journalism, these understandings stops short of outlining the characteristics of journalism that allow it to be recognisable—except to say it is spreading news.
Bovée (1999, 28) established a set of criteria that defines journalism in a more practical manner—as well as considering what information should be thought of as news. His suggested concept of journalism can be summarised as a form of mass communicated information that:¹

- Provides useful and practical knowledge
- Is—or is claimed to be—literally true
- Is provided by people with at least some control over the content
- Aids the receiver in making decisions about present choices.

This set of criteria established a distinction between journalism and other forms of mass communicated information—such as public relations, works of fiction and academic work. These conditions allowed for a clearer recognition of what should be considered journalism, and the purpose that it serves. This is an important distinction moving towards an understanding of citizen journalism.

**What is Citizen Journalism?**

It has proven difficult to define citizen journalism in a way that is widely agreed upon and also stands up to rigorous critical examination. Allen (2013, 2) considered the end result of “ordinary individuals” temporarily adopting the “role of journalist” to be citizen journalism. Others also reflected upon ordinary, or untrained people performing journalistic tasks when defining citizen journalism (Wall 2012, 2; Glaser 2012, 578).² Defining the term in this manner is problematic when considering citizen journalism as a viable, alternate approach to that taken by professional

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¹ Mass communication, as considered by Bovée (1999, 22-27), is the delivering of a message with the potential to reach audience members unknown to both the communicator and each other.

² In discussions concerning journalism people not working professionally as journalists are often referred to as ‘ordinary citizens’ in a similar manner to when the armed forces refer to people as civilians. Whilst acknowledging this is problematic language it has been used for the sake of continuity.
It would be circular reasoning to define journalism as what a journalist does, and by the same token it would also be circular reasoning to consider citizen journalism as journalism done by a citizen.\(^3\)

Friedland and Kim (2009, 297) took a more considered approach and defined ‘citizen journalism’ as:

> Contribution to discussion in the public sphere, whether in the form of simple information, synthesis, reporting, or opinion. The contribution can range from very local to very global...as long as their contents meet this definition, citizen journalists can be individuals making a single contribution (a fact, a correction, photo, etc.), bloggers, or professionals editing citizen content for “professional-amateur” (pro-am) sites which integrates the works of professional and citizen contributors.

The notion that citizen journalism exists as a *contribution to discussion* is particularly important here, as it implies an element of interaction not necessarily consistent with traditional notions of professional journalism. This is still a broad concept and some parts need to be explored in more depth. Three things will be further clarified:

- What topics of discussion can be considered sufficient to carry the citizen journalism moniker?
- How is the *public sphere* defined in the present-day?
- Are all singular contributions significant enough to be considered citizen journalism?

In order to differentiate between regular discussions and something that can be considered citizen journalism, the question must be asked if it really is as simple as saying “as long as it meets these conditions”. Bovée (1999, 28) set out conditions

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\(^3\) References to ‘professional journalists’, and the use of the term ‘journalism profession’ are only used to refer to people paid to do journalism. This thesis does not consider the debate as to whether journalism is a *profession*.

\(^4\) Defining something in a way that understanding the meaning relies on already understanding the term, or a derivative of the term, you have set out to define is circular reasoning.
that should be met for mass-communicated information to be considered journalism
and in the same manner they can be applied to assess whether a discussion held in
the public sphere can rightly be claimed as citizen journalism. For a contribution to
discussion to be considered journalism, it must be recognisable as practical, helpful,
understood as the truth, and be controlled by the contributor. Essentially journalism
should be considered according to the quality of information effectively
communicated, rather than the author’s employment status. Professional and citizen
journalism are simply different approaches to the same journalistic function. This is
one of the reasons defining citizen journalism is difficult; there are legitimate
arguments that suggest distinguishing between professional and citizen journalists
misses the point of journalism, because ultimately the quality of information is what
matters (Glaser 2012, 579).

According to Habermas (1996, 360) “the public sphere can be best described as a
network for communicating information and points of view”. That is, the public
sphere is a space in which information spreads through society. The information
moves from one point to another, via individuals as conduits in the network.
Technological advancements have made it easier to maintain network connections
between people that might have previously lapsed, creating a need for the public
sphere to be re-examined. Flew (2014, 69-72) considered the concept of a
“networked public sphere” that has resulted from such technological advancement.
The new public sphere has an ever-increasing potential to reach a wider audience
through “social production practices” enabled by technologies, allowing “a very
large number of actors to see themselves as potential contributors to public
discourse” (Benkler 2006, 220). People, empowered by being able to contribute to

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5 This thesis adopts this position in order to best compare citizen and professional journalism independent of underlying motives.
public discourse, create citizen journalism in various ways, to various extents and with various degrees of awareness, because there is a heightened degree of permanence that enables it to be considered mass communication.

This present-day public sphere allows more people to contribute by virtue of new networks not reliant on the capital ownership of printing presses or radio and television transmitters. Such is the saturation of information entering the public sphere Hermida (2011, 217) talked about “ambient journalism”, which is reliant upon the former audience—ordinary citizens—commenting on and sharing information within their networks in order to spread news information. This notion sits well with considerations of citizen journalism as a contribution to discussion, and “ambient journalism” might be best considered a further sub-category of citizen journalism. This illustrates that, by doing something natural to them, people may create citizen journalism without being aware of it. Sharing, commenting on, and discussing new information can be considered a natural reaction to living in a societal manner; Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007, 2) considered this to result in the developing system of journalism and similarly the idea that can be extended to notions of citizen journalism.

Finally, it is important to discuss whether or not singular contributions are necessarily significant enough to be considered a contribution to discussion. Traditionally, professional journalists have relied on information supplied to them by people willing and able to have that information attributed to them. These will often be one-off contributions to a particular discussion held in the public sphere, but they have previously been labelled as ‘sources’ and not journalists (Carlson and Franklin 2011). Furthermore, a discussion suggests some degree of interaction between

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6 These networks are largely new online ‘social media’ platforms such as Twitter, Facebook etc.
people—something is said, then there is a response and a discussion unfolds. A singular contribution should not automatically be considered journalism, because it does not necessarily treat information in a sufficiently clear manner, so that it becomes something more; a picture may tell a thousand words, but what words are important and need to be known is a different matter. If an audience fails to comprehend the intended information from a contribution, then that is a failure in communication, and therefore a failure to be journalism according to it being considered as a system of mass communication.

**Citizen as Journalist or Citizen as Source?**

Being able to distinguish between a citizen acting as a source and a citizen acting as a journalist helps to build a better understanding of citizen journalism. Sources have long had an important role to play in journalism (Carlson and Franklin 2011) and citizen journalism has similarly existed to some extent for a long time (Glaser 2012, 579). Both have their origins in the ordinary citizen; in any given situation a person might be one or the other, or neither, but whether they can be both is questionable.

When interviewing a group of international journalism students Blaagaard (2013, 1088) found they considered “citizen journalism as another journalistic tool to find news angles and sources, or a source in its own right”. This illustrates the confusion about where citizen journalism might eventually settle in the news information landscape. In understanding citizen journalism as a tool, or source, the students were reluctant to allow for the idea that the rise of citizen journalism may affect traditional journalism practices, instead trying to neatly wedge it into “an already stable idea of journalistic practice” (1088). There is reason to be critical of the stance taken by the students as it undermines the idea of journalism being fundamentally linked to society. The rise of citizen journalism marks a significant shift in that section of
society formerly deemed as the audience in the traditional journalism relationship. To consider that the audience can change in such a manner and still be sufficiently served by the same practices appears misguided.

By looking at the contemporary examples of Wikileaks’ Julian Assange and Edward Snowden, a former contractor for United States National Security Agency, we can explore the difficulty distinguishing a source from a citizen journalist. Despite using different approaches, both men were involved in releasing information which otherwise may have remained out of the public sphere. Although both have been associated with notions of citizen journalism, there are arguments that each of them might be better considered as a source. In 2010 Wikileaks released the Afghan and Iraq war logs, as well as American Embassy cables, in the “largest unauthorized publication of confidential government information in the history of modern journalism” (Beckett and Ball 2012, 47). By publishing a large range of uncensored documents the “traditional journalistic functions of sifting and sense-making” (McNair 2012, 83) were bypassed. By ignoring this function, a large portion of the potential ‘mass audience’ was left unable to understand the information, rendering it unhelpful in the making of present decisions. The sense-making came after and was performed by professional journalists. For that reason a lot of what is found on Wikileaks is best considered source material rather than examples of journalism—citizen or otherwise.

At first glance, Edward Snowden more neatly fits the traditional role of source, or “whistle-blower”.\(^7\) He took information to professional journalists, most notably Glenn Greenwald who at the time was working for The Guardian, allowing them to go through their established process of vetting, before releasing it in what they

\(^7\) A source that provides information that exposes bad practices from within an organisation—often with government links—is commonly referred to as a whistle-blower.
deemed an appropriate manner (Poitras 2014). Snowden is not a journalist in this case, given he did not communicate the information to the public. A case could be made that a direct communication link is not a necessary condition of being a journalist as many journalists can and have worked behind the scenes in newsrooms, but they would have been previously considered as being part of team in which the members were being paid. When considering citizen journalism, this defining characteristic does not exist and it causes some difficulty distinguishing source from journalist.

After the fact, it could be argued Snowden became part of the discussion, therefore becoming a citizen journalist. It could also be argued that it was an altogether different story—a similar debate can be had concerning Assange. Distinguishing between the two roles is difficult because they often overlap. One can quickly become the other, as news stories spin off from each other and head in different directions. It is also the case that neither ‘citizen journalist’ nor ‘source’ can be considered as a permanent moniker; there is a need to consider the applications of these terms on a case-by-case basis.

**Understanding Journalistic Objectivity**

Objectivity arose as a dominant journalistic ideal around the start of the twentieth century and some consider it the beginning of journalism as a profession (Maras 2013, 23-28). Therefore objectivity can be understood as a key difference between citizen and professional journalism. In *Liberty and the News*, Lippmann ([1920] 2008) presented the case for journalism needing to develop a more objective approach. He perceived governments were operating based on opinions presented in the news (6), and this was the main reason there needed to be a more considered approach to journalism:
In fact just because news is complex and slippery, good news reporting requires the exercise of the highest scientific virtues.

(49)

The dual democratic responsibility, requiring the news to simultaneously inform and speak for the voting public, meant “the discipline of a modernised logic” was needed to “open the door to reality” (51), so the best decisions might be made for, and by the public. This is a reflection of what Bovée (1999, 28) has since considered the purpose of journalism—aiding in present-day decision making.

Tuchman (1972, 661) considered the use of the term ‘objectivity’ as strategic ritual, with ‘ritual’ being understood as:

A routine procedure which has relatively little or only tangential relevance to the end sought. Adherence to the procedure is frequently compulsive.

Within professional journalism there is this kind of established procedure. Tuchman stated that a journalist will label their work objective, so long as it has gone through several editorial layers, relies on quotes and facts that can be attributed, and follows a preconceived structure concerning sequencing of information (675). For Tuchman this points towards the word ‘objectivity’ being used defensively in order to “protect the professional from mistakes and his critics” (678).

Boudana (2011, 395) conceptualised objectivity in journalism as a performance, in that it is practised, can be evaluated and is for an audience. The element of practice is comparable to ‘strategic ritual’, and the concept of ‘for an audience’ is already inherent with the idea of journalism as communication, so the new element is the idea that a journalist’s objectivity can be evaluated. Performances can be evaluated against criteria that are “disconnected from references to intentions of attitudes” and more specifically a journalist’s objective performance can by evaluated by “the degree of truth that characterizes his/her report” (396). Although establishing
absolute truth is problematic, this should not detract from the idea a performance might accordingly be judged objective based on what is known. In turn there is an acknowledgment no performance can be perfect, and journalists can always strive to be more objective in their reporting.

Tuchman and Boundana are linked by the way they perceive journalistic objectivity to exist in something beyond the journalists themselves. Suggesting a person might be objective is absurd, but a person might be able to behave in an objective manner (Marchionni 2012, 62). This in turn links to Lippmann’s ([1920] 2008, 49) idea of journalism needing to “exercise the highest scientific virtues”. This traditional line of thinking supposed that journalists adhering to set standards and procedures, could expect their results to be objective to a similar extent that scientists might expect the results of a properly considered experiment to be objective.

While it is commonplace for individual news organisations to establish standards for their journalists to follow, there are no universal standards by which all journalists are required to operate. However, it can be argued each organisation bases their individual set of standards around some that are commonly held. Ward (2006, 19) suggested six such standards, which can be summarised as follows:

- **Factuality** – is the story based on accurate, comprehensive and verifiable facts?
- **Fairness** – is a controversial issue being covered so that all views are represented in a reasonable manner?
- **Non-bias** – is the journalist preventing their prejudice, emotion, and other subjective characteristics from shaping reportage?
- **Independence** – is the journalist appropriately free to report without fear or favour?
- **Non-interpretation** – is the journalist’s interpretation and opinion left out of the report?
• Neutrality and detachment – is the report neutral so as to not take a side or advocate for a certain cause?

Whilst these might not enable a journalist to reach an absolute degree of objectivity they have the ability to guide the journalist towards something resembling it. In Australia, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance’s (MEAA) code of ethics has noticeable similarities to this list—both emphasise accuracy as well as mentioning honesty and independence (MEAA 2013).

**Changing Roles in Journalism**

Although, by definition, classifying journalism as a system of mass communication, the subsequent roles it plays are more extensive. Traditionally, amongst other roles, journalists act as the mediators between officials and the public, they are the gatekeepers of information and set the agenda for discussions held in the public sphere (Lamble 2013, 44-52). These are three of the roles most overtly affected by the rise of citizen journalism. An examination of these roles, and how they appear to be changing, can help to understand the possible effects citizen journalism is having on the traditional ideal of journalistic objectivity.

Journalism has traditionally had a role to play as the voice of the public it serves. In order for a democratic government to operate in-between elections, there must be a conduit to reflect the public’s stance on issues and decisions being made during that time. This is why Lippmann ([1920] 2008) pointed out governments operate on the basis of the news. A government will develop bureaucratic procedures in order to serve a growing population; as a result of not being able to understand all those procedures the population grows further detached from that government. As detachment grows, there is a need for an intermediary space where different sides of issues can be voiced so that democratic government can better represent that
population (Lippmann [1925] 1993). By being this intermediary space, journalism is not only traditionally the voice of the public, but also facilitates the dissemination of information to the public from various sources, including the government. This is the role that has seen journalists considered to be gatekeepers.\(^8\)

There are arguments that both of these roles have been affected by the increasing proliferation of citizen journalism. A large part of citizen journalism is the public speaking for itself in a way that has the potential to be heard on a scale that could be considered as mass communication. Whilst citizen journalism is not a new idea, technology has allowed it to happen far more easily by removing barriers to its publication. As the public begins to speak for itself, there is less of an onus on professional journalists to speak on its behalf. Subsequently, professional journalists may be freed up to focus on other areas, or to cover news in a different manner.

Similarly, it had been the case that a large section of all the information in the public sphere had reached a mass audience by means of professional journalism. Johnson (2012) suggested this role inevitably changes in the digital age as more information becomes available in the public sphere without necessarily going through the gate. Continuing the ‘gatekeeper’ metaphor, it could be suggested the digital age has knocked down part of the wall creating a new flow of information. At first it might seem like there is no longer a need for the ‘gatekeeper’, but Johnson suggested a simple alteration to the traditional flow of information that can be seen in the following model.

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\(^8\) White (1964) was the first to use the metaphor of ‘gatekeeper’ in reference to the decisions professional journalists make in selecting what information is important for the public to know.
This figure illustrates journalists are no longer the only, or primary, gatekeepers (G) in the public sphere. There is still a need for the professional journalist to act as the ‘gatekeeper’, but it must be acknowledged that information is now coming at professional journalists from more than one direction.

Bruns (2011) proposed a new way of looking at this role and coined the term “gatewatcher”. Whereas the ‘gatekeeper’ privileges certain sources by keeping other information beyond the reach of the public, the ‘gatewatcher’ allows all information to flood through whilst tracking information worth following up and ignoring other information, primarily due to limitations of time and resources (121-122). As with ‘gatekeeping’, professional journalists do not exclusively practice ‘gatewatching’, but it is perhaps a better way to understand the roles illustrated in Figure 1. Each instance in which ‘gatewatching’ occurs, information is effectively filtered as those topics generating the most interest avoid being discarded or ignored. As each party has different priorities, each focuses on different information. The question that

Figure 1. Whereas raw information was traditionally made available to the wider public through traditional media there are now more avenues for it to take (Johnson 2012, 234).
remains is whether or not the priorities of the new ‘gatewatching’ parties affect the established priorities of traditional media, and if so, then how.

This new paradigm was illustrated in the aftermath of the 2013 bombing of the Boston Marathon. Even though this was an incident at an event well-covered by professional journalists, individuals in the crowd with camera phones and people with social media accounts could report on what was unfolding before traditional journalism outlets, because they had the relative freedom to say what they wanted, when they wanted. Threads on Reddit began surfacing as people took to the Internet to simultaneously find out and report on what was happening.9 Similarly BuzzFeed reporters found themselves in unfamiliar territory as audiences turned to them for breaking coverage instead of their usually more light-hearted fare (Barker 2015). A growing section of the audience in the networked public sphere is accustomed to receiving breaking news via online platforms, so that is where it turned in order to keep up-to-date, rather than waiting for traditional media outlets on traditional platforms.

Considering this shift in the public’s first point of contact with news, there is the potential for professional journalism to lose some of its traditional dominance as the agenda setter. Traditionally, information trickled through to the public by way of a limited number of news agencies serving a wide public. The press might not have been able to tell the public what to think, but it had an undeniable impact in what they were thinking about (Cohen 1963, 13). A large amount of the public’s shared common knowledge and discussions concerning their current-day issues came from a limited number of journalism outlets—relative to the present-day—inherently

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9 Reddit is a website that curates a large number of smaller websites and threads—subreddits—dedicated to discussions on certain topics to which virtually anyone is free to contribute. Its ability to aggregate multiple sources by linking to other pages makes sections of the public consider it a more reliable source of information than traditional media.
limiting the spectrum of discussions to be had. Objective facts presented by journalists formed the basis of conversations between individuals in a public sphere, devoid of the extensive networks that exist in the modern world.

The modern networked public sphere creates an environment in which these conversations have the ability to be held involving many more parties. They also have the ability to leave a more permanent mark; this is the potential of those discussions to become mass communication. In turn, professional journalism may be drawn more directly into the conversation—as distinct from primarily providing the objective facts and analysis that start conversations. Marchionni (2012) suggested this is the case and there is now, more than ever, a need for journalists to be visible. She considered that as a result of being trained to ensure they do not become part of the story some journalists develop a confused understanding of what it means to be objective by taking that instruction to refer to more than just their personal biases (74). If this is a commonly held misunderstanding in the way journalists practice objectivity, there needs to be a re-examination of the objective ideal in professional journalism.

The Future of Objectivity as a Journalistic Ideal

Over time, objectivity has become a dominant ideal in professional journalism, but there have always been those questioning how it should be understood and implemented. Famously, the so-called Lippmann-Dewey debate considered different perceptions of how the press should operate and how information being communicated should be treated.10 Lippmann ([1925] 1993) adopted the position that a public could not feasibly have time to understand all the decisions, issues, and

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10 During the 1920s Walter Lippmann wrote three books containing ideas that John Dewey responded to, firstly in book reviews and then in *The Public and its Problems* ([1927] 1991); this is the genesis of the Lippmann-Dewey debate.
processes faced by governments, and institutions, and therefore the primary function of the press should be to present the bare, objective facts of what is happening.

Dewey ([1927] 1991), on the other hand, considered the public should, and could, be much more involved in critical discussions concerning the whole, rather than being limited to its own private concerns.

Dewey’s proposed critical discussions would require the press to provide more than just an objective perception of facts and truth. There would be a need for higher degrees of analysis, context and comparison so a properly informed discussion could be held—one that involved the public. Although at the time Dewey could not suggest a viable way for his ideas to be carried out, the same advances in technology that have brought about the rise in citizen journalism could allow the kinds of conversation Dewey might have envisaged to happen in the networked public sphere.

It can be argued citizen journalism is an extension of Dewey’s approach to journalism, and developments in the area may bring rise to a new chapter in the almost century-old debate.

The rise of citizen journalism has meant the traditional approach to objectivity as an ideal source of facts is being challenged. Maras (2013, 191-193) looked at objectivity as a changing journalistic ideal in direct relation to the rise of citizen journalism and postulated three possibilities that can be summarised as:

1. Objectivity is changing independent of the rise of citizen journalism
2. Citizen journalism is a source of “monitory democracy” which will either extend the fourth estate, or build the fifth estate\(^\text{11}\)
3. Citizen journalism is challenging objectivity as a foundation of information.

\(^{11}\) The fourth estate refers to journalism’s role independently holding the first three estates to account by ensuring an informed public. In Australia these three estates can be considered to refer to the government, the courts and the executive (Errington and Miragliotta 2011, 8). Citizen journalism has come to be considered a fifth estate in that it is the ability of the public to hold journalists to account.
Given this thesis looks at the possibility of citizen journalism affecting objectivity as an ideal, the second and third possibilities are of most interest. Each of these requires further examination and will be considered throughout the rest of the project.

The notion of reporting as a more transparent process, and in turn journalists being more visible has gained favour in the twenty-first century. Karlsson (2011, 291) uses an analogy that refers to the front and back stage areas, to build on this notion of transparency and suggested it already has a foothold in modern journalism practice:

The front stage area in the analogue era was characterised by disseminating finished news, with only a few participants creating and influencing the news... In the digital era the front stage area includes the continuous flow of drafts.

Practices formally taking place ‘back stage’ have come out from behind the curtain, as a result of higher instances of citizen journalism. Audiences have become more accustomed to information being presented to them as incomplete parts in a discursive process towards truth, more typical of citizen journalists and bloggers (Debatin 2011, 838). This would seem to contribute towards a sense of disillusionment with traditional journalism outlets that are perceived as not accurately and objectively covering news events because they, like their amateur counterparts, are governed by other agendas (Bruns 2005, 15).

Van der Haak, Parks, and Castells (2012, 2931) suggested the increasingly networked nature of the public sphere lends itself to a transparent approach to journalism:

Not objectivity, but transparency and independence are vital for journalists in the 21st Century. Journalism with a clear perspective is more convincing than neutral narrative. This however, calls for analysis grounded in reporting, not opinion or ideology.
An increasingly sceptical audience has the potential to become distracted looking for things to be critical about and may miss the information being communicated. By being transparent—acknowledging their own fallibility, position, and process—journalists may be able to more effectively communicate information. Despite this, it is important to recognise the familiar aversion to opinion, in favour of good reporting based on independence, that exist in both this notion of transparency and the standards Ward (2006, 19) proposed journalists follow in an effort to be objective. This suggests the notion of journalistic objectivity might simply need to be adjusted rather than completely thrown out.

‘Pragmatic objectivity’ is an adjustment of journalism’s traditional approach to objectivity as suggested by Ward (2006, 261-316). Within this approach, the standards concerning non-interpretation, and neutrality and detachment are emphasised less. Parallels may be drawn between the idea of objectivity as performance and pragmatic objectivity given the way it is described by Ward:

Pragmatic objectivity is the evaluation of the means and results of inquiry. Current beliefs, theories, and methodological norms are the tentative results of past inquiry, providing a platform for further inquiries. (264)

With this understanding of objectivity, a journalist may move towards the truth, but they recognise, and acknowledge, it is never the full truth. Adopting ‘pragmatic objectivity’ would see journalism considered an on-going process towards truth, as it would not be expected the truth could be found in one story; rather it is pieced together by looking at several stories over time. News is then taken as exactly that—an event or something new—and not a matter of fact.

‘Pragmatic objectivity’ carried out in the public sphere is not fitting to all situations. Under certain circumstances, speculation—a poorly considered attempt at ‘pragmatic
objectivity’—can do more harm than good, so waiting for official sources is preferential. In the wake of the Boston bombings a subreddit called *findbostonbombers* was set up, dedicated to using all available evidence to identify possible suspects. Despite the good intentions of the thread’s moderators, it could not be controlled and in due course an innocent person was named within the thread. It must also be acknowledged that whilst this was something that originated as citizen journalism speculation, mainstream news outlets went on to report on the person who had been identified. This included contacting the family of the individual—who had been missing for some time—causing them understandable stress as a result of the unwarranted negative attention (Barker 2015). This is both a sign of the mainstream news media feeling the need not to be outdone by citizen journalism—essentially acknowledging it as a competitor—and a damning indictment on what some have come to consider a “reportable source”. Two things can be drawn from this outcome; ‘pragmatic objectivity’ still requires disciplined practitioners in order to better ensure that repercussions are considered, and there is still a need for trained and experienced journalists to better ensure misinformation is not spread.

Considering what unfolded on *findbostonbombers* as a strict illustration of Ward’s ‘pragmatic objectivity’ is potentially misguided. What it does show is working towards the truth in the public sphere can be harmful if not handled in the correct manner. Misinformation has potential to spread just as quickly as information that has supporting evidence, and given journalism has a responsibility to the truth there is an expectation it will handle information in an appropriate manner. This is crucial when considering that ‘pragmatic objectivity’ works in tandem with a push to be more transparent. The utmost transparency—where nothing is censored and all processes, sources, and positions are revealed—can have undesirable repercussions. The most overt of these being when it is not properly considered how an action like
naming people in relation to an event may unfairly affect them or put them in danger. A perception they are hiding nothing is valuable for a journalist in gaining the public’s trust, but this has to be balanced against other factors such as whether or not linking names to stories could cause potential harm. Any balancing act is hard to achieve when it falls to just one person and that is why professional journalists rely on layers of experience from within newsroom environment to better assure their audience that the best decisions are made.

The discussion surrounding the future of objectivity indicates the notion of objectivity is changing, and in part this can be seen as a response to a now active, rather than a historically passive, audience. Whether or not transparency, as an ideal, should be considered to have developed separately from objectivity is debatable. There are some indications journalists have become more visible—both in terms of acknowledging their own ideas as well as in the more literal sense of being recognisable to audiences that have become more connected, aware, and critical of the information with which they are presented.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

To build upon the theoretical ideals identified during the literature review, it was decided that data would be collected through a series of individual practitioner interviews. A combination of citizen and professional journalists were interviewed to incorporate practical experiences, knowledge and perspectives into answering the overarching research question of this thesis—what impact has the rise of citizen journalism had on the ideal of objectivity in professional journalism? This chapter outlines the rationale for the chosen methodology and the interview process.

Selecting a Research Methodology

Creswell (2014, 4) explained that qualitative research is used to explore understandings and meanings, whilst quantitative research tends towards an examination of relationships between variables. Given the complex nature of the issues inherent in the overarching research question, and the time and resource constraints of the project, it was decided that a qualitative approach would produce the best results.

Three different qualitative methods were considered; observation, interviews and content analysis. The ‘every day is different’ nature of journalism environments meant the inability of a solo researcher to observe things unfold in multiple places at the same time was seen as too big a drawback of the observation method. Observing, analysing and comparing the reportage on particular issues across different outlets was considered more viable, because it would allow an application of ideas to actual content. However, having to infer journalists’ motivations and decision-making processes would hamper the effort to establish what real-life adjustments were being
made by those in the professional journalism industry. Also, the element of subjectivity that comes from having a solo researcher could skew the potential usefulness of any analysis (Simons 2014, 458). Ultimately interviews were seen as the most appropriate method of analysing the Australian journalism landscape.

**The Interviews**

As alternative interview approaches, the structured, semi-structured, and unstructured styles each have advantages and disadvantages. The restrictions implicit in a structured approach, allow data collected to be more directly compared as it removes doubt surrounding how the questions were delivered. However, it does not allow for different understandings of difficult-to-define ideas—either in the questions or responses. Confused understandings can ultimately lead to the mistreatment of data, as conclusions may be drawn on the assumption of shared knowledge. In contrast, the unstructured approach, which is more like a discussion, allows for explanations, but given this lack of structure, it can become unfocused. Comparing data collected through unstructured interviews can be difficult due to their unfocused nature, but this is countered by the possibility of issues being raised that were not previously considered by the interviewer. The semi-structured method that was employed, is a recognition of the need for a focused approach, allowing comparison, as well as desiring the interviewees to respond with their own experiences within context (Niranjala 2009, 168).

The semi-structured, individual approach was adopted in order to draw on individual perspectives representing different elements that exist within the Australian journalism landscape. The semi-structured interview utilises a set of pre-established questions as guides for multiple interviews in order to attain data, which can later be analysed and compared. Within the approach, the interviewer is allowed a degree of
flexibility to alter, where deemed appropriate, such things as the order of questions or add in follow-up questions (Brennen 2013, 28). It is a compromise between the rigid, structured interview and the relaxed unstructured approach.

The overarching question of this thesis, concerns ideas and motivations behind practices, as well as the practices themselves. With this in mind, the semi-structured approach allowed for the interviewees to explore and expand on their own journalism ideals—as well as those of the organisations in which they work.

**The Questions**

The interview guide is essential in allowing each of the interviews to have a common general focus. The questions were designed to cover five principal areas, which are key to identifying the approaches to objectivity and citizen journalism within Australian journalism:

1. Develop an understanding of the way key terms are used so that the end results might be more easily compared and analysed.
2. Develop an understanding of how objectivity is approached, and practiced in Australian journalism.
3. Explore the importance of ‘the audience’ in determining what issues and events are covered by Australian journalists, both professional and citizen.
4. Consider the different guiding priorities of journalists interviewed.
5. Examine how modern, changing professional journalism compare to traditional approaches.

Interviewees were identified as either professional or citizen journalists and were asked questions according to the corresponding interview guide. For the purpose of this thesis the distinction between professional and citizen journalists was determined

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12 The interview guides are attached as appendices—the professional guide is Appendix E and the guide for citizen journalists is Appendix F.
by considering the participant’s most recent involvement in journalism, and how that role corresponded to the established definition of citizen journalism. Although different interview guides were designed for each category the questions were structured around similar themes. Distinctions found between the two guides used for the interviews were little more than a personalisation to make the questions appropriate to either citizen or professional journalists.

The Interviewees

Seven journalists from across a range of areas within the Australian journalism landscape were interviewed. In compliance with Murdoch University’s Human Ethics policy, interviewees are identified only by pseudonyms/role names to preserve their confidentiality. Additionally all interviewees will be referred to in the masculine in order to prevent gender identifiers. The interviewees were:

The News Director is in charge of a high rating commercial television news service.

The Online Editor runs an independent Australian news website and has previously worked in various publications including one they established themselves. He has also won journalism awards for coverage of particular issues.

The Political Commentator writes columns in newspapers, runs their own blog and fronts their own television show. He is known for not shirking his opinion and is often considered an outspoken member of the media.

The Economics Writer was a citizen journalist before breaking into professional media courtesy of having written a popular blog as an amateur. He writes a regular column in a prominent newspaper as well as for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The Pro-am Editor has worked as a professional journalist and now works for an outlet partnering experts with trained editors so that a mass audience is
hearing directly from people with a deeper understanding of up-to-the-minute issues.\textsuperscript{13}

The \textit{Former Professional} worked at a newspaper from the late 1980s until the early 2000s, before leaving to write his own blog, independent of mainstream backing. He has since set up his own website as a platform for other citizen journalists to get involved in information dissemination.

Despite having no formal or professional experience as a journalist, the \textit{Citizen Editor} runs a website publishing unsolicited articles on a daily basis on a variety of current topics, written by a variety of contributors.

If journalism could be considered as a continuum with professional journalists and citizen journalists at opposite extremes, then this sample can be seen to represent junctions along this line—the News Director at one end and the Citizen Editor at the other. Whilst a larger sample would reflect the Australian journalism landscape with a higher degree of accuracy, it was considered impractical given the size of this project. Taking into account the sample size, the selection process for potential participants was undertaken with particular care to draw on different perspectives from representatives across the Australian journalism landscape. Drawing on this range of areas allowed the consideration of different ideas within their own context, something that becomes more difficult with larger samples, as contextual data gets lost due to a need to simplify (Daymon and Holloway 2011, 222).

\textbf{Procedure}

The Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee granted ethics approval.\textsuperscript{14} The participants were initially approached by email or telephone.\textsuperscript{15} Those indicating an interest in taking part in the project were sent follow up emails.

\textsuperscript{13} The pro-am reporting model utilises professional journalists in tandem with citizen reporters to continue producing traditionally high quality journalism (Friedland and Kim 2009, 301).
After agreeing to take part in the interview process each participant was sent an *Information Letter* describing the nature and purpose of the study, what the study involved, the voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study, privacy, and benefits of the study as well as any possible risks. Each of the participants was required to sign an *Interview Consent Form* acknowledging that they had read the *Information Letter* and agreed to be interviewed, that their responses would be recorded, and that the data gathered would be published in such a way as to preserve their confidentiality.

It was originally intended that the interviews be carried out in person. However this was only possible for the one of the interviewees. The responses of the Political Commentator were sent through in writing via email and the remaining five interviews were conducted via phone or Skype conversations.

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14 See Appendix A for ethics committee approval.
15 See Appendix B for a sample of the email approach.
16 See Appendix C for a copy of The Information Letter.
17 See Appendix D for a copy of The Interview Consent Form.
18 Daymon and Holloway (2011, 222) point out that when replying via email the interviewee has a chance to consider, reflect upon, and alter their responses to a greater extent than a spoken interview. This was taken into account although it appears as though the responses have simply become more succinct.
CHAPTER FOUR

The View From the Inside

This thesis has looked at journalism from the perspective of an outsider looking in. The literature review examined the theory concerning journalism, but often reality can play out differently to theory so a practical examination was required. This chapter examines the data gathered through a series of interviews with seven journalists considered to represent various junctions on a scale that has professional and citizen journalists at either extreme. Interview questions built upon one another to address five key issues: how citizen journalism and objectivity are practically defined; how objectivity is practiced; how significant is the audience in journalists’ considerations; how journalists come to prioritise; and how practices in professional journalism are changing. This chapter will examine these issues individually before bringing them together to draw out an answer to how the rise of citizen journalism is affecting the traditional journalistic ideal of objectivity.

Establishing a Practical Understanding of Terms

Defining the notions of ‘citizen journalism’ and ‘journalistic objectivity’ is difficult. Given they are inherent in the overarching question of this thesis it is crucial to understand how individual participants understood, and applied the terms. This enables better analysis of subsequent responses as well as allowing for an examination of differences between theory and practice.

Defining citizen journalism

This thesis has proposed that the term ‘citizen journalism’ can be best understood as any significant contribution to appropriately newsworthy discussions in the public sphere (Friedland and Kim 2009). Due to the acknowledged complexities in the
term’s use it was not expected the participants would necessarily express similar understandings.

The Citizen Editor considered citizen journalism as anyone’s ability to perform traditional journalistic roles:

> The ability of anyone, anywhere to be an originator of writing or reporting, rather than someone who has to mediate that information through someone who classes themselves as a professional journalist.

This is a similar understanding to the definition often given in the literature that refers to journalistic tasks being undertaken by ordinary citizens (Allen 2013; Glaser 2012; Wall 2012). Other participants also gave comparable definitions by explaining citizen journalists in the context of professional journalists, although each expressed it in different ways by emphasising different aspects; for instance, the Former Professional referred to “journalistic ethics” instead of “journalistic tasks”.

The News Director spoke of professional journalists being concerned about the tendency of citizen journalism to be unfiltered:

> It conjures up the word ‘dangerous’ for a trained journalist like me in a newsroom where every single word we write, every single picture we put to air, has been carefully monitored and checked as much as it possibly can be.

This viewpoint also considers citizen and professional journalists often work in different environments. Traditionally professional journalists are employed as part of a hierarchal newsroom, with editors and procedures in place to ensure a certain quality of work as Tuchman (1972) described.¹⁹ In many situations citizen journalists do not have the same structured support prompting the News Director to refer to them as “a sort of rogue journo.”

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¹⁹ Freelance journalists are an obvious exception to this, in that they don’t work as closely within a team of journalists, however in order for their work to be published or broadcast it will still be run through an editorial team.
The Pro-am Editor and the Political Commentator each considered paid employment a significant factor in distinguishing between citizen and professional journalism. Notwithstanding that, the Political Commentator questioned whether this was an appropriate way to draw a definitive line given he runs one of the biggest political blogs in the country without being paid anything extra. The Economics Writer spoke about similar difficulties defining journalism:

> Journalism itself is a pretty broad concept and it can be practiced by anyone, whether it can be practiced well by anyone is a different thing.

This reflects the consideration of this thesis of citizen journalism as an approach to journalism, whilst illustrating one of the difficulties of defining the term; if journalism is already a broad concept, then so too are journalistic practices. The Economics Writer also expressed reservation in using the term, because he sensed journalists generally used it in a dismissive manner. This was reflected in the comments of the News Director who compared the term to the idea of a citizen surgeon or a citizen car mechanic. Glaser (2012, 581) wrote of similar reservations and this becomes problematic when trying to identify citizen journalists because possible practitioners are often reluctant to be considered as citizen journalists.

Those participants identified as citizen journalists prior to the interviews were also asked if they consider the articles published on their associated website should be described as citizen journalism. The Pro-am Editor thought because they paired trained journalists with relevant experts it would be a mistake to class the end result as citizen journalism. The Citizen Editor said his site’s articles are citizen journalism, but stated the site follows a “traditional op-ed model” and classing it as citizen journalism.

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20 For the purpose of this thesis journalists were identified according to their most recent involvement with journalism and how that corresponds to the established definition of citizen journalism.
journalism makes it sound like “something novel”. The Former Professional agreed his website was a source of citizen journalism, because anyone writing for the site had to agree to the MEAA’s code of ethics. The mixed responses from the participants reiterate the problematic perception of the term, with some people seemingly wanting to avoid being branded citizen journalists.

As was expected the term ‘citizen journalism’ was not easily defined but the application of the term ‘citizen journalist’ seemed even more problematic. It appears simple enough to consider a piece of journalism as citizen journalism based largely on it being produced by someone who is not payed or trained to do so. However calling someone a ‘citizen journalist’ becomes problematic because of the negative connotations associated with the term, and the need to be able to refer to an appropriate example of their journalism.

**Defining journalistic objectivity**

Professional journalism has been guided by an ideal of journalistic objectivity since around the start of the twentieth century, and Lippmann ([1920] 2008, 49) notably insisted journalists needed to exercise the highest scientific virtues. Whether or not a journalist reports objectively is often considered the difference between them being professional or not, especially given that some consider objectivity and professional journalism as synonymous (Maras 2013).

The Pro-am Editor understood objectivity as a process towards the facts:

> Objectivity is really dealing rigorously and fairly with the facts, not misrepresenting arguments, not giving undue weight to any one argument, not distorting, not twisting, not misrepresenting.

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21 Traditionally an op-ed piece is found in newspapers or magazines. It is an opinion piece written by a person not connected to the publication’s editorial board. It is called an op-ed simply because they would often be found opposite the editorial page.
He went on to explain that a perfectly neutral position was not something that could be achieved and therefore it was useless for journalists to situate themselves in that manner.

The Economics Writer thought many journalists misunderstood the pursuit of objectivity:

Too many journalists see their jobs as just to report what is said and believe that actually providing any sort of additional commentary, or any additional context, to statements is too much like opinion writing.

He went on to say objectivity should be about presenting facts and the truth rather than covering both sides of the story without critical analysis. The Political Commentator was similarly sceptical about what journalists perceived as being objective. However he clarified journalists are closest to objective when they endeavour to “describe facts without overtly opining, and when they give enough information to explain the opposing sides of any debate”, whilst being honest, frank, and fair.

The News Director explained whilst he was a “stickler” for objectivity it didn’t mean journalists were perfect at it:

You have to do your best. You have to try as hard as you can to step outside yourself, to work as a journalist without fear or favour as much as you possibly can; that’s being objective.

He also said objectivity was about questioning everybody in order to ensure everything reported was correct. He would instruct young journalists to start by assuming what they are told is “bullshit”, and then they can work toward the truth.
Whether objectivity is, isn’t, or should be a guiding principle in journalism is an issue that developed parallel to the question of its practical definition. The Pro-am Editor spoke about it being a desirable guide:

It means that people who are behaving in a journalistic fashion are disciplining themselves around their opinion, and they’re trying to make sure they make the right judgement calls.

The response of other participants also reflected this notion. It is an understanding that aspiring to objectivity results in a better standard of reporting facts, even if there is an acknowledgement that objectivity, in absolute terms, cannot be achieved. The Citizen Editor illustrated this point:

I’ve never thought that journalists could be objective, but I think when you’re writing reportage you should strive to be, so that’s a different concept.

The notion of journalists disciplining themselves so they can strive for something that better resembles objective reporting harkens back to objectivity as performance, as suggested by Boudana (2011). Journalists work on stories in a manner that will ultimately be judged by an audience according to how it measures up to the available facts, which represent the truth.

The Political Commentator positioned himself differently by suggesting the notion of individuals being objective is flawed:

Some journalists mask this better than most, but an awful lot lie to their audience by claiming to be objective and unbiased when in fact they are as much a slave to prejudgements, assumptions and values as anyone.

The Former Professional agreed with this viewpoint and believed professional journalists need to outwardly acknowledge objectivity is not possible:

It’s essential to reinvigorate, or make journalism meaningful again, to admit that it’s subjective. To admit there’s always a point of view or angle, a
perspective. That’s always been the case but journalism traditionally has hidden behind this myth of objectivity.

The notion of objectivity as a flawed myth needing acknowledgement reflects the concept of transparency explained by Karlsson (2011). In admitting there is a point of view behind all journalism many of the informed decisions that formerly happened behind the scenes would be brought to the “front of stage” in an effort to reconnect with the audience.

Although there is some disagreement about the practicality of objectivity as a guiding ideal for journalism, common ground was found in most of the interviewees’ responses. In broad terms it can be summarised as truth and fact presented relatively free of bias. Some participants believed that since being free of bias was not possible, there needed to be either a different understanding of objectivity or a different ideal guiding the practice of professional journalism. Others thought that it was good for journalists to strive to be objective even if they cannot be free of biases. Thus, whether or not objectivity is possible seems to be a result of how it is conceived.

When working as an individual absolute objectivity might be impossible, but when working in teams who are led by experienced individuals, it becomes easier to comprehend. This is also explains the tendency of citizen journalism to be considered as something other than objective.

**Journalistic Objectivity as Practiced**

In order to be guided by an ideal of objectivity, professional journalism outlets have developed expected standards—so objective performance may be evaluated (Boudana 2011)—and followed certain rituals—in order to best avoid making mistakes (Tuchman 1972). Ward (2006) identified six commonly held standards and suggested traditional ideas of journalistic objectivity became impractical when
journalists were expected to not interpret information and remain neutral.\textsuperscript{22}

Participants were asked about balance and being able to identify a journalist’s ideas, beliefs and personality within their reporting.

\textbf{Balance}

Balance is often discussed when looking at the standards of objectivity that relate to fairness, a lack of bias and detachment. Participants were asked how important achieving, and seeking balance, is to good journalism.

The News Director explained balance as being critical to all of a newsroom’s stories:

\begin{quote}
Balance is what we set out to achieve in any story. It’s up to me and the senior producers to make sure that journalists are making sure they’re getting both stories.
\end{quote}

Others agreed balance was especially important in news reporting. The Former Professional thought ‘straight reporting’ was always best for news because “you’ve got new facts to tell”. The Political Commentator felt because audiences “don’t want to feel lectured to, or denied half the picture” achieving balance was extremely important. The News Director added pursuing balance faced some practical problems because of difficulties balancing responses of different lengths and depths: “it’s not just about getting the other side of the story, it’s about making a very concerted effort to get the other side of the story.”

However a number of the responses indicated balance was also considered more complicated than giving equal coverage to all sides of an issue. The Online Editor believed balance becomes difficult because it “means different things to different people.” The Pro-am Editor saw the journalist’s role as: “to reflect the consensus of

\textsuperscript{22} These standards are factuality, fairness, non-bias, independence, non-interpretation, and neutrality and detachment.
the experts, not to just give equal balance to one side or the other.” This idea of balance gives preference to the weight of evidence over notions of each side being equally important. This means trusting those with relevant expertise to a higher degree, rather than expecting the audience to make well-informed decisions based on a mass of information presented free of analysis.

The original concept behind the Citizen Editor’s website was based on a similar understanding of balance:

   Over time, ideas would be beaten out and you would approach closer to an objective position through the course of a number of iterations coming from all different sides.

Given enough time, the weight of evidence and expert opinion would be reflected in the overall coverage of an issue and ultimately help inform the audience—the public.

The Online Editor raised the idea of balance needing to be viewed over time. He explained that on his site, articles would be published attacking different political parties, people or organisations according to the issues that were relevant at the time: “our view of balance simply is that they’re all bastards and they should all be held to account.” Given this, an outsider could consider the site unbalanced if only looking at a particular time when the focus was on a particular issue.

The Economics Writer summed up one of the problems a journalist might face if their only concern is balance:

   You need to also be aware that what is perceived, or what political parties would like to perceive, as being balanced is actually a contested space.

Just as journalists need to be wary that absolute objectivity is difficult for them, they must appreciate that is also the case for others. Without this appreciation a journalist becomes prone to unwittingly favouring one agenda over another because of a misguided use of the concept of balance.
One perspective of journalistic balance is that it helps journalists counteract their own biases, viewpoints, and perspectives in order to be objective. The Online Editor thought this ambition of objectivity was faulty:

People might say we’re very unbalanced on things like coal mining, well we are. We freely admit that we’re unbalanced because climate change is real and if we don’t do something we’re all in serious trouble. I don’t know how you can find balance on an issue like that. I don’t agree that you can and I don’t agree that you should try.

He acknowledged this requires a value judgement, but suggested the wider media landscape was broad and “if you want to be a redneck, bogan racist” you would find your views represented somewhere. This brings into question the scale on which balance should be judged. Given the volume of information and range of journalism outlets in the networked public sphere, should a single outlet be expected to cover every issue from every angle in order to cater for everyone? Perhaps balance is better conceived by examining the broader public sphere instead of hoping to find it in each isolated section of the public sphere—that is any individual journalism outlet.

Participants agreed balance was an important aspect of journalism—especially in news reporting. But there were conflicting ideas about what it meant to be balanced, and within which space balance should be expected. Some emphasised balance was a matter of properly representing the weight of expert evidence and opinions. There were also suggestions time was crucial to finding balance as it effectively counters bias, especially if conceived across the wider media landscape encompassing all sides’ supporting evidence—this is a concept similar to Ward (2006) description of pragmatic objectivity.

None of the participants believed it was as simple as providing equal coverage to all sides of an issue. This suggests a necessary degree of analysis in all stories, instantly
removing any idea of absolute objectivity and raising the issues of the extent to
which journalists should endeavour to detach themselves.

The visible journalist

Building on this idea of balance being found by looking at the whole rather than
individuals, raises the issue of just how detached a journalist should be from the
subjects that they are reporting. Questions were asked of the participants about the
‘visibility’ of journalists—or how recognisable they, and their ideas or beliefs, are in
their reporting.

When asked about the extent journalists should detach themselves from their
reporting, the Former Professional reflected on approaches taken when they started
in mainstream media:

> They thought it was a good idea to have some journalists that all they
do is
news. So if you’re a news journalist you couldn’t do comment, or opinion, or
really do any analysis because you wanted that separation.

Much may have changed in journalism since that point, but detachment is still
considered to be a sign of good reporting, as is being selective of the reporters
according to the News Director:

> A lot of us are defined by our beliefs so it can be very difficult for reporters
to separate some of their beliefs, therefore reporter selection on stories is
important.

The News Director continued by explaining that being selective is required more
with young, inexperienced reporters who learn through being guided by experienced
individuals, like himself, in the newsroom:

> I don’t think anyone would know my political beliefs or what footy team I
followed. How important is that? I don’t know, but I wear it as a badge of
honour.
Parallels could be drawn between this statement and what Marchionni (2012, 74) considered was a misunderstanding of what being objective entailed. Whilst detachment may be good, an understanding of how to balance detachment whilst simultaneously preserving your own individuality as a journalist is difficult. This potential misunderstanding of objectivity, though well intended, is then passed on as young journalists learn from experienced colleagues.

When talking about detachment, most of the participants acknowledged it was especially important when dealing with straight news reporting, however they felt certain circumstances benefitted from a different approach. The News Director noted that a reporter showing empathy can be valuable in the right circumstances and the Political Commentator suggested passion could be very powerful:

If someone is honest about their values, but is frank and with a great eye for detail, you can get a lot, lot more out of their account than that of someone either faking detachment or too dead emotionally to be alive.

The Pro-am Editor said whilst their site operates on the basis that “who is talking is as important as what they’re saying”, they are more interested in “their evidence, their understanding their expertise, their knowledge their deeper context” than opinions. The Economics Writer was worried that journalists were too concerned with leaving themselves out of the story:

It’s less about journalists putting in their opinions. I think it’s more about journalists putting in their knowledge. I think sometimes journalists get confused about the two and think: “If I add anything like that, then that’s me showing my opinion.” Whereas you’re just showing you’ve got some knowledge on this topic and you’re actually giving something to the readers.

The Former Professional backed this up: “if you’ve got the news, then you’re a pretty good show to do a good analysis.”
When asked if they thought journalists were becoming more visible, the Online Editor agreed:

There’s more editorialising media these days and I think unfortunately, it’s the cult of celebrity that drives a lot of media.

This concerned him, as he believed it was indicative of too high a priority being placed on entertainment; the perception being some journalists have been taking on more of a celebrity status. The Economics Writer was more circumspect when it came to the issue of journalists becoming celebrities:

It’s difficult to know whether they are getting more well known or because the people who watch those shows and the people who follow them on twitter—were they the type of people who would have actually known who journalists were in the past?

He conceded that social media allowed journalists to garner more of a following. In his case, the use of social media had enabled him to break into the media, whereas in the past it probably would not have occurred.

The News Director considered journalists becoming more recognisable in a comparatively positive light:

Because they’ve got that kind of identity, can attract stories. There’s a good and bad with it, and it’s mostly good. Big name journalists in this country break most of the stories because they’re known.

He explained journalists could garner trust because the audience gets to feel as if they know them by seeing them on a television screen. Given this, the networked public sphere offers up new and greater opportunities to build upon that trust. Van der Haak, Parks, and Castells (2012) suggested a transparent perspective is more convincing than the neutral narrative, and journalists becoming more recognisable can be perceived as a natural outcome. A journalist develops a certain reputation over the course of their career depending on their actions and the networked public
sphere makes it much easier for audiences to scrutinise patterns that emerge in their reporting. Whilst professional journalists scrutinise each other to an extent, most scrutiny can be credited to citizen journalism—done in variety of ways and various degrees of depth.

There was agreement that a journalist should try to detach from their reporting, and avoid becoming the story, but being detached meant different things to different participants. Predominantly, it meant journalists should have appropriate facts to support their reporting. In doing so, they best enable themselves to present reportage free of pre-conceived ideas; once again this was considered of particular importance in stories dealing with new facts. It was also considered allowing the audience ‘to know’ a journalist as a person could help build trust. This seems to go beyond the traditional understandings of objective reporting and suggests audiences may be expecting something different in a more connected public sphere.

**Considering the Audience**

Naturally when considering journalism as a form of mass communication there must be some thought to the audience—without anyone on the receiving end of a message, it cannot reasonably be deemed communication. Traditionally the relationship between journalism and its audience—the public—was one predominantly of sender to receiver. Now this has become something more complicated as the audience begins to participate in citizen journalism to greater and various extents. Given the inherent link suggested to exist between society and the journalism it produces (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2007), it is prudent to assess how much importance each participant placed on audiences, as well as how they interacted with their audience.

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23 See Figure 1 in the Literature Review.
Importance of the audience

Asked how much he considered the audience when writing a story the Economics Writer explained in his case it was “everything” because he was employed to explain masses of confusing data to people without background knowledge. The Political Commentator agreed the audience was largely taken into consideration, but clarified: “Not necessarily to pander to them, but to address their interests, and use the language to reach them.” Whilst recognising the importance of engaging with an audience, the Political Commentator went on to explain that sometimes articles get written knowing they would not generate traffic, but they deemed it important to report the information.

Similarly the Online Editor thought considering the audience was important, but by no means everything:

    We’ll often publish stories that we know won’t be particularly popular or do particularly well because they’re issues that we think are particularly important.

Identifying the pursuit of ratings as a fundamental problem that he believed had led to a “dumbing down” of the public debate, the Online Editor branded it a “community disservice”:

    When you boil all media and journalism down to its bare bones it’s there to benefit society. If it’s not benefiting society, if it’s just benefiting media outlets, then I see it as pointless.

Instead he explained, the site prioritised articles focused on having either “news or social values”, preferably both.
The News Director reiterated a similar sentiment by explaining that supplying the news was a responsibility to take very seriously:

Our job is to deliver the best possible product to the people who care, or to the people who want to care, so that they’re able to come to us and get a great product and a good news service.

He explained that although everybody does not have the same interest in watching the news, the audience is still so large and varied that they avoids making assumptions about it. However stories do arise that they admittedly would not cover in the same way as other news outlets:

We are more likely to do a fun story on the footy and the ABC News won’t do that. The ABC News might do more political stories than we would, we would not do as many. I pitch to what I think is the wider audience and at the same time think to myself the tried and true test of what we put out over time has been the rating success. “What do I think people want to view? Here it is, view it.”

The Citizen Editor said quality and intrinsically interesting ideas took precedence over whether an audience will like something when they were deciding what to publish. However he accepted that the audience would ultimately have an impact on the contributions the site received:

The writers that write for you tend to understand what the audience is and the audience understands what you’re likely to publish. There’s a bit of a loop that informs what’s going on. That explains why you get certain sorts of contributions and you have a certain view, and that explains why The Australian’s where it is, and the Sydney Morning Herald’s where it is.

It was expected that professional journalists would consider the audience more than their citizen counterparts as it sustains their livelihoods, and that was reflected in the data. Despite this, there was evidence to suggest that both the citizen and professional journalists had intentions to consider the wider public instead of focusing in on a particular target audience.
Audience interaction

In considering citizen journalism as a contribution to discussion there is an implied higher degree of interactivity within the wider journalism landscape. The modern networked public sphere, as understood by Flew (2014) and Benkler (2006), allows for higher numbers of individuals to spread and contribute news information in a way that it can be considered mass communication. These acts of citizen journalism come in many shapes and forms ranging from comment threads on professional articles, to ordinary people writing their own articles in reply.

For the Online Editor, increased audience interaction meant breaking down long-standing barriers and making journalism more accountable again:

For a very long time, the big media outlets have had security at the front door and it’s very difficult to hold faceless journalists to account for their reporting. But that’s starting to change with social media, which is one of the things I really like about it.

He likened it to the way in which regional journalists had to live within the communities they were writing about: “sooner or later you’re going to have to confront the community that you’re doing over.” This is a reflection of the changes to the public sphere, from something that had gradually become disparate and disjointed to now being a network of complicated connections. The same sprawling online networks enabling the rise of citizen journalism, have brought people back closer together and make it hard for anyone, including journalists, to hide.

When starting out in mainstream media, the Former Professional felt there was a mixture of fear and contempt for the audience, which meant there was very little interaction:

If readers complained you’d go through this whole process, you wouldn’t even think to ring them and explain or apologise.
He said this was no longer the case as social media has made it crucial to now have a relationship with your audience:

More journalists are finding that audiences can be extremely useful in terms of gathering facts, in terms of expert opinions, in terms of notifying you of errors quickly, and it’s really important as a journalist to acknowledge that quickly, in fact it breeds trust.

The News Director reflected similar notions saying most of the feedback they receive from the audience now came via social media:

We got a lot more feedback on social media now, obviously that’s the way to do it. We also know that if we make a major mistake, or a major blue, we will get ousted on social media way quicker than we ever did in the past.

Although he explained that while a complaint would never be summarily dismissed they had to be wary social media doesn’t have the same “rules of engagement.”

Often complaints are misconstrued because either the person didn’t see the story properly or they didn’t see the story and they’re told by a friend “You’re never going to believe what the news did.”

The Citizen Editor held a similarly wary position when considering that comment threads could go off on unrelated tangents, but there were also positives:

It shortens the amount of time you have to spend gathering information, it gives you access to sources that you wouldn’t have otherwise had, and it also gives the readers access to sources that they wouldn’t have otherwise had.

On occasion, the threads could provide valuable insight into issues not previously considered by the author, or understood by other audience members. In these moments it would be fair to consider these threads as citizen journalism, and furthermore as “ambient journalism” (Hermida 2011).

Audience interaction was largely perceived as a positive development, because it meant journalists would be held to a higher degree of accountability. Interactions
also seemingly add an extra element for professional journalists to consider and it raises questions about the value of conversational styles of journalism (Marchionni 2012). By publishing their own thoughts and ideas, journalists opened themselves up to criticism, but also cultivated a higher level of trust.

**Priorities**

One of the biggest pre-conceived distinctions between professional and citizen journalists is where their priorities lie—what stories they cover and the way in which they cover them. Being part of a news organisation means there are guidelines to follow, as well as a need to consider issues other than those being reported. In comparison many citizen journalists enjoy relative freedom to follow their own priorities.

Many participants simply stated their number one priority was to make sure they got it right. The News Director put it most succinctly: “If in doubt, leave it out.” Where the differences lay was in how they would go about trying to ensure they could get it right.

The Pro-am Editor talked about how the site’s editors were all trained in a set of key values:

Accuracy, impartiality, fairness, rigour, accurate presentation of information, fair presentation of counter-arguments, giving people the full picture, not distorting, not leaving things out, explaining context; those sorts of things and those sorts of disciplines to me are the important things probably more so than trying to achieve some abstract notion of objectivity.

Whilst experts commissioned to write for the site were not expected to act in the same manner as professional reporters, they were expected to be working from evidence.
The Economics Writer found there was a similar requirement of evidence with his work for the ABC, but when writing for a commercial paper there was more leeway to add his own opinion and a few more throwaway lines. He explained his own ethical guidelines:

It’s a case that context is always clear even if I might argue one aspect of the data might be more important than the other. I don’t ignore the data and I’m there to try and give the readers the full picture.

Though there are no uniform ethical standards professional journalists are required to adhere to across the industry, the Former Professional believed they are essential to identifying journalism: “without the ethical standards I don’t see how journalism can be defined as something different from what other people do.”

The website requires every contributor to agree to abide by the MEAA’s code of ethics, but he supported the idea of a strong self-regulatory body, underpinned by legislation, that would make more journalists think about ethics:

I find “amateurs” are actually much more ethical, and think more about ethics, than a lot of professional journalists do; they seem to take it more seriously.

However the News Director saw the journalists in his newsroom constantly discussing ethical issues they encountered:

They’re not necessarily discussed in terms of ethics, the word wouldn’t necessarily be used—it would probably never be used. It would be: “Are we being fair? Are we being too hard? Should we be showing the address of that person? Should we be showing that person’s face?”

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24 The MEAA does have a code of ethics but journalists are not required to be part of the alliance in order to work as a journalist
The Citizen Editor said his site was run like a forum, and in that sense it was driven by the agendas of its contributors:

These days I rarely go out to source material, it’s got enough intellectual capital to attract enough contributions most days to give us three to six articles.

How well the articles are written combined with the institutional standing of the author, determines whether they will publish the article.

In conclusion, the evidence from the interview responses suggests journalists will more readily talk about their guiding principles as a matter of ethics instead of an ideal objectivity, which many deem unachievable. Similar ideas surrounding facts, truth, clarity, and context are considered when trying to be objective in reporting (Ward 2006). It could be considered as re-imagining, or a building upon, the objective ideal.

**How Things Change**

Already in this chapter there has been mention of some changing journalism practices—journalists being more accessible, for example. It is hoped by examining these changes, connections can be made to traits more typical of citizen journalism in order to establish the impact the rise of citizen journalism has had on professional journalism. Participants were asked whether they perceived citizen journalism as having had any impact on professional journalism practices. They were also asked about where they saw citizen journalists as having advantages over their professional counterparts—this was considered an indication of how things may change further.

Earlier comments, made by multiple participants, regarding audience interactions alluded to how the traditional gatekeeping role of the professional journalist has
weakened. The Pro-am Editor explained things have changed since the times of having to go through editors and reporters in order to reach an audience:

Now what we’ve got is this flourishing of online publishing where you’re a physicist, and you’re applying ideas from physics to everyday life then you can write a blog, you can talk to other physicists, you can interrogate, you can investigate, you can do a whole range of things as citizens and as a citizen journalist.

The Former Professional explained that during the 2013 Australian federal election they had citizens reporting on their local campaigns:

I was quite concerned that they wouldn’t be able to get access to the politician because they weren’t professionals, but actually the opposite was true. Because they were actual constituents they had a really good chance of getting heard.

The News Director considered that citizen journalists are able to break some stories before the professionals because they are less shackled by procedures and guidelines:

You can find yourself in a situation where you’re covering a story; you can just do it. You can kind of have some fun with it and you can say what you like and you can do what you like.

In being able to act in a way in which they see as fitting the situation without any hoop-jumping, citizen journalists are free to largely base their work on their own knowledge. The Political Commentator suggested this was one of their main advantages:

In some circumstances they may be better informed on certain topics, depending on who they are, what they do, or what they’ve seen. And that is the difference that counts. The facts, the opinion, and the story—not the employment status of the storyteller.

That is also the guiding principle behind the site run by the Citizen Editor and the Pro-am Editor’s associated site. By removing the intermediary, the wider public—for it would be remiss to simply call them an audience—hear things directly from the
source rather than through quotes pieced together in the traditional style of reporting. The Former Professional suggested that, in combination with the structural decline of journalism, this might lead to professional journalists becoming more reminiscent of curators of news. This role would see journalists sorting through the mass of information in order to collate the most relevant information for their audience to access in one space—there would be less emphasis on being an original source and more emphasis on collation and analysis.

The Pro-am Editor also suggested the rise of citizen journalism was going to mean media organisations will have to overhaul traditional models to continue practicing journalism. The Citizen Editor agreed:

> The Internet has destroyed the publishing model and any publishing model that’s springing up to replace the traditional one has to have much lower costs. So one way of getting lower costs is disintermediation to allow significant members of the audience to take on the role of the journalist to a certain extent.

According to many of the participants, the mainstream media still has the loudest voice in the journalism landscape, with the News Director saying: “the big screen in the lounge room is still quite strong.” However the Online Editor perceived social media and citizen journalism as whittling away at that power: “It is starting to make journalists a little bit more accountable, which is obviously good in the end.” The Former Professional sees it much the same way: “It definitely is forcing legacy media to be more open about who the journalist is and where they’re coming from.”

**Conclusion**

The data gathered presents many issues and conflicts, but several ideas became more prominent as they continued to emerge throughout the participants’ responses. However, given the difficulties of defining ‘citizen journalism’ it is hard to establish
the extent to which its rise has impacted professional journalism practices. By looking at some of the characteristics typically associated with citizen journalism and comparing them to the change mentioned by the participants, it seems apparent that there has been an impact; it is just the extent of that impact which that remains in question.

The first area of change is in accountability; citizen journalism has created an environment where professional journalists are held to account for what they say with more immediate ease than before. This is particularly the case given experts, as well as *ordinary individuals*, now have a way of reaching an audience without the need for journalists to act as mediators. This has opened up professional journalists up to a layer of analysis and criticism they previously avoided by virtue of being largely hidden away behind closed doors and the use of reporting practices entrenched in ‘ritualistic behaviour’. Now, the more often public nature of these critiques demands professional journalists interact with, and answer to, the audience in order to build rapport. This inherently involves journalists becoming more transparent with their own thoughts, ideas, processes and bias.

A guiding principle of transparency is not altogether removed from the objective ideal in ambition, but it places greater emphasis on journalists disclosing their processes, and self, which sets it apart as a distinct ideal. This comes as a result of a combination of things and seems to be in part a repercussion of the rise of citizen journalism. As more people begin to act in a manner that fulfils the journalistic function, the way *ordinary citizens* process information changes, because they are presented with more alternate views that then they cannot possibly process in their entirety. It is unlikely that notions of objectivity in journalism will stop being discussed or that the standards associated with good journalism will change a lot,
however the term objectivity has competition as the best summation of those standards. Transparency, accountability and, in some circumstances, straight ethics are considered to be more favourable ways of referring to the standards set outlets for their journalists.

It also became apparent through the interview process that objectivity was considered differently depending on what level of knowledge the audience already has on the information being delivered. Many of the participants indicated that traditional ideas of balance and detachment were most important when dealing with ‘straight news’. This idea of straight news came across as the presentation of previously unknown information. Many participants considered objective actions, such as balance and detachment, particularly important, but there was a suggestion journalists dealing in analysis—which generally comes later in the piece—had more room to move when it came to these and other established objective practices.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Journalism is a natural result of the way people live within societies. It has developed as a system, delivering news information, alongside the societies that we build and has adjusted when the need arises. But always at its foundation it has informed people so that they might best make decisions when faced with choices. As society has grown, spread, and generally become more complex, journalism has had bigger roles to play in order for societies to function effectively. Democratic societies are reliant on journalism as a fourth estate that serves the public and acts as a mediator between the governed and the governors—simultaneously speaking for and informing parties on either side of the divide.

Around the start of the twentieth century professional journalists began favouring the idea that they needed to adopt an objective position in order to best fulfil their role within society. This was in line with the emerging thinking of the time that favoured scientific notions of certainty. The foundation of this idea was that growing, increasingly diverse, and increasingly educated societies, were best served by a neutral presentation of facts in order for the public to make appropriate decisions without needing to process all the information.

Recent technological advances have caused another significant shift in large parts of society. The public sphere has opened up as more permanent network connections between individuals created an environment where it was easier for individuals to reach mass audiences. This enabled ordinary citizens to see themselves as viable contributors to public discourse and, with various degrees of awareness, they began...
fulfilling the journalistic function by spreading information that influenced decisions being made.

The rise of citizen journalism fundamentally caused a shift in how the audience acts—from being a once passive receiver reliant on the news information fed to them by professional journalists to becoming an active participant in the dissemination process. Becoming more involved caused the audience to experience news in a different manner and as a result professional journalism practices have been affected. The change in audience behaviour is a significant shift in society and the industry of professional journalism needs to adjust in order to continue to function as a form of mass communication.

Upon analysing the responses it seems as though the traditional understanding of objectivity is losing some of its traction as a dominant guiding ideal within professional journalism. More professional journalists are beginning to realise there is now a need to interact, or be seen to interact, with their audiences in order to establish themselves as somebody worth listening to. There is less talk about the ritualistic nature of objectivity that protects journalists from mistakes, and more talk about acknowledging mistakes when they are inevitably made. Obviously preventing mistakes is still considered a priority but the journalists interviewed were under no illusion that they were infallible.

Whilst transparency does not completely overhaul the ideal of objectivity it can be considered a shift in the established standards that has resulted in journalism becoming more accountable. Professional journalism’s pursuit of accountability comes in part as a result of the rise of citizen journalism; it has brought with it information that previously may not have made it past the gatekeepers and into the
Given individual professional journalists will find it very difficult to report on, and be aware of, all the information and perspectives existing in the networked public sphere, their reporting is prone to being construed as unbalanced or biased. As professional journalists explain and justify the positions taken by their reporting they lift the curtain on their processes and reveal they too are slaves to their own positioning in the world—they too are not absolutely objective.

During the research for this thesis it became evident that the notion of ‘citizen journalism’ is much easier to discuss than notions regarding ‘citizen journalists’. Whilst still problematic, the term ‘citizen journalism’ can at least be applied with some permanence to certain contributions to discussions held in the public sphere, whereas applying the citizen journalist moniker to an individual is reliant on reference to such a contribution. The problem is exacerbated by the negative connotations often associated with the term. Individuals are reluctant to be considered as citizen journalists because they are seen as inferior to professional journalists and even “dangerous” because of their lack of experience and training.

One course of action may be to abandon the citizen journalist moniker in favour of referring to all relevant contributors as journalists. If there is a need to distinguish those that are paid then simply refer to them as professional journalists.

As journalism is still in a transitional phase, further research is required in order to better comprehend the extent of citizen journalism’s impact on the traditional ideals of professional journalism.

An examination of the audience is key to assessing how citizen journalism is affecting professional journalism, but it was not directly addressed in this thesis. Any mention of the audience has been made from the perspectives of the practitioners and
this does not necessarily correlate to the actual experiences audiences have with journalism. Yet it is changes to how audiences function in relation to journalism that will help to illustrate whether or not the traditional approach to journalistic objectivity will be affected. Ultimately journalism still answers to the public and the suggestion that citizen journalism acts as a fifth estate seem to hold sway given some of the participants’ responses regarding higher degrees of accountability. Further research focused on the audience, and questioning what they expect of good journalism, could add to the discussions of how guiding ideals in journalism are changing in light of the audiences experiencing news differently.

In light of many participants referring to ‘straight news’ as part of their responses, an examination of the makeup of professional journalism landscapes may provide further insight into citizen journalism’s impact. Comparing the number of sources dealing in ‘straight news’ to the number that predominantly focus on analysis, and assessing if this balance has shifted may indicate whether the subjective nature of citizen journalism has influenced professionals. As considered in this thesis citizen journalism focuses more on discussion and analysis, which naturally tends away from the neutral perspective in favour of a distinctly transparent viewpoint. If it could be established that a greater share of the professional journalism landscape was focused on undertaking this approach—in a responsible and accountable manner—then a connection between the rise of citizen journalism and changes to traditional journalistic ideals will become harder to ignore.

The rise of citizen journalism in the twenty-first century has opened the gate such that more information floods into the public sphere, and this has caused new ways of thinking. Just as new ways of thinking gave birth to journalism’s objective ideal at the start of the twentieth century, this latest change has made waves in terms of how
audiences experience news. A different or changed ideal, guided by the pursuit of accountability and transparency, is required for an effective communication of news information in this new environment. The rise of citizen journalism has played a definite part in that.
Appendices

Appendix A

Monday, 25 May 2015

Dr Leo Murray
School of Arts
Murdoch University

Dear Leo,

Project No. 2015/072
Project Title The Rise of Citizen Journalism and its Impact on the Ideal of Journalistic Objectivity

Your application in support of the above project was reviewed by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee and was;

APPROVED – subject to the following CONDITIONS:

a) Refer to Qn 10 on the Application Form. As some interviews will take place off-campus, ensure fieldwork approval is obtained prior to commencing the research.

b) Refer to Qn 16 on the Application Form. How will ‘citizen journalists’ be identified for recruitment and what are the parameters around which of this group be approached for participation?

c) The application needs to have the School Dean or Associate Dean Research’s signature.

d) As journalists are covered by a range of ethics and protocols and ‘citizen journalists’ perhaps are not, consider including a question on journalistic ethics and codes of conduct to add to the questions around objectivity for both groups of interviewees.

You are not authorised to commence data collection until all conditions listed have been addressed to the satisfaction of the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Your response to the conditions should be forwarded in writing to the Research Ethics and Integrity Office. Once the committee is satisfied that the conditions have been met, you will be issued with a formal approval.

The committee expects researchers to respond to conditions in a timely manner. If no response to conditions has been received within 4 months from the date of this letter, the conditional approval lapses and a fresh application will be required.

Please quote your ethics project number in all correspondence.

Kind Regards,

[Signature]
Appendix A (cont.)

Dr. Erich von Dietze  
Manager  
Research Ethics and Integrity  

cc: Mr Andrew Porter and Stuart McGuckin
Appendix B

Email Interview Approach

Dear ________,

My name is Stuart McGuckin and I’m doing honours research at Murdoch University concerning citizen journalism and the effect it’s had on professional journalism.

As part of my research I will be conducting a series of interviews with a selection of professional journalists and citizen journalists. I am hoping that you might be interested in participating as one of the interviewees and if so I would like to explain my project to you further via phone or email.

If at that point you are still interested in participating we'd set up a time convenient to both of us in order to conduct the interview, most likely via Skype.

Thanks for your time, I look forward to hearing back from you and explaining my project further.
Stuart.
Appendix C

Information Letter

The Rise of Citizen Journalism and its Impact on the Ideal of Journalistic Objectivity

Dear

We invite you to participate in a research study looking at the effects of citizen journalism on professional mainstream journalism practices. This study is part of my Honours Degree in Arts, supervised by Dr Leo Murray and Andrew Porter at Murdoch University.

Nature and Purpose of the Study
A new wave of citizen journalism has evolved with the development of web 2.0, meaning anyone with internet access can take on the role of journalist to disseminate information and facts to a ready and available audience. Given this rise, audiences are increasingly exposed to a different kind of ‘journalism’ based on different ideals, values and practice.

The aim of this study is to investigate how the professional journalistic ideal of objectivity, may have been affected by the rise of citizen journalism.

If you consent to take part in this research study, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and the procedures you will be asked to undergo. Please make sure that you ask any questions you may have, and that all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction before you agree to participate.

What the Study will Involve
If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview with the researcher, Stuart McGuckin. It is anticipated the interviews will be conducted face to face in a mutually agreed location. If distance or circumstances means that is not plausible, it is planned that a telephone or Skype interview will be conducted.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without discrimination or prejudice. All information is treated as confidential and no names or other details that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research. If you withdraw, all information you have provided will be destroyed.

Privacy
Your privacy is very important. Your participation in this study and any information will be treated in a confidential manner. Your name and identifying details will not be used in any publication arising out of the research. Following the study, data will be kept in de-identified format, in a locked cabinet in the office of the Chief Investigator.

Benefits of the Study
It is possible that there may be no direct benefit to you from participation in this study. While there is no guarantee that you will personally benefit, the knowledge gained from your participation may help others in the future.
Appendix C (cont.)

Possible Risks
There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Stuart McGuckin on 0430 118877, or my supervisor, Andrew Porter, on 93602534 or 0417 976751. My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have about this study.

Once we have analysed the information from this study we will email a summary of our findings. You can expect to receive feedback by the end of the year.

If you are willing to consent to participation in this study, please complete the Consent Form.

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Sincerely

Stuart McGuckin

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2015/072). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University’s Research Ethics Office (Tel. 08 9360 6677 or e-mail ethics@murdoch.edu.au). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix D

The Rise of Citizen Journalism and its Impact on the Ideal of Journalistic Objectivity

I have read the participant information sheet, which explains the nature of the research and the possible risks. The information has been explained to me and all my questions have been satisfactorily answered. I have been given a copy of the information sheet to keep.

I am happy to be interviewed and for the interview to be audio recorded as part of this research. I understand that I do not have to answer particular questions if I do not want to and that I can withdraw at any time without needing to give a reason and without consequences to myself.

I agree that research data from the results of the study may be published provided my name or any identifying data is not used. I have also been informed that I may not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study.

I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

Participant’s name: __________________________

Signature of Participant: ______________________ Date: ……/……/…….

I confirm that I have provided the Information Letter concerning this study to the above participant; I have explained the study and have answered all questions asked of me.

Signature of researcher: ______________________ Date: ……/……/…….
Appendix E

**Interview Guide for Professionals**

1. What does the term citizen journalism mean to you and how does it differ to the traditional notion of journalism?

2. Do you think the rise of citizen journalism has had any impact on what you do, or are expected to do, as a journalist? If so, how? If not, why not?

3. How would you define journalistic objectivity?

4. What are your newsroom/workplace standards for objective reporting?

5. What ethical guidelines are in place in your newsroom/workplace?
   a. And how are ethical ‘grey areas’ dealt with?

6. Can you give me an example from experience of when a story had to be re-done before it was published because it didn’t meet standards of objectivity?

7. How important is balance? Why?

8. With a story that has two or more sides should each side necessarily be given equal coverage? Why or why not?

9. Have you found you have become more ‘visible’ to the audience/public as a journalist over time?
   a. Is it important for journalists to detach their personal feeling/beliefs from their stories? Why?

10. How much is a target audience taken into consideration when putting together a story?
    a. And as opposed to the wider public as a whole?

11. How much do you interact with your audience? Do you receive negative feedback from them? If so, what does it usually relate to?

12. What is your number one priority when putting together a story?

13. Do you think the burden of objectivity should be policed by each organisation/publication or is it something that falls on the shoulders of the individual journalists?

14. Do you think a citizen journalist has any advantage over you in terms of how they might be able to report? If so what are they? If not, why not?
Interview Guide for Citizen Journalists

1. What does the term citizen journalism mean for/to you and how does it differ to the traditional notion of journalism?

2. Do you consider what you do to be citizen journalism? Why/ Why not?

3. How do you find your stories or decide what to write about?

4. How do you define journalistic objectivity?

5. Do you set yourself guidelines for how you write when it comes to being objective? What are they? Or why not?
   a. How much editing does a story undergo before being published?

6. Do you have a set of ethical guidelines? If so what are they and if not why not?
   a. And how are ethical 'grey areas' dealt with?

7. How important is balance within the stories you cover? Why or why not?

8. Do you endeavour to try and cover more than one side of the story? If not ,why not?

9. How ‘visible’ are you as the author of your story to your audience?
   a. Is it important to detach your feelings and beliefs when you are producing stories? Why or why not?

10. How important is an audience to you?

11. Are you trying to reach a wider and larger audience then you already have or does that not matter?

12. Do you consciously aim for a certain type of audience? If so who?
   a. Do you think what you contribute seems to appeal to a certain audience and/or disengage other?

13. What is your number one priority when putting together a story?

14. Do you think the burden of objectivity should be policed by each organisation/publication or is it something that falls on the shoulders of the individual journalists?

15. Do you think a citizen journalist has any advantage over traditional journalism in terms of how they might be able to report? If so what are they?
References


