THE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION PRACTICES

OF ONLINE JOURNALISM

IN DIGITAL TAIWAN

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I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Win-Ping Kuo
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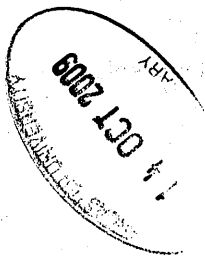
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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study which investigates the production and consumption practices of online journalism in Taiwan. Two key questions are asked: how is online journalism practised in the domain of production and consumption and how is online news culture shaped or constituted through these practices? Distinct from existing studies of online news, I argue that online journalism should be studied as an emerging cultural form, rather than a subordinate of any existing forms of news media.

My ethnographic study focuses on the practice aspect of online news consumption and production. It includes observation of, and interviews with, both professional news-workers in the online newsroom and online news consumers in private spaces. The analysis of this data reveals that online journalism has formed a 'convergence news culture'. This convergence culture in online journalism does not only involve an integration of different media formats and organizations, but also involves a convergence of different practices conducted by dispersed participants relating to online news media.

In showing how the convergence culture of online journalism is constituted and shaped, I frame the analysis of online journalism through three interrelated aspects: online news production, consumption and online participatory journalism. My key finding suggests that online media, influenced by the convergence of different practices, shapes and expands the producer/consumer relationship. This relationship, therefore, cannot be captured by the conventional dichotomy of information provider – recipient. Both professional news-workers, and consumers/citizens who are involved with the practices of grassroots/citizen journalism, contribute to the circulation of online news information via their various practices of online news media.

A significant influence of convergence news culture and the changing relationship is that consumers' or citizens' online news practices have challenged the traditional mainstream definition of what journalism is, as well as provided different 'public knowledge' and perspectives to facilitate public discussions in a new, emergent online public sphere.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis examines online journalism in Taiwan. It comprises practice-based research into the production and consumption of online journalism. Following the practice paradigm in media and cultural research, this thesis aims to study what people really do and say - their practices - in relation to the production and consumption of online journalism. Two key research questions this thesis tries to answer are: (1) how is online journalism practised in the domain of production and consumption and (2) how is online news culture shaped or constituted through practices? I argue that online journalism should be studied as an emerging cultural form, rather than be treated as a subordinate or by-product of print or broadcast news media. Furthermore, I also argue that, as an emerging cultural form, online journalism has formed a convergent news culture. The construction of this convergent news culture has derived from different practices relating to online journalism in the online news environment. That is, online news culture is no longer shaped only by professional news-workers' everyday work of making news in the newsroom; additionally, those consumers who are usually seen as recipients of news information also contribute to the construction of online news culture via their different practices relating to online journalism.

In online journalism studies, a common perspective is to underline the effects of technology. The claim is that online journalism and some digital technologies are driving forces resulting in radical consequences and transformations to the production and consumption of news. This perspective, which sees technology as the main force, is common in explaining both the transformation and character of online journalism. Based on this perspective, scholars, on the production side, claim that online technologies are 'rapidly rewriting the traditional assumptions of newsroom

organisation and structure' (Pavlik, 2001:108) or changing the definition of journalism. On the consumption side, online journalism is also said to alter the way news is received. Online newspapers enable readers to control the story-lines of news according to their own desires via the use of certain web technologies such as hypertext or database search engines, or select different news presentations via multi-media formats in online news reports (Negroponte, 1996). Readers can also participate in chat groups or online forums to discuss special topics or customise their online newspapers by using some special online filtering software to personalise their news to present the topics they prefer to read.

Paradoxically, a number of empirical studies of online journalism show different results for the development of digitised news media, particularly in online newspapers. These empirical studies suggest that, so far, online news appears to be 'subordinate' or 'subservient' to print newspapers (van der Wurff, 2005:107). These findings confirm what is known as the 'shovelware effect' of online journalism: 'taking information generated originally for a given print paper's edition, and developing it virtually unchanged onto its website' (Boczkowski, 2002:274). These empirical studies represent the second perspective on online journalism, which argues that online news media seem to be only a 'territory' in which the conventional news media (mainly referring to print news) move their material infrastructures and production logic to the digitised environment, but change little of the essence of journalism.

The above two debates on online journalism have been criticised by scholars (Boczkowski, 2004a; Domingo, 2006). One of the criticisms is that both viewpoints focus, more or less, on the technological effects on online journalism. This perspective, to a certain extent, has made some valuable contributions by stressing the significance of technology's potential influence, but has, on the other hand, limited our

understanding of the complexity of online journalism (Boczkowski, 2004a). Yet, the historical development of Internet related technologies suggests that these technologies were not invented for the news industry in the first place. The news industry is merely one several adopters (e.g. academic and military users) to adopt Internet-related technologies. Once Internet-related technologies enter into different cultural domains, their usages and practices are various. This is an important aspect for us to consider when examining the meaning of technologies and cultural products. As Pablo J. Boczkowski (2004b:3) indicates, 'most of what ends up becoming unique about a new technology usually develops from how actors appropriate it'. However, the discussion of how technologies are actually used and appropriated in online journalism is almost absent from the perspective of technological effects.

My investigation of online journalism in this thesis does not follow the perspective of technological effects. Yet, we cannot deny that technology, in particular digitising technology, is one of the aspects where online journalism is discriminated from other forms of news media. That is, online journalism is normally seen as news that is published and distributed via digital media which is different from conventional print or broadcast media. There are some novel and unique features about online news products which cannot be disregarded. Nevertheless, studying online journalism is more than just a comparison with the old and new traits of conventional news media (e.g. newspapers and television news). Simultaneously, online journalism is more than a product resulting from technological effects or simply news information carried on digital media. It also relates to how different ideas, values, meanings and interpretations are practised in the digital environment, how a form of social knowledge is constructed and circulated via online formats, and also how a new social space is used and established as a new tie between civil society and the state which is usually called the public sphere.

All these aspects connect to different usages and appropriations of online journalism, which are – practices of online journalism.

Accordingly, this thesis aims to offer an alternative trajectory to investigate online journalism on the basis of its practice. I argue that online journalism should be studied as an emerging cultural form and that we should look into the practices connected to this cultural form. Treating online journalism as an emerging cultural form does not mean that it is an entirely new one, instead I accept what Raymond Williams, in his book *Television: Technology and Cultural Form,* argues: 'a new media technology can be a combination and development of earlier media forms', but 'the adaption of received forms to the new media technology can also lead in a number of cases to significant changes and to some real qualitative differences' (Williams, 1974:44). Likewise, Boczkowksi (2004b:4) describes online journalism as 'emerging media', which has emerged by merging existing social and material infrastructures with novel technical capabilities, a process that also unfolds in relation to broader contextual trends. In this thesis, I see online journalism as more than emerging media. On the surface, online journalism is indeed a novel medium, but its significance is more than simply that of a new medium. What online journalism has brought to news producers, consumers and society is in fact a new cultural form. This new cultural form is inscribed into news producers and consumers' practices. What I imply here is that we need to study online journalism as a whole, instead of as a by-product of other news media; and we should study the complexity of activities around online journalism practices from cultural aspects. This focus on the cultural aspects of journalism studies has been emphasized by many authors (see Allan, 2004; Schudson, 1989), and this is as well the key concern for my analysis of online journalism in this thesis.

The term 'practice' in media and cultural studies can be defined as a set of

individuals' actual doings and sayings around media or related social activity (Couldry, 2004b). Practice theory has been seen as a shifting paradigm in media and cultural studies which aims to investigate the complexity of media activity, and one which moves beyond old debates about media effects, political economy forces and audience interpretation (Couldry, 2004b). The connection of culture and practice can pursue anthropology's viewpoint which treats culture as kinds of social practices (Hall, 1996). In journalism studies, many empirical studies have already examined news culture from a practice aspect (Tuchman, 1973; Tunstall, 1971). As Thomas Hanitzsch (2007) suggests, news culture is connected to ideas (values, attitudes, and beliefs), practices (of cultural production), and artefacts (cultural products and texts). By addressing these three aspects, Hanitzsch thus indicates that news culture is 'a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists, consciously and unconsciously, legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful for themselves and others' (Hanitzsch, 2007:369).

Hanitzsch's analysis of news culture and practice is here obviously based on the general concept and situation in the era of mass media, which relates the creation of news culture to the work of professional news-workers. However, in online journalism, things have been different. The practices of online journalism now include different activities from dispersed practitioners (or actors) who utilize varied media technologies and make their creative contributions to online journalism culture. I will show in my following analysis that 'convergence' is at the heart of the integration of these different practices.

Convergence in media usually refers to an integration of cross-media formats or technological features in the digital environment. Certainly this is the core aspect for convergence in media. Nevertheless, in this thesis, I will argue that convergence does

not only lie in technological shift and integration; instead, convergence in online journalism transforms the relationship between news genres, technology-in-use (practice), news producers and consumers (audiences). In other words, in online journalism, convergence involves the convergence of practices and the convergence of cultures.

To investigate online journalism practices and the convergence culture driven and shaped by and from these practices, I use Taiwanese (R.O.C.) examples including online news media and their readers as the subjects of my study. Taiwan is an island nation country which is famous for its 'made in Taiwan' technological products. As a country for which high-tech exports are the main pillar that sustains the nation's economy, technology, in particular information and communication technology (ICT), also plays a significant role in the government's policy making and in people's everyday lives. This can be seen from the high Internet penetration on the island. By 2007, the household Internet penetration rate in Taiwan was around 70 per cent, which ranks in the top 20 in all countries of the world according to statistic from Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (Taiwan) (2008). In this region, promoting Internet usage is one of the nation's core policies to establish Taiwan as a 'high-tech island'. On the other hand, using the Internet and related technologies are also seen as an important capability for Taiwanese citizens. In this context, the development and diffusion of online journalism appear to present no difficulty to the mainstream news media and Internet users. In fact, the first online journalism website in Taiwan was launched at around the same time as in several western countries.

In addition to high-tech products, news media in Taiwan also form a special news culture very different from other countries and is satirized by some people as 'another miracle of Taiwan'. The highly competitive media ecology resulting from the hasty

process of media de-regulation has led the media in Taiwan to pursue exaggerated and sensational topics or even to 'fake' news in order to increasing copy sales or audience ratings. Ironically, a survey has found that few Taiwanese people trust news media and complain of its worsening quality, but a high portion of Taiwanese still express the view that news programmes are their favourite programmes (NCC., 2008).

The practices of online journalism in Taiwan are situated in this special news culture and technological environment. On the one hand, the mainstream media are eager to go online because economic pressures have pushed them to seek a new medium to extend their consumer base, particularly younger consumers. On the other hand, the public's complaints over the poor performance of the mainstream media sparked the emergence of a number of small alternative online news websites at nearly the same time as mainstream online news on the island. This had a profound influence on online journalism culture in Taiwan and, later, on the development of online participatory journalism – a kind of journalism where the content is mainly produced by online news readers or users. The implication here is that the practices of online journalism are in fact intertwined with the social and cultural contexts of Taiwan. I will provide further discussion of these contexts in Chapter 3.

The circuit of online journalism culture

As suggested earlier, in this thesis I am interested in the practices of online journalism within two main realms – production and consumption. I think that the practices within the two realms are the centre where online journalism product is produced, distributed and consumed, as well as where online journalism culture is constituted. Regarding this, du Gay, Stuart Hall, Lind Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus' discussion on the circuit of culture (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997:3) provides a plausible model and useful framework for me to examine the

production and consumption of online journalism. In their discussion of the circuit of culture, du Gay et al. use a conceptual model which includes five processes: production, consumption, identity, representation, and regulation[1] (see Figure 1.1) to examine the meaning circulation of a cultural product. Du Gay et al. argue that any analysis of a cultural text or artefact must be examined via the five processes if it is to be adequately studied.

Figure 1.1 The circuit of culture
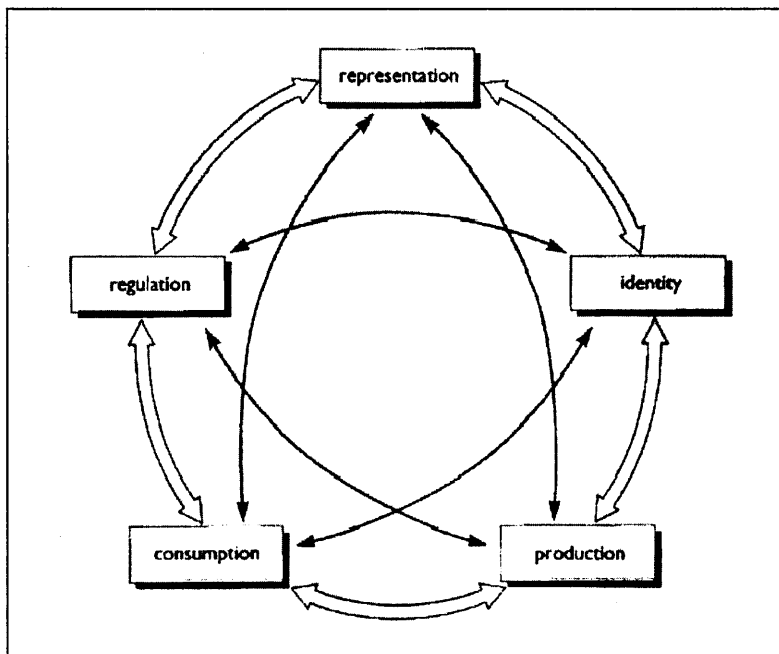
Source: du Gay et al., 1997:3

In this thesis, I employ the cultural circuit model to examine the production and consumption of online journalism. Before discussing the significance of the model to

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[1] The different processes of the model are also discussed in other authors' works (du Gay, 1997; Hall, 1997; K. Thompson, 1997a; Woodward, 1997).

online journalism study, it is necessary to outline briefly each process. Each of these processes will be given a more detailed analysis when they are mentioned in later chapters with my empirical data. From the perspective of du Gay et al., these five distinct processes are linked with each other based on articulation – 'the form of connection that can make a unity of two or more different or distinct elements, under certain conditions' (du Gay et al., 1997:3). The circuit of culture includes the following five processes:

The first process of the model is production. The study of the production process in media and cultural studies does not only aim to examine how media or cultural products are produced technically, but also how meanings are inscribed into the products, which is, in other words, to understand them culturally. This is the moment of the production process which, using Hall's term, is called 'encoding' (Hall, 1973). Du Gay et al. suggest that the production process is one of the moments when a cultural product is made meaningful. They are interested in how values, beliefs, and patterns of working are intertwined into production practices. Therefore, studying the production process for them aims to understand the production of culture, but their means to achieve this understanding is from a cultural aspect. That is to say, to investigate the 'culture of production' – the way in which the practices of production are inscribed with particular cultural meanings (du Gay et al., 1997:43).

The second process is consumption. Consumption in the process of the cultural circuit can be seen as the moment of 'decoding' (Hall, 1973). Consumption here is not simply concerned with brute economic phenomena, such as buying and shopping activities; instead, from the cultural circuit notion, consumption is in the mean time a cultural phenomenon which is involved with various meaning-making practices. This viewpoint also reveals one of the basic assumptions of the cultural circuit model. That is,

the meaning of an object or a cultural product does not just end with the production process. While producers attempt to encode cultural products (including news products) with particular meanings, this is not, as du Gay et al. claim, the end of the story in the biography of a product (du Gay et al., 1997:5). For them, to say producers determine the meanings of cultural products tells us nothing about what those products may come to mean for the consumers who use them. As many authors from cultural and media studies argue, consumers or media audiences do not passively accept the meanings created by producers in cultural products and media text, meanings are actively made through consumption or media text reception. Therefore, consumption practice in the circuit of culture is also at one and the same time a meaning-making practice. Through meaning-making practices, consumption could be linked to patterns of social and cultural differentiation (Bourdieu, 1986), an appropriation process which makes cultural product meaningful to consumers (Miller, 1991) or a resistance practice to react against the dominant meanings defined by the producers (de Certeau, 1984).

Identity is the third element in the circuit of culture. A broader meaning of identity can be defined as 'how we think who we are' and 'our understanding of who we qre and of who other people are' (R. Jenkins, 1996:5). In the circuit of cultural production, identity relates to two aspects: what sort of identity the producers of a cultural artefact encode in the process of producing the cultural artefact, and what identity is associated with or acquires as potential consumers. Identity in the process of cultural circulation relates to both production and consumption. In a research project for Sony Walkman, du Gay et al. suggest that producers of the product usually try to use the language of advertising and marketing to create identification between consumers and product (du Gay et al., 1997). Therefore, consumers are subjects-for-the-product, and they become, in their mind's eye, typical 'Walk-men' and 'Walk-women' (du Gay et al., 1997:25).

Representation, another process in the circuit of culture, can be understood as 'using language to say something meaningful about or to represent, the world meaningfully' (du Gay et al., 1997:14). In their original notion of the cultural circuit, representation is seen as the core process in which meanings are given to a cultural artefact when it is represented in visual and verbal forms. In media studies, studying representation refers to the construction in any medium of an aspect of social affairs including people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and other abstract concepts. Such representation may be presented in different forms of media such as language, reports, images, as well as other symbolic forms.

Regulation in the cultural circuit model does not only refer to government policies or laws, which represents one of the regulatory frameworks from political forces in our society. Regulation is also about economic interests or market forces, which are usually described as a 'hidden hand' and other social actors and institutions (e.g. social pressure groups or the educational system) and so forth.

In examining the practices of online journalism, I will use the cultural circuit model to frame my thesis. In the production process of online journalism, I focus on how online news content is produced and how meanings and values are inscribed in online news content. In consumption practices, my study centres on how online journalism is consumed through online news readers' different practices, which include their use of online news media to sustain daily routines and various social practices. I also analyse the regulatory framework of the media in Taiwan and the government's Internet policy with the aim of showing their impacts on the circuit of online journalism. I do not really analyse identity and representation separately because I view both processes as being inscribed in the production and consumption processes. In online journalism, both production and consumption involve representing news and identity aspects. I will

show in my empirical analysis that the work of news representation is not the privilege of professional news-workers anymore in online news, those who are usually treated as consumers now also try to generate their own versions of the news in the online news environment. This aspect also relates to the identity issue in the circuit of online journalism. That is, the once distinct identity between producer and consumer in the process of production and distribution of news is now blurring in the online news environment.

Although du Gay et al. claim that studying the circuit of a cultural product should examine the five processes; they also imply that all the processes are in combination and that we should study their articulation (du Gay et al., 1997:3). In regard to this, my chapter structure in this thesis does not following the strict segmentation of this model. In particular, I give much more attention to discussing the production and consumption process of online journalism and the relationship between these two realms based on my research interests. However, one critical point that should be borne in mind is that while du Gay et al. suggest that researchers using the cultural circuit model can separate the different processes for discussion for analytical purposes, in the real world the five processes continually overlap and intertwine in complex and contingent ways.

Studying culture practice

The cultural circuit model is significant for the study of online journalism for the following reasons. Firstly, the model provides an adequate analytical framework for studying media activities and media products. One key argument of this model is that meaning production and creation within the circuit of a cultural product is never ending; it is an ongoing process. For du Gay et al., most research into cultural artefacts usually focuses on the end process of production or assumes that production processes determine the meaning of cultural products. As they indicate, 'it was not unusual for

sociological analysis of cultural products to begin and end with these processes of production', because 'the model of production of a cultural artefact was assumed to be the prime determinant of the meaning which that product would or could come to process' (du Gay et al., 1997:3). The cultural circuit model obviously breaks with this logic. By introducing the notion of circuit, du Gay et al. refuse to accept that the meanings of any cultural artefact are only decided by any single process. On the contrary, they suggest that the meanings of a cultural product are a continuing circle and are created through a combination of processes. Meanings of any cultural product are not pre-determined, but can be changed according to the practices in different processes. Each process identified by the cultural circuit model influences the distribution of meanings of a cultural product. Therefore, for the study of a cultural product, one should at least, as suggested by du Gay et al., 'explore how it is represented, what social identities are associated with it, how it is produced and consumed, and what mechanisms regulate its distribution and use' (du Gay et al., 1997:3).

My viewpoint of the production and consumption processes of online journalism echoes the basic argument of the cultural circuit model. For me, online journalism practices involve, more or less, meaning creation and distribution. I see meaning in the circulation of online journalism as an ongoing process which does not end in any moment. Journalism practices connected to meaning-making and distribution have been shown in some existing journalism studies. News production and consumption essentially include using symbolic material to represent social events, as well as a different range of interpretations of media text. All these respects can be seen as meaning practices. In the online news environment, these meaning practices seem to engage with a more complicated situation. Additionally, the relationship between online news producers and consumers due to the use of online media technologies has

encouraged an increasing participatory culture which I will discussed later in this chapter.

Secondly, in their studying of the cultural circuit, du Gay et al. connect studying culture to social practices, which is also the major concern in this thesis. The term 'culture' has been discussed across different disciplines from sociology, through cultural studies to media studies. Yet, it is also one of the most controversial notions to give a definition to. In their discussion of culture, du Gay et al. pursue the early definition of culture by Raymond Williams, and develop it in terms of the practice perspective. In his book *The Long Revolution*, Williams suggests that 'culture is a description of a particular way of life which expresses certain meaning and values' (Williams, 1961:57). From this perspective, culture does not exist only in art or literature, but is also involved with meaning and value expression and creation from different institutions and ordinary people's behaviour, which is, in other words, their practices.

Nevertheless, du Gay et al. obviously take only part of Williams's definition of culture. In their discussion of the circuit of culture, they imply that culture, to a certain extent, involves meaning producing and circulating practices, and studying culture at the same time lies largely in investigating meaning practices. Here we can see clearly that du Gay et al. did not follow Williams's argument that culture refers to an abstract notion of 'way of life', but they do seem to accept that culture is involved with the expression of meaning and values. They suggest that people are cultural beings and 'as cultural beings, we are all, always, irrevocably, immersed, in the "sea of meanings", in this giving-and-taking of meaning' (du Gay et al., 1997:15). They argue that meaning is not found in things, instead, it is human beings who, through the process of using words, language and images to form concepts in our heads which refer to objects in the 'real

world', construct meaning, and make a cultural form (or product) mean something.

The emphasis on cultural practices is one of the central aspects for cultural study. As Stuart Hall (1997:3) indicates, 'it is participants in a culture who give meaning to people, objects and events'. For Hall, things do not only comprehend one, single, fixed and unchanging meaning. He uses stone as an example and indicates that 'even something as obvious as stone can be a stone, a boundary marker or a piece of sculpture' (Hall, 1997:3). It all depends on how we use something, and what we say, think and feel about things, how then we give them meanings.

Following Hall, du Gay et al., I thus understand that the activities within the cultural circuit, including meaning construction, expression, and circulation are involved in different social practices, or we can say more specifically – meaningful practices. Yet, we do not have to accept completely the argument that all social practices are practices oriented to meaning-making proposed by du Gay et al (1997). Furthermore, we do not necessarily have to think that culture lies completely in meaningful practices. In fact, even du Gay et al. (1997) agree that culture has diverse meanings and dimensions. However, the discussion about culture and practice is significant for my study of online journalism culture. It connotes a new research trajectory where we can study culture via certain concrete actions – practice. These respects will be further discussed below.

The practice turn in media and cultural studies and its significance

As previously stated, practice is central in my study of online journalism. It represents both a research paradigm and a perspective on how social life is structured. There is a claim that some social, cultural and media studies are now being shifted to a 'practice turn' by some authors (Schatzki, 2001a). They argue that 'practice theory' is a type of social theory that has been sketched by such scholars as Bourdieu, Giddens and, later, Foucault, and by others (Reckwitz, 2002). These theorists use the term in various

ways but all in ways which are alike in emphasizing that practices involve routine activities, shared habits, techniques and competences. So far there is no general theory developed on the basis of a practices perspective. Schatzki argues that theorists of practice approach 'present pluralistic and flexible pictures of the constitution of social life that generally oppose hypostatized unities, root order in local contexts, and/or successfully accommodate complexities, differences and particularities' (Schatzki, 1996:12). However, recent work conducted by different writers has tried to give practice theory a more concrete and complete definition, as well as applying the notion to different research domains such as philosophy (Schatzki, 1996; Schatzki, Centina, & Von Savigny, 2001c), cultural studies (Reckwitz, 2002), consumption studies, (Warde, 2005) and media studies (Couldry, 2004b).

Theodore Schatzki provides a philosophical base for practices theory. He argues that 'social order is established within the sway of social practices' (Schatzki, 2001b). By social order, Schatzki defines it as 'arrangements of people and the organizations, artefacts, and things through which they coexist' (Schatzki, 2001b:43). Schatzki identifies practice as a coordinate entity. That is, social practices usually organise nexuses of activities and discourse. He suggests that a practice includes doings and sayings organised by a pool of understandings, a set of rules, along with purposes, beliefs, emotion and moods. All these together form a practice.

What Schatzki implies here is that practice cannot simply be studied as human activity. A social practice also consists of 'embodied, material arrays, and shared meanings' within the human activity (Schatzki, 2001a:3) . This resembles Andreas Reckwitz's (2002) definition of practice, as he writes:

A practice is a routine type of behaviour which consist of several elements,

interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002:249).

The practice theory which is developed by Schatzki and Reckwitz frames practice as the smallest unit of social analysis. This highlights the different perspectives on human action and social order taken by those using practice theory, classical economic theory and some classical sociological perspectives. Classical economic perspectives explain actions on the grounds of individual purposes and interests, and sees social order as a product of these individuals' interests and purposes. By contrast, some classical sociological perspectives emphasize collective norms and values as the basis for action and argue that a normative consensus is fundamental for social order. However, practice theory, offering an alternative viewpoint, overcomes the debate between the purpose-oriented theory of action from a classical economic perspective and the norm-oriented theory of action presented by sociologists such as Durkheim and Parsons. By emphasizing practice as the smallest unit of social analysis, theorists claim that practice theories are neither individualist nor holist (Schatzki, 1996). However, this does not means that practices are not related to social structures or rational decisions, instead these are embedded in practices or, as Schatzki suggests, 'both social order and individuality ... result from practices' (Schatzki, 1996:13).

One of the significances of practice-based research is that practices are based on seeing something observable (Barnes, 2001). Performances of a practice are usually public and visible, something that is manifest in what actors or practitioners do. This aspect has a profound influence on media and cultural studies. Ann Swidler (2001)

indicates that the aim of practice theory is to analyses culture via publicly observable processes, instead of the older abstract notion of culture as internal ideas or meaning. Swidler (2001) point out two such observable processes of practices which link to Schatzki's definition of practice as doing and saying. Firstly, practice involves activities which enable media and cultural studies to investigate what people actually do in relation to cultural and media practices. This relationship between practices and activity is also discussed by Schatzki as he argues that 'practices are organised nexuses of activity' (Schatzki, 2001b:48). He gives examples such as cooking practices, child-rearing practices, political practices, banking practices and so forth. Each of these practices is 'an organised web of activity, exhibits two overall dimensions: activity and organisation' (Schatzki, 2001b:48). Secondly, practices also involve the aspect of discourse, which Swidler refers to as 'not what anyone says, but the system of meaning that allows them to say anything at all' (Swidler, 2001:75). Following other theorists of practice theory, I suggest that discourse-related practices can be understood as knowledge, principle, order or statements about practice (Couldry, 2004b; Reckwitz, 2002), the aspects which usually reflect on individual's actions when conducting and performing a practice.

The second significant aspect of practice-based research is that it does not see practices as pre-determined. As Nick Couldry states, 'practice research aims to be as open as possible in analysing what practices are out there, which in turn depends on how people understand what actions are linked into a practice' (Couldry, 2004b:121). Alan Warde (2005) puts a clearer description on this aspect, as he indicates that 'social practices do not present uniform planes upon which agents participate in identical ways but are instead internally differentiated on many dimensions' (Warde, 2005:138). Here, Warde argues that every social practice is different and is not predicted and completely

predetermined by any rules or conditions. For example, Warde uses performance in driving to explain his viewpoint, and indicates that the practice depends on past experience, technological knowledge, learning, opportunities, available resources, and previous encouragement by others. From this point of view, we can hence 'differentiate on the basis of the potential contribution of agents to the reproduction and development of the practice' (Warde, 2005:130).

For online journalism, practices theory provides a different angle which does not emphasize technological effects, but to observes different actions and activities of actors. Based on a practice perspective, online journalism practice therefore includes a variety of aspects and activities such as discursive knowledge for conducting practices, material use for production and consumption practices, engagement of actors for practices and so forth. I will develop these details more in the following discussion.

Online journalism practices and their circulation

I have discussed the cultural circuit model and the basic assumption of practice theory. In this thesis, I build a bridge between the two theoretical approaches in my study of online journalism. To use them in my empirical study, I need to address several aspects which are important for my later analysis, including a definition of the actors/practitioners and the themes relating to the practices of online journalism.

To define the actors in online journalism practices, we need to discuss the question of who participates in the practices. For practice theory, actors are an important element for forming, reforming and performing a practice. Reckwitz notes that, in practice theory, 'the social world is first and foremost populated by diverse social practices which are carried by agents' (Reckwitz, 2002: 256). He indicates:

As carriers of practices, they [agents] are neither autonomous nor the

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judgemental dopes who conform to norms: They understand the world and themselves, and use know-how and motivational knowledge, according to their particular practice (Reckwitz, 2002:256).

To address the major 'actors' in online journalism practices in this thesis, we need to look first at the character of online journalism. Regarding online journalism practice, many authors tend to define it from the perspective of professional journalism. For them, online journalism is the work of journalists and includes at least four 'core' activities: news gathering/research, selecting, writing/processing, and editing. Based on this, 'the online journalist is therefore a professional performing journalistic tasks [sic] within and for an online publication' (Deuze, 1999:377). This definition of online journalism and its practices tends to imply that professional news-workers are at the heart of the online news production practices.

However, from the perspective of the cultural circuit and the real situation of online journalism, the above viewpoint seems inadequate. On the one hand, the notion of the cultural circuit has suggested that the producers are not the only the practitioners who decide the meaning of a cultural product as I have discussed; additionally, consumers, through their consumption practices, also contribute to the circulation of meanings. On the other hand, as also mentioned earlier, recent developments in online journalism have shown that more and more amateurs who are also participating in news circulation via the Internet (e.g. personal websites or sending information to mainstream news websites and so on) in such big news events such as the September 11, 2001 attacks (9/11 attacks) also play a significant role in providing and distributing news information.

Regarding this, my investigation of online journalism practices does not only lie

with those professional news-workers, but also those online news readers who participate in online news consuming practices, and those who contribute their versions of journalism by using different online media in the online news environment. All these practitioners are the 'carriers' who carry out online journalism practices.

Online journalism production practices

Online journalism production practices are one of the processes in the circuit of the culture of online journalism. Following practice theory, my aim in this thesis is to investigate what practices constitute the process of online journalism production, and how these practices generate online journalism products and culture. In this thesis, I will begin my investigation of online journalism production practices with ethnographic observations and interviews in an institutional news setting – the online newsroom. The newsroom is usually the site for researchers to observe and investigate news production practices (also called news-making practices). Many journalism studies labelled 'newsroom ethnographies' (Zelizer, 2004:65) were early endeavours to study the routine practices of news-workers. These newsroom ethnographic studies tried to find the framework that guided news-workers' journalistic practices including how they classify news, verify facts and uphold professional principles (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1973).

My interest in the production practices in the online newsroom is to explore what actors (professional news-workers) say and do in relation to online journalism, by following Schatzki's (1996) theoretical description that practices include nexuses of saying and doing. I understand doing as the practical activities related to online news production, and saying as including the explicit rules, principles, precepts and instructions that link to practical activities in the online newsroom. These sayings, as discussed, represent different discourses about journalism which have been studied in

existing research on news-making. These studies show that different discourses in the newsroom seem to form a set of norms and principles which is used for guiding news production practices. For example, different 'news values' – the criteria for selecting news - are used as the accounts for journalists to decide which social event is newsworthy (Fishman, 1982).

Online news production practices also include situated activities, that is, the practices in each case are performed and take place at particular times, in particular places, and in relation to particular social and technological circumstances (Schuman & Trigg, 1991). From this perspective, online news production practices should consider the environment where the practices are situated. In online journalism, authors argue that the online newsroom provides an environment for production practices which is different from other news media. For example, John V. Pavlik (1999:57) proposes three features of the online newsroom: firstly, the newsroom is integrated with other departments in the same news organization; secondly, the online newsroom now employs a less hierarchical structure; and thirdly, news media embrace ever-increasing freelance reporting and stringers, who work from remote locations and are connected via Internet technologies. Pavlik's suggestion addresses some features of the online newsroom. However, how these features in the online newsroom shape the production practice of online journalism and its product are still unclear, which need a further investigation.

Consumption practices in online journalism

The relationship between consumption and practices has been discussed in a few studies in recent years. The key concern over consumption and practices is not only to treat consumption as a kind of practice, but also concerns how consumption engages different kinds of practices (Warde, 2005). Couldry (2004b) makes a similar argument

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when discussing media consumption from a practices perspective, as he suggests that to theorise media consumption as practices is to study a different range of practices in which the acts of media consumption occur, and also how these practices link to other social practices. In fact, many media studies have shown that media consumption does not lie simply in media textual reception and interpretation (certainly these are also kinds of practices), but also involve using and appropriating media and their content to sustain other social practices, including everyday routines (Bausinger, 1984), family power relations and activities (Lull, 1990; Morley, 1986), and daily conversations with peers (Bird, 2003).

As stated earlier, consumption and related practices make up one of the processes in the circuit of culture of online journalism which occupies a significant position like production. However, so far, the literature of online journalism consumption has accumulated largely in relation to what new options are added to media repertories, and the effect that the use of online news has upon that of conventional news media, and vice versa (Boczkowski, 2002). The studies apparently began with the old media effect paradigm, and do not tell us what people actual use in relation to online journalism. On the basis of practices theory, my interest in online journalism consumption thus lies in how online journalism consumption relates to different practices.

In this thesis, my concern with online journalism consumption practices focuses on the relationships between news reception, technology practices, and other social practices drawn from online journalism consumption. These aspects as well relate to the fundamentals of online news products. Concerning online news consumption, it has been said that, on the one hand, it enables readers to play a more active role in controlling their online news reading; and, on the other hand, it also encourages a media participatory culture (Jenkins, 2002), which means that readers now involve themselves

more frequently with activities such as media participation. Additionally, the Internet has been labelled as a nonlinear, multimedia, and interactive medium which has also become the significant character in online news production. These features yield several meanings to online news consumption. Online journalism is nonlinear, therefore the information on online news websites can be provided and consumed in non-sequential fashion by readers (Gunter, 2003); if it is multimedia then readers can select the storylines of the news information they want; and if it is interactive, so readers have more opportunities to interact with journalists or express their opinions on news websites.

Some scholars have pointed out that studying media consumption practices, especially technological media, needs to take both material and textual (symbolic) aspects into account – the so-called double articulation feature of media technologies (Livingstone, 2007; Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992). To put it simply, consumers' media consumption includes two general types of practice. On the one hand, they may read media content and generate various interpretations (the textual/symbolic aspects), and on the other hand, their practice may also involve using the media themselves for other purposes (the material/technological aspect). For instance, a study shows that television in some families is used for displaying the family's imagination about modernity (Leal, 1990).

Online journalism, from my viewpoint, is also a 'double articulation medium' (this concept will be discussed further in Chapter 6). Therefore, online news readers' consumption practices also include both features. For example, readers' online news reading might mainly focus on online news content receiving and interpreting, but, at the same time, these reading and interpreting practices also involve using a different range of online media technologies such as hypertext, multimedia and other

technological aspects. Accordingly, when we study the practices of online journalism, we need to take all these aspects into account.

Online participatory journalism and the public sphere

Another important online journalism practice I will analyse in this thesis is what has been called 'online participatory journalism'. The term refers to those non-professional news writers who use a different range of online technologies to produce journalism-related content from writing news reports to making comments on news issues on blogs – a kind of online diary which enable users to write their own texts and interact with others – or other online news forums. Gillmor suggests that the Internet and related technologies give everyday people the tools they need to develop what he calls 'grassroots journalism' (Gillmor, 2004b:270). In this grassroots journalism, citizens play active roles in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. Authors argue that the practices of online participatory journalism have changed the epistemology of what we usually think journalism is. For example, Donald Matheson (2004:444) indicates that different kinds of online participatory journalism 'provide a case of how one form of online journalism is re-articulating existing norms, and particularly some of the epistemological foundations of news-work'.

The practice of online participatory journalism has raised several issues relating to the cultural circuit of online journalism. Firstly, it re-defines the relationship between news producers and consumers. Scholars proclaim that the use of digital technologies blurs the traditional distinctions between producers and consumers of cultural products in the digital age (Klinenberg, 2005). In online journalism, people who have previously been seen as audiences or consumers now conduct more news production practices via writing and distributing news information on blogs or other websites. By contrast,

mainstream news media and professional news-workers whom are usually seen as the major institutional mechanism of outputting news information seem to face huge challenges now. As Dan Gillmor (2004b:270) claims, 'tomorrow's news reports will be more of a conversation, or a seminar' and will not be controlled totally by professional news-workers or the big media.

Secondly, online participatory journalism influences our ordinary perspectives on journalism. Journalism in contemporary society has been seen as a form of knowledge (Park, 1940). Today, we tend to get used to mainstream journalism as an important institution for providing 'public knowledge' – knowledge which is about public affairs. These sorts of knowledge, such as government policy and public interest issues, are assumed to give citizens useful information for their social lives such as voting for/against decisions or addressing issues in public debates. However, public knowledge reported on the mainstream news media seems to have a pre-established form. John Fiske (1992) indicates that this form of knowledge should include an informative function which tells people what they ought to know in a liberal democracy and for social responsibility. Therefore, 'it is a knowledge required by public, not private life; it is knowledge of society in general rather than of the particularities of daily life' (Fiske, 1992:49).

Obviously, online participatory journalism challenges the above definition of journalism as a form of public knowledge. Journalism generated by those grassroots writers or citizen journalists has, to a certain extent, been seen as practices where citizens express their views (Allan, 2003). However, these citizens' voices are frequently from their own first-hand and eye-witness experiences. Their journalism might be neither related to those kinds of public knowledge with which official sources or mainstream news media expect that their audience should concerned, nor present

'public knowledge' in the way that professional journalism usually emphasizes.

Thirdly, online participatory journalism also provides a different aspect for examining operation of the public sphere in contemporary society. The public sphere, following the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, can be defined as 'a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed' (Habermas, 1964:49) (this concept will be further discussed in Chapter 2). For Habermas, in the public sphere, access is guaranteed to all citizens. It is the place where citizens participate in debating issues of public interest. An ideal public sphere, according to Habermas, is a forum which acts as mediator between a society and its state; it is also a forum where individuals can get together and freely debate public affairs (Habermas, 1989). News media have been seen as an important public sphere for modern society. However, Habermas himself makes a deeply pessimistic critique of the modern media. He argues that as market-driven entities with a vested interest in fragmenting audience markets for profit, most news media in modern society fail to provide a real public forum for public discussion.

In this thesis, I use blogging journalism – one of the popular forms of participatory journalism in the blog sphere – to examine the influence of participatory journalism practices on the public sphere. On the surface, a blog sphere resembles what Habermas's original vision of the ideal public sphere where participants can enter freely and discuss public-interest issues, but on the other hand, practices within this new public space are different from mass media or the ancient Greek city-states and the eighteenth-century coffee houses which Habermas calls the bourgeois pubic sphere (Habermas, 1989). That is, many activities related to public discussion and debates in the blog sphere are a kind of collective practice in which dispersed practitioners share certain expectations about the use of blog as a tool for information distribution,

knowledge building and relationship management of different practitioners (Schmidt, 2007). Therefore, the meaning and influences of these collective practices to operation of the public sphere present controversial dimensions for studying and will be discussed further in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

Research Questions

At the beginning of this chapter, I have proposed two key research questions that this thesis tries to answer. Apart from the two main research questions, a series of secondary questions emerged from the two key research questions. These secondary questions became categories, along with my three core research topics of online journalism which I have discussed previously in this chapter.

Firstly, for online news production, I asked:

SQ1: How does online journalism transform the practices of news production?

SQ2: What sorts of norms, principles or criteria guide production practices in the online newsroom?

SQ3: How are online media technologies utilized in the process of online news production?

Secondly, for online news consumption, I asked:

SQ4: How does online news influence consumers' news consumption in their everyday lives?

Thirdly, for online participatory journalism, I asked:

SQ5: How does online participatory journalism change the producer/consumer relationship in the online news environment?

SQ6: How does this changing relationship influence news culture in the information age?

SQ7: What are the implications of this change for the public sphere?

All the research questions will be addressed in relation to my empirical data in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Methodology: media ethnography and practice

The main research method in this thesis is media ethnography. At the heart of this research method is the act of observing and listening to people as they go about their everyday lives in order that the researcher might understand the way they behave or think on their own terms (Machin & Niblock, 2006:1). The aim is to find out what Clifford Geertz describes as the 'informal logic of actual life' (Geertz, 1973:17). There are two basic assumptions in ethnography. First, this method emphasizes that researchers have to understand human behaviour not by looking at any one moment, but by observing it in different contexts and at different times. Second, researchers have to assume that people may not know to the actual reasons why they do things. Societies generally have available official reasons for why people do the things which people often do, but which may not be their actual motivations. Regarding these, the ethnographic method is a significant method for my study since my research mainly focuses on the online news practices of news-people and consumers in their everyday lives.

Traditionally, ethnographic study requires researchers to spend a long time with the subject of study in order to find out the real and complete answers for their behaviour. However, conducting long-term ethnographic research is difficult, considering the available resources and time in my research. Researchers, especially media scholars, have developed several different strategies to conduct their ethnographic studies with limited resources. For example, Ann Gray (1992) and David Morley (1986) used ethnographic interviews (interviewing the subject of research in the environment where they use media) to do their research on the audience's consumption of media technology.

Some researchers also use diaries and recall methods to ask people what they do during the periods when the researchers cannot observe their media reception activities. Thus, the media ethnographic method I used for my study is not entirely the same as an anthropologist's ethnography. In addition to the observations and interviews at the time the audiences use online news media, my study also combines multiple methods, such as interviews after use, audience self-expression, related documentary analysis, and so on. I use these multiple methods to offset the limitations of being unable to perform long-term observations for my project.

My fieldwork is based on Taiwan because this is the society and cultural region that I am familiar with, and where I could get more resources to help my data collection. Empirical data in this thesis are based on two phases of fieldwork in Taiwan. The first phase was from July to September 2005, and the second from February to March 2006. Each period of fieldwork consists of two elements – production and consumption. On the production side, I use *ETtoday.com*, one of the popular mainstream online news websites in Taiwan, as the case study. I use serial interviews and observations to collect my data. During the two fieldwork periods, I interviewed journalists, editors and related staff of *ETtoday.com*. The interviews were conducted in the newsroom and, after the interviews I asked to stay on in the newsroom for a further period to observe their working activities. I also accompanied some journalists to observe their work of news convergence outside the newsroom.

On the consumption side, I interviewed people who have experience of reading online journalism and people who use online media to conduct their media participation in journalism. In the second phase of the fieldwork, I asked some respondents to let me observe their online news reading at home to see how they actually use and read online journalism. I could not conduct conventional anthropological ethnography and stay at

the site for years, because the limitations of time and resource did not allow me to 'live with my respondents'. However, unlike those researchers who enter into a totally strange environment to do ethnography, the news, cultural and media environment in Taiwan is familiar to me since I have lived on this island more than thirty years, and my experience as a journalist for seven years also helps me to understand the journalistic work more quickly than outsiders. To a certain degree, my background also solves the problem of my not being able to conduct a long-term ethnographic study. The procedure, questionnaires, and ethical guidelines of my fieldwork, as well as the advantages and limitation of my research method are further discussed in Appendix 4.

Chapter outline

This thesis is structured according to the cultural circuit model, but the chapter arrangement does not follow precisely each process of the model due to analytical reasons and my special research interest. From my point of view, each process of the cultural circuit model is related to the others, it seems unnecessary to follow the distinct categorization of each process. Based on this, this thesis is organised as follows:

Chapter 2 reviews existing studies of online journalism and some key arguments over news and online news in contemporary society. My review work is based on the three major themes in this thesis: online news production, consumption and online participatory journalism. The aim of this chapter is to provide an insightful exploration into how existing media and journalism studies understand online journalism.

Chapter 3 discusses the regulatory framework of journalism and the Internet in Taiwan. It includes a historical review of the development of the media and telecommunication systems in Taiwan from 1940 to the early twenty-first century, the regulatory frameworks for the media and telecommunication systems in different time periods in Taiwan, and how these different regulatory frameworks influence the

practices of online news media. I point out in this chapter that the regulatory

frameworks in Taiwan create a 'hybrid regulatory framework', and the special media

and telecommunication environment in Taiwan, which directly and indirectly impacts

the development and practices of online journalism there.

Chapters 4 and 5 use *ETtoday.com* as the case for investigating the production

processes and practices of a mainstream online news website. In Chapter 4, I focus first

on three aspects – time, space and news flow in the online newsroom – to see how the

adoption of online media technologies and the transformation of newsroom structure

influence everyday production practices and shaping online journalism culture.

In Chapter 5, I examine how market values and news professional values co-exist in

the online newsroom and influence routine online news production practices. I first

investigate how market values are embedded into the everyday production practices of

an online newsroom through the adoption of technology in order to boost profits.

Secondly, I examine how news-workers in the online newsroom resist the influence of

market values based on their rules and norms of news professionalism in their everyday

production practices.

Chapter 6 investigates online news readers' news consumption practices in

everyday life. By interviewing online news consumers and observing some

respondents' online news reading practices, I suggest that online news consumption

practices include two aspects, consuming news content (the textual aspect), and

consuming online media technologies (the technological/object aspect), the 'double

articulation features' of online news media. With these double articulation features,

online news consumption practices for readers do not simply aim to get news

information, but also involve a variety of activities from incorporating online news

reading into their everyday routine to appropriating online news reading as a way of

social participation.

Chapter 7 analyses two types of online participatory journalism – user-generated journalism and blogging journalism. The first type is where online mainstream journalism engages with readers in their news production process, and the second type refers to those who actively participate in journalism-related practices in the online news environment. I suggest that online participatory journalism has a profound influence on the identity of news producers and consumers and their relationship in the process of online news circulation. Furthermore, online participatory journalism provides a new way of analysing the operation of the public sphere and the construction of public knowledge in contemporary society.

Chapter 8 recaps the findings I present in each chapter. Based on these findings, I will try to answer the questions driven my empirical findings, including what are (if any) the features of online journalism culture in the Taiwanese context, and what kinds of practices constitute this culture. I will assess the significance of practice-based study and media ethnography methods by examining the actual doing and saying of online journalism. Finally, I hope to highlight the implications and meanings of this online journalism culture for the news industry and the public sphere in the digital age.

Chapter 2 Studying online journalism in the digital age: How does online journalism transform the practices of news production and consumption?

The emergence of online news media has created a new regime for creating news content that provokes many challenges to contemporary journalism. There is already abundant literature on the production and consumption of online journalism. In this chapter, I will review related literature and point out that studying online journalism needs to focus more on the practice aspects. As I argued in Chapter 1, the practice-based media and journalism study focus on the aspects of what is seen to be done and said by different practitioners in relation to online journalism. Researchers can thus observe and investigate what people actually do and say in terms of studying online journalism culture. Additionally, examining the practice aspect also enables us to see how things are used, values inscribed, and different actions structured around online journalism. None of these aspects have been fully developed or discussed in the online journalism literature so far.

Based on my research interests, I am dividing this chapter into three research themes: the production and consumption of online journalism, and the practices of online participatory journalism. Firstly, for online news production, my review will be based on the key concept of the sociology of news production, which argues that news is a cultural product 'made' or 'manufactured' by news-workers. That is, the news we read/watch/listen to in everyday life is generated through a production process resulting from news-workers' routine practices constrained by institutional pressure, newsroom culture, news professionalism and different social forces. As Denis McQuail (2000:627) suggests, 'news is a process of both selection and construction'. Therefore, in this

chapter, I will discuss the key elements which influence the making of news products. These elements are also important for my study of the process of online news production to be found later, in Chapters 4 and 5.

Secondly, in the consumption side, I will examine different approaches to media and news consumption including media effect studies, the uses and gratifications approach, reception analysis to the practice-based research of news consumption. These approaches help us to understand different perspectives on media and news consumption, which is also significant for my analysis of online news consumption practices. I will use my empirical data to investigate online news consumption in Taiwan in Chapter 6.

The third part of this chapter will focus on online participatory journalism - a practice where the general public 'write their own news and comments' in online spaces via online media. This practice has a profound influence on both news culture and the (media) public sphere in the digital age. My discussion in this part has two main dimensions: how online participatory journalism transforms the relationship between news producers and consumers, and how the practice connects to citizens' actions when exercising their citizenship in the online media public sphere. For discussion of the public sphere, I argue that Jürgen Habermas's (1964, 1989, 1992) theory of the public sphere, especially the media public sphere, in contemporary society provides us with a useful start to discussing the relationship between online participatory journalism and the public sphere. Therefore, I will outline Habermas's theory in this chapter. This discussion also relates to my own empirical studies of online participatory journalism in this thesis.

The sociology of news production

In this section, I will first assess certain important aspects of news production. From

the perspective of practice theory, a social practice usually includes complicated activities such as human actions, material use and knowledge learning organised around the practice (see Chapter 1). Similarly, news production practice also involves various activities organised around journalism. Peter Dahlgren (1992) indicates that news production practices in general comprise a group of news-workers who work with professional knowledge, experience and an ethical framework within the context of media organizations and report on the social events that happen in the world. McQuail (2000:267) also claims that 'news is the core activity according to which a large part of the journalistic (and thus media) profession defines it'.

Many studies of news production using the newsroom ethnography method suggest that news production practices are not conducted in a vacuum. On the contrary, a news product is produced within the context of organisational culture (e.g. the editing policy and an organisation's interests), newsroom routine (e.g. time and space limitations), material usage (e.g. information technology use), news selecting criteria (e.g. news values), ethics framework (e.g. news professionalism) and so forth. News production studies which focus on these issues are labelled 'the sociology of news production' (Schudson, 1989: 263-282). Michael Schudson (1989) analyses three different perspectives of studying news production based on the sociology of news production. Firstly, the political economy perspective centres on how a news product is made within different political and economic forces. Secondly, the social organisation of news-work explores the everyday routine practices in the newsroom and examines how newsroom culture shapes the news product. Thirdly, the culturological perspective examines the influences of cultural aspects such as news values on the process of news production.

By emphasizing that news is a product manufactured by news-workers, the sociology of news production sees news products from different angles to those of

news-workers. These angles include a different viewpoint of the relationship between news and fact (or truth and reality which refer to similar concepts in most journalism studies), as well as ontological issues about news. Usually, journalists claim that their daily news production practices entail reporting what they see in the social events they cover. They often say that journalists explore the facts. As Fergal Keane, a BBC journalist indicates: 'The fundamental obligation of the report is to the truth' (Keane, 1997, cited in Allan, 2000: 29). Keane's statement here represents one of the common viewpoints of some professional news-workers. That is, most journalists believe their mission is to report the 'facts' they see; there might be occasional bias, inaccuracy or sensationalism in their reports, but a responsible journalist would say they never fake the news. The key thinking behind news-workers' beliefs is that 'news reflects society'. News-workers cover, select and disseminate stories about items identified as either interesting or important to citizens. The task of news-workers is to present a social as a mirror of its concerns and interests (Tuchman, 1978).

The sociology of news production sees the relationship between news and truth from a different perspective. The approach argues that 'news is what newspapermen make it' (Gieber, 1964:173). News product is produced within a complex process rather than independent journalists gathering facts and presenting them value-free to the public (Machin & Niblock, 2006: 23). What is implied here is that a social reality is constructed in the news (Fishman, 1982; Tuchman, 1978). Treating news as a product was first proposed by Walter Lippmann (1950). For Lippmann, a social event does not become news until journalists report it. Studies from the Glasgow Media Group (1976:339) suggest that 'news is not a neutral product'. Instead, it is a 'cultural artefact and a sequence of socially manufactured messages which carry many of the culturally dominant assumptions of our society' (Glasgow Media Group, 1976:339). Likewise,

Peter Golding and Philip Elliott (1979:19), in their study of broadcast journalism, indicate that journalism is a 'manufactured cultural product' which the selected news items are put in order, treated for suitable presentation and a package prepared to make up a news report or a news programme (Golding & Elliott, 1979).

There should be further discussion here of the terms 'truth', 'fact' and 'reality' which I use in this thesis. As my above discussion suggests, news-workers and journalism studies appear to see news and fact/truth/reality from different angles. These terms in social science relate to a long-term debate. For some scholars, these concepts refer to 'the phenomena that we recognise as having a being independent of our own volition' (Berger & Luckmann, 1967:13). People who hold these kinds of viewpoints believe that the world or social event exists independently of our representation (Searle, 1995). Opposing this, certain scholars (see Berger & Luchmann, 1967; Searle, 1995) argue that there is only institutional reality (reality that requires human institution for it existing) in the world. However, I have no intention of discussing the ontological question of truth and social reality in this thesis. From my point of view, the two kinds of reality represent different perspectives which can be true in different situations.

Hanna Adoni and Sherrill Mane (1984:325-326) propose three forms of reality when they discuss the relation between media and reality which I think is a useful framework. For them, the first form of reality is objective social reality. This kind of reality is experienced as the objective world existing outside the individual and confronting him or her as facts. This type of reality, according to the authors: 'does not need any further verification over and beyond its simple existence' (Adoni & Mane, 1984:325). The second form of reality is symbolic social reality, which consists of any form of symbolic expression of objective reality such as art, literature, or media content.

Thirdly, they indicate that most people have subjective social reality, 'where both the objective and the symbolic realities serve as an input for the construction of the individual's own subjective reality' (Adoni & Mane, 1984:326). Adoni and Mane also argue that 'the objective world and its symbolic representations are fused into individual consciousness and provide the basis for our social actions' (Adoni & Mane, 1984).

My discussion of the different forms of reality is significant for my analysis of the practices of online journalism. In my later discussion about the practices of online participatory journalism in this chapter, and my case studies in Chapter 7, I will point out that one of the reasons why online participatory journalism arises is that participants of such journalism aim to provide facts or reality of a social event which differ from the mainstream news media. To a certain extent, their practices intend to provide their form of subjective reality via online media which they 'believe' is closer to the objective reality of social events (this aspect will be discussed in Chapter 7 with my empirical investigation).

News values and news production

In the previous section, I discussed the basic argument concerning the sociology of news production and the relationship between news and social reality. Following the approach of the sociology of news production, in this thesis, I argue that news is not simply a 'mirror' that reflects the social world; instead, news is a product which is socially constructed (Fishman, 1982). Based on this, I will consider three dimensions: news values, news professionalism and newsroom structure in the following sections. These dimensions are important for my analysis of online news production practices in later chapters.

Studies have shown that news values have a significant existence in the practices of

news production. These studies of news values reveal that news reports are not random selections of social events; instead, social events become news because they fit some criteria of news values and, furthermore, these criteria are largely determined according to the perspectives of news-workers. Golding and Elliott (1979) suggest that news values are connected to news production practices in two ways: they are the criteria for the selection of material available to the newsroom for those items worthy of inclusion in the final news product. In the meantime, they are also guidelines for the presentation of news items, suggesting what to emphasize, what to omit, and where to give priority in the preparation of items for presentation to the audience. In other words, news values provide the working rules and guidelines of newsroom production practices. The discussion of news values from Golding and Elliott suggests two important meanings for news values — both as the criteria of news selection and as the framework governing social events.

In the first meaning, news values are viewed as 'the criteria applied by journalists and editors in news organizations to determine whether or not to carry particular items of news' (McQuail, 2000: 500). Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge's (1965) analysis of foreign news in four Norwegian newspapers sets forth a number of news values, including: (1) frequency (the latest, sudden, dramatic events are more newsworthy than long time span ones); (2) threshold (news affecting a huge volume of people is newsworthy); (3)the less ambiguity, the more the event will be noted; (4) the more meaningful, in the sense of culturally proximate or relevant, the more likely it will be considered news; (5) the more expected — in the sense both of predictable and wanted — the more an event will be news; (6) the more unexpected or rare an event is the more likely it will become news; (7) continuity — once an event is defined as news, follow ups will continue to be newsworthy; and (8) the element of composition — an

event becomes news in order to produce a 'balanced diet' of news for the audience.

The second meaning of news values is utilising them as a 'frame' for governing social events. According to Erving Goffman (1974:10-11), a frame is 'the principle of an organisation which governs social events' and 'our subjective involvement in them'. Thus, a frame is a framework of interpretation that allows individuals or groups 'to locate, perceive, identity, and label' events and occurrences (Goffman, 1974:21); it thereby renders meaning, organises experiences, and guides actions. From this point of view, news values are also related to how social events become meaningful at the moment of construction of a news product. Hall et al. (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Robert, 1978) understand news values resemble this definition. For them, social events reported in news media are not random selections; on the contrary, 'the events must be identified (i.e., named, defined, related to other events known to the audience), and assigned to a social context (i.e. being placed within a frame of meanings familiar to the audience)' (Hall et al., 1978:335).

The decision of what is news and what frame should be used for interpreting a news event is not only based on journalists' personal experience and knowledge, but also a negotiated process based on the practical working conditions in the newsroom. Golding and Elliott (1979: 119) indicate that news values are based on the perception of audiences, the accounts of routine work (e.g. news-workers tend to view the latest information as newsworthy) and the features of news product (e.g. news values for newspapers and television news are slightly different). In their study of the production process of television news, they find that even if a news event is interesting, news-workers will still consider whether the news will be understood, enjoyed, register and be perceived as relevant. Additionally, news-workers tend to consider accessibility (if the news resource is easy to obtain) and fit (if the news is consonant with the

pragmatic purposes of production and the features of the news medium).

News professionalism and occupational identity

Whether a career is a profession or not is usually identified by setting up a check-list of traits, including certain levels of skills, autonomy, service orientation, licensing procedures, testing of competence, codes of conduct, training and educational programmes (Zelizer, 2004). From this viewpoint, journalistic work can hardly be seen as 'professional work' (Zelizer, 2004) because it seems that journalistic work does not need any licence or qualified process (e.g. having some training or passing examinations) to do that work. However, certain professional norms are still evident in the practical processes of news production. Therefore, journalism as a profession is what Gaye Tuchman (1978:111) calls 'unsuccessful professional'.

Two concepts, objectivity and impartiality (or balance), are perhaps the most important professional norms often discussed by scholars (Soloski, 1989). The objective ideology in journalism can be described as 'the belief that journalists can and should separate facts from values in their reports' (Schudson, 1978:239). According to the norm of objectivity, news-workers' production practices consist of 'reporting something called news without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way'(Schudson, 2001:150). Impartiality can be defined as news-workers not directly involving their own particular personal stances when doing news reports. In so doing, they are able to give a fair opinion or decision about what they report. Impartiality and objectivity seem to be two related concepts. As John Soloski (1989: 311) points out, 'for journalists, objectivity does not mean that they are impartial observers of events — as it does for social science — but they look for the facts and report them in as fairly and as balanced a way as possible'. Soloski's argument implies that objectivity and impartiality relate to each other in a certain sense. That is, it seems

that presetting different news angles and viewpoints in news reports, a practice which journalists usually do in news reports, is a means of performing objectivity.

Objectivity and impartiality are particularly relevant to the evaluation of journalism in the United States (Schudson, 2001; Zelizer, 2004). The two professional norms also influence journalism practice in Taiwan. Therefore, it is vital to have a brief introduction to the relationship between Taiwanese journalism and American journalism in order to give a picture of why the two norms of news professionalism are important in Taiwan.

News culture in Taiwan is profoundly influenced by American journalism because of the solid political coalition between Taiwan and America during the Cold War period. In the 1950s, Taiwan relied on U.S. aid, economic, military, and politic support, and thereby established an intimate relationship with the U.S. Prior to the 1980s, a high percentage of Taiwanese graduates went to study in the States and some of them brought 'the culture of American journalism' back to Taiwan. This has made news culture in Taiwan seemingly 'Americanized' (Lee, 2000). For instance, some professional norms, objectivity and impartiality which are emphasized in American journalism, have been seen as important values for news-workers in Taiwan (Z. M. Chen, 2007). Along with this, certain professional traits such as objectivity and impartiality from American journalism are widely accepted in Taiwan. These have been the mainstream ideology of journalism in Taiwan up to now. For example, the *Code of Practice for Chinese (Taiwanese) Journalists* (Ma, 1995) promulgated in 1995 demands that journalists should 'acquire broad knowledge and act in compliance with professional ideology... and treat journalism as a life long career' (Ma, 1995:online). Besides, the first chapter of *The ethical norms of newspapers of the Republic of China (Taiwan)*, which was released in 1974 and revised in 1992, states 'news-workers

should recognise their work as professional work...news coverage should be fair...news coverage should make every effort to achieve accuracy, objectivity and impartiality' (The Press Council of Taiwan, 1992:online).

So how does news professionalism influence news production practices? Soloski (1989) suggests that news professionalism controls news production practices in two related ways. Firstly, it sets standards and norms for news production practices, and journalists act in ways that fit news professional norms and standards. For example, journalists might avoid making comments in their reports and cover as many as possible angles in order to follow the norms of objectivity and impartiality. Therefore, news professionalism does not reside in news stories themselves, but in the practices of journalists. On the other hand, research finds that news professionalism can be a 'strategy' through which news-workers protect themselves from critics. These strategies include presenting supplementary evidence to support the (journalist's viewpoint of) 'facts' of news, using a quotation mark to indicate that the reporter is not making a truth-claim, presenting the most 'material fact' first and carefully separating 'fact' from opinions (Tuchman, 1972:660-79). Secondly, Soloski (1989:310) also suggests that news professionalism determines the 'professional reward system'. This reward system, from Soloski's definition, is that 'journalists will look to their profession for recognition of success' (Soloski, 1989:312). In other words, news professionalism provides journalists with an independent power base which can be used to thwart heavy-handed interventions from other department (usually from management). For example, journalists might use the idea of professionalism as a means of resisting news control in an organisation and to gain more autonomy in pursuing stories according to their own decisions. For example, when facing pressure from management in a news organisation, journalists might claim that their decisions

are based on some professional norms.

In addition to setting up a practice norm and supply reward system, the idea of news professionalism also provides an ideological orientation that facilitates the maintenance of journalism's 'collective boundaries' (Zelizer, 2004:33). That is, news professionalism has become an important part of a news-worker's occupational identity with which news-workers tend to value the ability to judge what readers should know or want to know as 'the expertise that distinguishes them from non-reporters' (Zelizer, 1993:220). There is evidence that the news industry still invokes a discourse of professionalism. In this sense, to become a journalist can be seen as to adopt a symbolically powerful identity associated with high standards to distinguish the journalists themselves from the general public (Machin & Niblock, 2006). News professionalism thus reinforces news-workers' identity and sustains the occupational culture in journalism.

Newsroom, representation and news-making practices

News values and news professionalism are two important criteria for news-workers' everyday news-making practices, and these practices are habitually undertaken in the context of the newsroom and media organisation. Newsrooms, according to some scholars, are the 'sites of news-making' (Louw, 2001:156). Nevertheless, studies of newsroom practices include various dimensions. On the one hand, the newsroom is commonly a sub-structure within larger media organisations, which means that news-making practices in the newsroom thus confront not only the organisational rules of their host bodies, but also a wider social hegemony. Therefore, to examine news-making practices in the newsroom is, as well, to seek the impact of media organisations and wider social forces on the practices. Additionally, news organisations also operate under different political, economic and cultural parameters, which may

directly or indirectly constrain news-making practices in the newsroom and complicate the relationship between news organisations and the news-making practices taking place within them.

There have been abundant literatures on news production practices at the organisational level. Researchers usually adopt ethnographic methods to observe news production practices in the newsroom. Such research brings a sociological emphasis to studying how news production practices are arranged within news organisations and the occupational norms for accomplishing news. David Manning White's (1950) pioneering study uses the 'gate-keeper' metaphor to examine a newspaper editor's news selection work and the influence on news flow in the newsroom resulting from this selection. His study addresses two substantial issues in news-making: how is news flow influenced by the position structure in the newsroom, and how is it related to the representation of journalism? White observes the daily work of an editor, 'Mr. Gates', who works in an American small town newspaper and reveals that news is a product of selection via highly subjective and personal judgements from Mr. Gates, and the selection process determines the news product we consume every day. White's research has been criticized for its reduction of the practical process of work in the newsroom. News making processes are in fact more complicated than simply subjective selections by few news-workers. Following in White's footsteps, news scholars then put more focus on the organisational level of news-making practices. For example, Warren Breed (1955) examines social control in the newsroom. His study concludes that news selection and practices are social learning processes. Through the process, news-workers learn and confirm organisations' norms and policies gradually through their everyday news reporting.

Richard V. Ericson, Patricia M. Baranek, and Janet B. L. Chan (1987) provide a

more complex insight into newsroom structure and news-making practices. For them, the newsroom is organised as a bureaucratic structure and news-making practices are embedded within this complicated structure. Figure 2.1 is the model of news-making processes proposed by Ericson, Baranek and Chan's study.

Figure 2.1 The production process in newspaper and television newsrooms
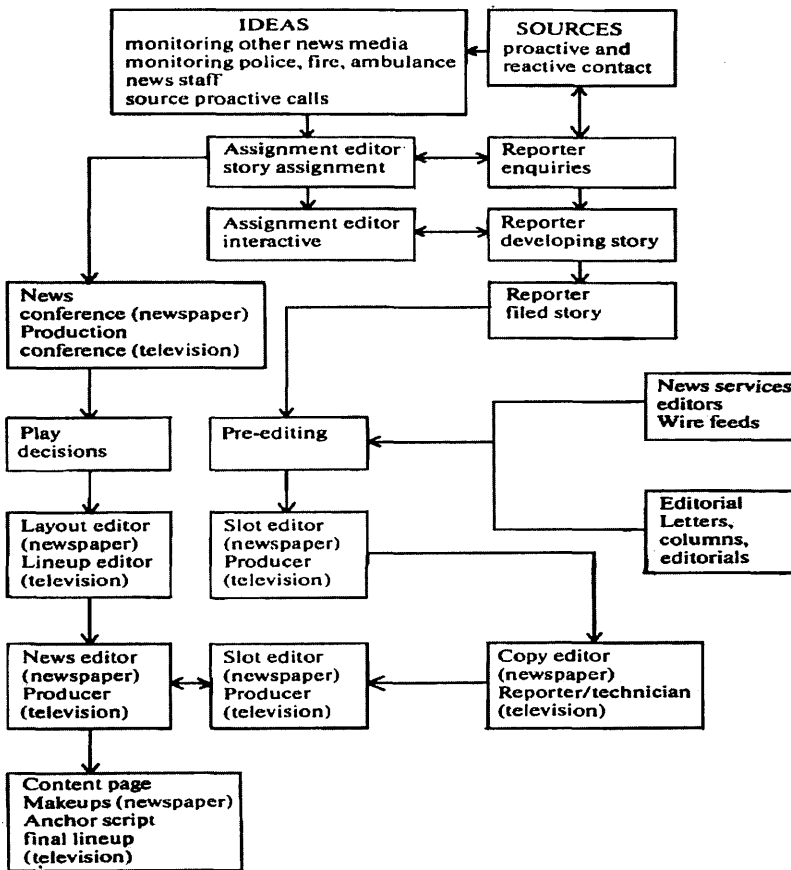
Source: Ericson, Baranek & Chen, 1987: 43

We can see that, in this model, the flow of news information in the newsroom has to pass through different news-workers' elaborations and contributions from different occupational positions, and that it also denotes a power relation between different occupational positions in the newsroom which means that news editors in newspapers

or producers in television news seem to have the right to decide the final presentation of the news. The news production process, in this study, is fundamentally a negotiated process, rather than a gate-keeping process in which the flow of news information is decided by just one or two powerful departments or sections in the newsroom. The newsroom structure provided by Ericson et al. is useful when examining the newsroom structure in online journalism because it is a more comprehensive process and can be used to compare the transformation of the newsroom structure of online journalism. This topic will be discussed in Chapter 4.

It is significant to note that news values, news professionalism, organisational decisions and news reports are inextricably connected with news-making practices. Golding and Elliott (1979), in their study of broadcast journalism, indicate that the process of planning, gathering, selecting and producing television news is moulded by the demands of a composing order. For example, the editorial conference decides what news to cover in advance in order to organise journalists and machines to match the events, plus all these aspects also need to fit the daily circle of news production practices in the newsroom. Tuchman's (1973, 1978) analyses show how a news organisation can process information about unexpected news events by observing real practices in the newsroom. She finds that two methods are used in news-making practices. Firstly, journalists usually 'typify news' with different categories, such as soft news, hard news, spot news, developing news and continuing news (Tuchman, 1973:179). These typifications of news enable journalists to schedule their daily work practices. Secondly, news gathering work is set up in connection with numerous social organisations where news events regularly occur (Tuchman, 1978). These organisations are called news beats. For example, economic news beats can be set up ranging from the government's financial and economic departments, stock exchange centres, to any other

sites that routinely generate news.

The construction of news beats also implies that the representation of social events in journalism is bureaucratically structured. That is, the social events in news reports only occur at certain locations (the places which are selected as news beats), especially official sources, but not others (Tuchman, 1978). Mark Fishman (1982:109) points out that bureaucracy sources are one of the 'systems of accounts' for news gathering practices, because bureaucracies are so organised that they provide reliable, predictable, scheduled quantities of raw materials to solve the pressure of daily story quotas and deadlines that news-workers and organisations face every day. Both Tuchman and Fishman's studies assert that news product is 'manufactured' in the context of organisational needs or the requirements of routine work rather than resulting from an abstract conception of the public's right to know. News organisations also play the role of reproducing official viewpoints since they rely largely on bureaucratic sources. In other words, news media develop their own machinery and rules for generating convincing accounts of social reality, of what is worth featuring or reporting, but these accounts usually coincide with society's hegemonic elites (Eldridge, 1993; Gouldner, 1976).

Production practices of online journalism

In my previous discussion, I have addressed certain aspects relating to news production practices in journalism study literature. These studies aid our understanding of the complex processes of news production. Following on from this, I will continue to discuss the production practices of online journalism. I will focus on the sociological aspect to examine the existing studies of online news production. In a broad sense, the existing studies of online news production can be divided into three research domains —website analysis (or site analysis) (Boczkowski, 2002), technology

diffusion analysis and ethnographic studies. The first two research domains have amassed a significant amount of literature, while the ethnographic study of online news production has attracted relative little attention. I will now address these three approaches in detail.

Firstly, website analysis of online journalism concentrates on how the web's information architecture is intertwined with changes in the character of journalism (Boczkowski, 2002). Several common online news features which are related to the web's information architecture are often mentioned and analysed, including hypertext, interactivity, customization, web search engine and multi-media (Pavlik, 2001). Hypertext means the combination of many separate texts through embedded links (hyperlink); interactivity in online journalism refers to the digital communication techniques which allow different ranges of communication between news producers and enable consumers to express opinions and contact each other; customization refers to the services where news agents provide news content adjusted to customers' specific interests through the segmented techniques developed by online media technologies; web search engine is an online tool for Internet users to search archives and databases in cyberspace by using special information filtering system; and, lastly, multi-media is a combination or mixture of traditional forms of media-to-one presentation.

News website analysis usually focuses on the adoption of the above features on news websites in their site design. Some of these analyses are grounded in the perspective of 'online journalism utopia' (Domingo, 2006:95). That is, authors tend to believe that the adoption of these features (e.g. hypertext, multi-media or information searching) in online news reporting makes the content of news reports richer and deeper, in terms of contextualization and comprehensiveness (Huesca & Dervin, 1999; Cerf, 2006).

The second research domain concerns how Internet technologies cooperate with the production processes of online journalism (Jankoswki & Van Selm, 2000; Kenney, Gorelik, & Mwangi, 2000; Massey & Levy, 1999; Paulussen, 2004). The diffusion of innovation theory proposed by Everett M. Rogers (1995) has been used as a framework for studying the diffusion and adoption of online media technologies in the newsroom. Scholars (Signer, 1998; Garrison, 2001) are interested in interrogating why some Internet technologies are successfully adopted in certain online newsrooms, or by news workers in associating news production, but some fail. The diffusion of innovation theory suggests that all the diffusion and adoption of technologies follow a similar pattern. The first stage is that users acquire knowledge about a new technology and then form favourable or unfavourable attitudes towards it. The second stage is that users make a decision to adopt or reject the technology. The final stage is that users confirm or reinforce adoption of the technology.

Jane Singer (1998) points out that online news production studies based on the diffusion of innovation approach usually concern the use of computers and Internet technologies in the newsroom in relation to a variety of online journalists' information-gathering tasks, ranging from data analysis to searches of online records. For example, Bruce Garrison (2001) used a series of mail surveys to study the adoption of information technologies in American newspapers from 1994 to 1999. The study concludes that information technologies have become essential tools in the newsroom, but journalists' perspectives on information technologies and their abilities have influenced the adoption of certain technologies. Journalists who acknowledge that new technologies can provide great assistance in their journalistic work tend to accept online media technologies more quickly, while others attribute their rejection of new technologies to the lack of resources and training.

Essentially, website analysis and the diffusion of innovation studies contribute to our understanding of certain aspects of the role of information technologies in the process of online news production, but such studies provide few explanations for the practices and decisions that shape the online news product in the newsroom.

Recently, many studies have called upon a return to studying online news production based on the sociology of news production (Boczkowski, 2004b; Domingo, 2006; Singer, 1998). Among these studies, Singer's (1998) early study uses White's gate-keeper metaphor to investigate how journalists perceive their role in the online news environment. The study finds that journalists in a multi-media world are coming to observe their profession as being the interpretation of information and the management of the quality of information, rather than them being gate-keepers who merely gather and disseminate news information. However, Singer's study only investigates online journalists' changing perceptions of their occupational identity, but does not tell us much about how it influences the practical production practices of online news.

There have been a few examinations of online news production issues employing ethnographic methods (Boczkowski, 2004b). These studies have started to focus on the practice aspect of online news production. One of these is Simon Cottle and Mark Ashton's (1999) study of the BBC news centre in the UK. The study highlights how technology usage alters routine practices in the newsroom. Their study indicates that the traditional occupational assignment and hierarchy structure in the newsroom has been re-structured due to the process of digitisation in journalistic work. Consequently, news-workers need to possess multi-skills (e.g. using different online technologies) to cope with the requirements of news work. The impact of online technology adoption in the BBC news centre rests in two main aspects. On the one hand, news production

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practices have become less linear and some news works can be accompanied on individual workstations. On the other hand, this transformation also causes job redundancies/redeployment in the newsroom. For example, some journalists lose their jobs due to some job titles/roles being merged together in the newsroom.

Boczkowski's (2004b) ethnographic study explores the production practices in the three online newsrooms of American newspapers and concludes that the content of online newspapers is related to three dimensions. Firstly, the production practices in the three online newsrooms are largely determined by their different relationships with the print newsroom. For example, editors from an online newspaper which borrows content from a printed version spend a lot of time coordinating different editorial desks. Secondly, the content of the three online newspapers is also related to the inscription of a vision of the intended users. That is, news-workers usually design their online news content, such as interface, media choice, and information flow, based on their views of the potential users. Thirdly, the practices and news content in the three newspapers are also influenced by the identification of news-workers as traditional gate-keepers or alternative informers. For the former identity, news-workers in the online newsrooms tend to adopt the traditional role of selecting and editing news; and for the latter, news-workers tend to adopt more alternative information in online news reports, such as information provided from consumers or outsourced material.

Focusing on the shift of working patterns, David Domingo (2006) analyses routine work in the online newsroom in his ethnographic study of four Spanish online newspapers. In his study, online news journalists have to work with the 'endless update' culture (Domingo, 2006:69), and provide instant news with very limited human resources. Thus, online news journalists, on the one hand, rely on the wires they can 'copy' and post on the news website without even editing, and, on the other hand, their

reports usually highlight only a forthcoming event rather than actually going to report all the details of it. Additionally, the Spanish newsroom study also addresses the material constraints on online news production practices such as the design of the content management system that the journalists use to maintain the news website and the use of multi-media tools in online news reporting also relates to the structure of the online newsroom. For example, he points out that online newspapers which belong to some bigger media groups can provide more multi-media materials than other news websites because they can cross-use the media content generated by different news media within the same media group.

The above discussion has outlined existing studies of the production of online journalism which concern the practice aspect of online news production grounded in the sociology of news production. These studies have provided some useful and important information of how online news product is actually manufactured. However, there are still many questions that need further investigation. Some aspects which are significant to understanding news production practices such as news values, news professionalism, and organisational structure have not been discussed well in the online journalism literature so far. How do these aspects change (or not change) in the digital news environment? How are they related to the representation of social events in online journalism? These questions await further exploration. In his review article of online newspaper study, Boczkowski (2002) suggests several issues of online news production which need further investigation, including the routines, values and professional ideology of online news making, and their relationship to those of conventional journalism. Besides, it is also worth asking: how does the new environment construct or re-construct the occupational identity of journalists? All these research questions will be discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 7.

Consuming online journalism and related studies

Online news consumption is the second theme with which I am concerned in this thesis. It is also one of the important processes of the cultural circuit of online journalism (see Chapter 1). In this section I will turn my focus to reviewing the existing literature of online news consumption. I will start with the long-term debate over the audiences in media and news consumption, and then connect the debate to online news consumption studies. Regarding this, I will firstly review some early approaches to news consumption including media effect studies, uses and gratification studies, and media reception analysis.

Early media and news consumption studies tend to view consumers as passive individuals. Scholars seek to explore the effect of media content and argue that the media have the power to influence the thoughts and behaviour of their audience (see McQuail, 2000). However, media effect research has been criticized by many scholars (Morley, 1980; S. Hall, 1981) because numerous studies later find that consumers are in fact actively selecting what they want to read, and there is little evidence to show that they are passive and gullible victims duped by the media and news content.

The uses and gratification approach is a significant shifting point in the debates concerning active/passive media consumers. The approach can be seen as a reaction to the studies of media effects; it claims a re-thinking of media effects and considers why consumers select a particular aspect of media and news content. The approach assumes that people, as a result of their psychological dispositions and social contexts, have particular uses for media which are fulfilled through discerning what texts are suitable for satisfying their needs[2] (Taylor & Willis, 1999). For example, Bernard Berelson

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2 Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumer and Michael Gurevitch (1973:20) provide a processing model of media selection based on the uses and gratification approach. The model suggests that a consumer's media

(1948) interviewed newspaper readers during the week of a news industry strike in the 1940s, asking them why they read newspapers, and found out that news information is more than just a source of providing useful information, as it also gives readers a sense of security and shared topics of conversation. Accordingly, news messages are consumed by the audience only when the messages fit their psychological and social needs. Individuals are seen as active information seekers who have similar needs, interests and tastes (Katz et al., 1973).

Different from the uses and gratifications studies which emphasize social and psychological needs in news consumption, the perspective of cultural studies focuses on the meaning-making process of news consumption. Many analyses in this school are labelled as media reception analysis (Taylor & Willis, 1999). The key argument of media reception studies emphasizes that media and news reception involves consumers' active interpretations of news content. This research trajectory has been developed following Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding approach, which examines consumers' interpretive abilities in evaluating news information. In the encoding/decoding model, Hall argues that media texts are developed within different ranges of constraints such as professional codes of practices and technological conventions. It is the process of 'encoding' that generates meaning in media products. At the opposite end of the communication process, media consumers (audiences) are also engaged in interpreting the texts they receive, which is the 'decoding' process. The model suggests that consumers do not necessarily accept the textual meaning which the media industry inscribes in their product and that there is more than one possible way of understanding the meaning of media products. Texts and messages in media products are structured in

selection include seven processes: (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources which lead to (5) differential exposure (or engaging in other activities), resulting in (6) needs gratification and (7) other consequences.

a polysemic way, which is, having multiple meanings. Thus different possibilities of meanings are open to a host of available consumers' interpretations and readings. Hall argues that media texts and messages need to be appropriated as a personally relevant discourse by the viewer. In other words, they have to be meaningfully decoded.

By analysing television news, Hall (1973) sees the interpretation process (decoding) of media products as an active practice which consist of three hypothetical positions: the dominant-hegemonic position in which an individual decodes the media content in alignment with the producer's intention; the negotiated position in which is contained a mixture of adaptive and oppositional positions with regard to the message; and the oppositional position in which individuals decode the message in a contrary way. The three decoding positions have become the conceptual model for several media reception studies.

Hall's model profoundly influences the studies of media and news consumption. Numerous studies follow his model to investigate consumers' different decodings of media content. Morley's (1980) study of the BBC news programme *Nationwide* audience is probably one of the most famous analyses based on Hall's encoding/decoding model. In the *Nationwide* Study, researchers interviewed groups of people, from different backgrounds, after they had viewed an episode of the television news programme, and then examined how they discussed the content of the news programme. The study concludes that viewers' responses and interpretations of the news programme are politically patterned, and align with their social positions and backgrounds. The outcome suggests that the social-cultural situations of viewers are strongly implicated in the meaning they create from the news programme. Another study by Greg Philo (1990) illustrates a more sophisticated interpretation, from news audiences, in receiving British coal strike news during 1984-5. The study finds that the

interviewees in the research generate different explanations of the violence shown in the news report. Philo's study focuses particularly on the aspect of 'preferred reading' of the strike news. To sum up, news reception studies provide empirical affirmation that meanings of news can never wholly reside in the text alone; rather, meaning lies in both production and consumption practices.

News consumption and the significance of practices

In the above discussion I have briefly reviewed some early approaches to media and news consumption. All these approaches depict certain aspects of consumers' news consumption. However, many authors have pointed out that discussion of the social and cultural context has been missing in most previous media consumption studies (Ang, 1986; Morley, 1980; Silverstone, 1994). Later, media scholars began to notice how media is used and consumed in different social and cultural contexts (Morley, 1980; 1986; Silverstone, 1994). They argue that media consumption must also consider the context within which media reception occurs (Taylor & Willis, 1999:174). This viewpoint has influenced media consumption research since circa 1980 when media consumption research turned to focus on the lived contexts and consumption practices relating to media in our everyday lives. In these studies, researchers emphasize the importance of ethnographic investigation in their studies in order to know what people do practically with media in their everyday lives.

To a certain extent, this new trend of media consumption study can be seen as an ongoing stage in media reception studies, but scholars' focuses are not restricted to investigating the symbolic level of interpretation of news content by different media audiences. Instead, they argue that media can actually be used, appropriated and practised according to media consumers' own purposes (Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley, 1991). In other words, news and media consumption studies began to focus on what

people actual do and say about media and related content, which can be connected to the central argument of practice theory (see Chapter 1).

Morley's study of television as used in domestic space was an early endeavour concerned with how this medium is used (consumed). In his book *Family Television*, Morley (1988) analyses how television use links to power relationships in families. He finds that the different perceptions of home between men and women impact on their television viewing practices. Men usually think home as a place of relaxation, and prefer watching television attentively, in silence and without interruption. However, most women tend to treat home as another working space. They thus feel that watching television without doing anything else at the same time would be a waste of time. James Lull's study (1990) of television use in households found that the social use of television includes two different types: structural use and relational use. In the former use, television is employed as an environmental resource in order to create a flow of constant background noise for other family activities; and in the latter use, television is used for its communication facilitation, affiliation (e.g. family groups watching television together), social learning, and competence/dominance (e.g. the regulation of children's television viewing by parents). Joke Hermes's (1995) study, *Reading Women's Magazines,* also suggests that the most significant aspect of a women's magazine for its readers is not its practical information, but that the magazines blend in easily with other obligations, duties and activities in everyday life. Hermes (1995) indicates that women's magazines as texts are not highly significant, but as an everyday medium they are a means of filling a small break and relaxing that does not interrupt one's schedule, because they are easy to put down.

In parallel, studies of news consumption have found that journalism is not only consumed as 'information' in everyday life; moreover, journalism consumption is

embedded into the structure of consumers' everyday lives and is connected to other social practices. Hermann Bausigner (1984), for example, tried to identify how newspaper reading is associated with everyday rituals. He indicates that in a situation when a newspaper is miss-delivered, the newspaper company usually receives a great number of complaints by telephone. He argues that this is not because of the missing newspaper content, but because a reader's everyday normality is interrupted. Therefore, Bausigner (1984:344) suggests that one of the meanings of newspapers is as 'a mark of confirmation'. Bausigner's viewpoint of news consumption can also be seen in other studies (Gauntlett & Hall, 1999; Jensen, 1986). Gauntlett and Hill's (1999) investigation of television news watching illustrates that news consumption coincides with different routine practices, such as housework, cooking or even waking up in the morning. They also find out that news bulletins can provide a means for family members to interact, especially at meal times. David Gauntlett and Annette Hill (1999: 77) conclude that new bulletins coincide with daily activities because they provide a focal point that helps people to 'punctuate the day'.

While critical investigations of news consumption typically centre on the 'quality' side of journalism, studies on the consumption of tabloid journalism are also growing in number. These studies create an alternative way of understanding news consumption practices. For them, reading news can be a resisting action to an elite's viewpoint that is inscribed in news products. Studies of tabloid journalism address this kind of journalism as a form of popular culture (Dahlgren, 1992; Fiske, 1992; Sparks, 1992) and refuse to define it as 'trivial trash' (Fiske, 1992:49). Fiske (1992) distinguishes tabloid newspapers from official news according to their information function. For him, official news promotes a top-down definition of information and the knowledge about what people ought to know for a liberal democracy and public interest. It is a sort of

knowledge of society in general rather than of the particularities of daily life (Fiske, 1992). He argues that official news produces a 'believing subject', that is, a reader who generally accepts the world view created by it (Fiske, 1992:49). Yet, as Fiske points out, what tabloid newspapers gives to its readers, is a tone of voice with 'a special laughter which offers the pleasure of disbelief, the pleasure of not being taken in' (Fiske, 1992: 49).

Likewise, Elizabeth Bird (1992) indicates that one important element of reading tabloid news is indeed a form of resistance to dominant values — an awareness that readers find out that what they are told they should read about news and current affairs is boring and irrelevant. Bird suggests that 'the perception that tabloids offer untold stories' about anything from government waste to a movie star's romance is important to them (tabloid readers) because it suggests 'some sense of knowing and control over things that really are out of control' (Bird, 1992:204-5). In her later study, Bird (2003) works on how scandal news in tabloids is used to set the agenda for readers' daily conversations. Her study suggests that scandal news offers a realm of text which draws some questions and issues about morality but does not provide answers in their reports. Therefore, scandal news gives readers an opportunity to interrogate morality issues and binds people together for conversations.

Mapping online news readers: early studies of online news consumption

My review of the existing studies of news consumption suggests that different approaches focus on certain aspects of media and news consumption. Nevertheless, some of these approaches have implied that media and news consumption involves different range of practices. In news media research, some studies of Internet usage have started to emphasize the practice aspects of the medium in a user's everyday life (Bakardjieva, 2005; Miller & Slater, 2000); this links with practice perspectives of the

study of media consumption. However, only a few online news consumption studies centre on practice aspects. In the following discussion, I will review some existing online news consumption studies. I will point out that the early studies of online news consumption focused mainly on investigating readers' demographic characteristics, motivations, and the relation of online news consumption to other news media consumption. This research contributes little to our understanding of how online news is actual read and used by its readers in their everyday lives. Some studies based on audience reception theory are starting to focus on the practices aspect of online news consumption. I will discuss these studies later in this section.

As mentioned, early studies of online news consumption often seek to investigate why people read online news, and how online news consumption is different from conventional news media. Marketing research methods have been utilized to measure online news audiences' demographic characteristics and reading habits. Many studies find that the early adopters of online journalism are usually people with a higher income, who are young, and who are in the better educated strata (Li, 2003; Nguyen, 2003). Gender in many studies has been found to make little difference in online news consumption. That is, male and female users are nearly the same in terms of numbers (AlShehri & Gunter, 2002; Coats, 2004; Gunter, 2003). Another issue in studying online news consumption is to explore readers' reading preferences. These studies suggest that online news is often read during the day or evening, at work or at school, and most readers express the view that local news and entertainment material are the preferred topics that they read on news websites (Coats, 2004).

Whilst many market surveys try to find out 'who reads online journalism', other studies, following the uses and gratification approach, are interested in asking: what are the reasons that make people select online journalism instead of conventional news

media? Wang S. H. and Luo M. L. (1999) investigated the motivation for online news reading in Taiwan. They concluded that there are four categories of motivation for online news reading behaviour, including Internet features (e.g. multi-media and using databases); passing time and using the Internet as a space for escape from pressure, social interaction, and seeking free information. Wang and Luo's (1999) study is one of the few studies in Taiwan that focuses on online news readers' uses of online journalism.

As online media and the Web are accessed more and more, media scholars have switched their attention to readers' habits for online news. Susan M. Ming's (1997) pilot study, using video-tape to record online news readers' reading activities and time spent, found that, on average, online news readers spend more than 35% of their overall reading time on the main text of news reports, about the same amount of time clicking hypertext links to access more detailed information, less than 20% of their time surfing summary information, and less than one per cent of their time using audio-video material on the news websites. Resonating with Ming's studies, most of the later studies adopt experimental designs to examine specific features of online news site use. Studies of this kind suggest: (1) online news users read in a shallow but wide way and, on average, they spend less than 14 minutes per visit, viewing an average of seven pages each time (Aikat, 1998; Lewenstein, Edward, Tatar, & de Vigal, 2000); (2) because most online news formats present fewer editorial cues about the importance of events, it appears that people are more willing to use their own interests as a guiding criterion (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000); (3) although many people claim that online journalism provides multi-media material, some studies indicates that most users still concentrate on text material rather than graphics or other multi-media material (Lewenstein et al., 2000).

Consuming online journalism

The early online news consumption studies discussed above seem to lack analysis from a cultural and social context perspective. Market research and experimental research methods in many prior online news consumption studies do not provide us with much information about how online journalism is consumed in real contexts, especially what online news readers do when they read online news and browser news websites. Also, we do not know much about the relationship between online news reading and the readers' interpretations of news; nor do we know much about how online news is made meaningful to readers in their everyday lives. My previous discussion of different approaches and studies of news and media consumption has suggested that audiences' consumption of news and other media content is not only information-seeking behaviour, it also involves the practices of meaning-making and textual interpretation. Additionally, we have also learnt from media and journalistic studies that consumers make news and media meaningful to themselves by articulating them to other social practices. Therefore, for online news consumption, these are many aspects that need to be investigated in addition to asking who reads online news and why they read it. Some researches have noticed the gap and try to bridge the gap between online news study and the existing media consumption theory by emphasizing online news interpretation and related practices in their studies.

Tony Wilson, Azizah Hamzah, and Umi Khttab's (2003) study of Malaysian college students' online news reception is an example of turning the focus onto some practice aspects of online news reading. By conducting interviews, the study illustrates that accessing journalism online enables users to experience the pleasure of the 'technology of clicking' (Wilson et al., 2003:530). The study defines online news reading as 'ludic' action (Wilson et al., 2003:531). That is, online news readers tend to click back and

forth within different news web pages via hypertext links which makes online news reading essentially a playful and pleasurable experience. Wilson et al. conclude that through mouse clicking or keypad typing online, on the Internet, online news readers can move from one news page to another page, and these practices have, to a certain extent, an influence on the interpretation of online news content.

Chan Joey Ka-Ching and Louis Leung (2005) investigated the relationship between users' lifestyles and online news adoption in Hong Kong. The study suggests that online news consumption is associated with different life styles. 'The experiencers' - people who like to try new things and like the challenge of doing new things - enjoy the convenience, interactive use and multi-media features of online news, and tend to find news information on the Internet rather than via the traditional news media. 'The survivors' who live a limited and narrowly-focused life and are concerned with primary safety and security, show more conservative behaviour and have no interest in many materials which are available via online news consumption.

Robert Huesca and Brenda Dervin's (1999) study analyses readers' uses of hypertext on the *Los Angeles Times* website. They conclude that hypertext on online news website enables readers to develop their own reading orders or news storylines, so that readers can generate their own combinations of reading news stories. That is, readers of traditional texts have to follow a prescribed reading order which news producers have set up for them, while hypertext articles enable them to make choices to follow different narrative paths and web pages in the online news environment.

Although many scholars have started to go beyond the marketing research on online news consumption and to pursue the actual practices relating to online news consumption (Boczkowski, 2004b; Domingo, 2006), some significant aspects are still missing in existing studies. I argue that we need further investigations of how online

news features such as the hypertext and data searching functions mentioned earlier relate to readers' interpretations and practices of online journalism. As we have seen from the previous discussion, some web features enable readers to select their own narrative paths of news reading, but how are they related to their understandings and interpretations of news information? Additionally, the existing studies of news consumption have also shown that reading/watching/listening to news is usually associated with other social practices, especially domestic activities. It is significant to ask whether online news consumption also accompanies different social practices. If so, then what are these social practices and how do practices influence online news consumption? I will investigate these aspects with the support of my empirical data in Chapter 6.

Online participatory journalism: its impact on news culture and the public sphere

In the previous discussions, I have discussed certain studies of online news production and consumption. In the following section, I will discuss the third theme of this thesis – online participatory journalism – and issues related to this practice. As indicated, my main concerns lie in the influence of online participatory journalism towards news culture and the public sphere. Therefore, my ensuing discussion will be grounded in these two topics. Firstly, I will point out that online media encourage 'media participatory culture' (Jenkins, 2002:157). As Henry Jenkins argues, new media now enable consumers to engage with more active practices in participating in the process of media and news production. To a certain extent, consumers' media participatory practices also alter the existing relationship between producers and consumers in media and journalism. Additionally, the changing relationship also re-defines the role of journalism as the institution for mediating public opinion and the

role of news media as the public sphere where citizens can express their opinions and discuss public interest issues.

Changing identities and blurring the producer/consumer boundaries

As already stated, one significant impact of online participatory journalism is that the practices essentially alter the relationship between media/journalism producers and consumers. But why is this relationship significant for studying online journalism? In response to this question, we should start by discussing the discrimination between media producers and consumers in existing studies, and how the increasing participatory culture in the digital age alters this relationship. In many studies of media and cultural production and consumption, the two research subjects seem to be separated for analysis (Deuze, 2007b). The consumption analysis is predominantly investigated by focusing on the ways audiences receive and give meaning to media content; the production analysis, however, tends to emphasize the political economy or sociology of the industry (Schudson, 2003). The implication here is that media producers and consumers are involved with different social identities. Mark Deuze (2007b:244) argues that previous studies 'tend to generate answers that reinforce people's social identities either as producers or consumers of media content, and frame their responses either as actors of resisting or enforcing power relationships between producers and consumers'. One example, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, is that professional news-workers tend to bear a special occupational identity (e.g. news professionalism) in mind and use it to distinguish themselves from news consumers.

The separation of the research domains, between media production and consumption, also implies that the two practitioners in the two realms – media producers and consumers - conduct and perform their practices in different ways. For example, news-workers usually claim their professions of reporting news based on the

norms and principles derived from news professionalism (see earlier discussion in this chapter). This news professionalism also functions as a boundary to discriminate professional news-workers from non-professional writers, this also maintains their social status as mediators of social events (Soloski, 1989). News consumers, on the other hand, have been treated as recipients of news information. They might have the capability, as my previous discussion showed, to decode news content according to their own interpretations, but they usually have few opportunities to participate in the process of news production (J. B. Thompson, 1995).

Recently, numbers of scholars (see discussion in Chapter 1), especially from the perspective of cultural studies, argue that media and news production and consumption are not two separate domains in the cultural circuit of a cultural product, but have a different range of connections. Thus, we need more work investigating the relationship of the two processes in media studies. The issue is particularly significant in the digital age. Some authors indicate that, in the digital age, new tools and media technologies have enhanced an individual's 'participatory capital' (Wellman, Quan-Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001:437), which means that media technologies offer more opportunities for people to bond together and make their demands and desires visible when they adopt different media technologies for community building, intellectual exchange and information distribution. Besides, media and cultural industries have begun to incorporate consumers' productive activities into their business strategies, which also increases the opportunities for consumers' media participation as well (Deuze, 2007b). All these imply that consumers in the digital age are involved in more 'producing practices' than simply information reception. Many authors thereby conclude that, in the digital age, the boundary between media producers and consumers is blurred (Jenkins, 2002; Poster, 2004).

In online journalism, those once seen as news consumers nowadays also engage more and more in 'news production practices'. Different terms have been used to describe practices of this kind such as citizen journalism, grassroots journalism or blog journalism. In this thesis, I mostly use the phrases 'participatory journalism' and 'blog journalism' but other terms are also mentioned which mean the same kind of practices. Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis (2003:9) define participatory journalism as 'the act of a citizen or a group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information'. For them, the intention of this participation is to provide the independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.

Media participation in journalism is in fact not a brand new concept. It already existed in most conventional news media. As Deuze (2007b:245) indicates: 'media products in the late 20th century have increasingly used audiences as a participating resource in programme design'. Participation as value and expectation in journalism has been established in several media such as letters to the editor in newspapers, viewers' tips hot-lines in television news, and more recently by soliciting citizens to submit their own eyewitness photos and videos to news organisations.

Citizens' grassroots voices in the online news public sphere

In online journalism, consumers' media participation has various forms. Email to journalists and online forums are similar to letters to editors in print newspapers or viewers' hot lines in call-in programmes, but are practised in digital form. Personal web-pages and blogs are two common online publications which consumers use for their media participation. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the news content generated by amateur writers has been growing in importance in the online news environment. This kind of content has also become part of the consumption practice of online journalism.

Jaana Hujaanen and Sari Pietikainen (2004) study the online news consumption of young Finns, and found that contributing journalism related content to news websites (e.g. discussions on online forums and letters to online news editors and so forth) is recognized by the respondents as one of the activities of online news reading. However, the study concludes that these activities have not become a major part in young Finns' online news consumption practice.

Nevertheless, we have seen that a growing number of consumers now write and generate 'news content' in online space in many cases (see Chapter 1). As Neil Thurman (2008:140) in his analysis of readers' uses of online news forum suggests: 'there is no doubt that those who have traditionally consumed news are increasingly ready and willing to produce content'.

Mainstream news media seem to see consumers' media participatory practices from commercial purpose. Studies show that adopting user-generated content on news websites, such as participating in online discussion or contributing their information and articles to news websites, has been seen as a marketing strategy for maintaining readerships in mainstream journalism. For instance, Ann Light and Yvonne Rogers (1999) find that readers' participation in online discussion on online news forums is one of the strategies to attract readers back. Their analysis of the design of the online forum on the *Guardian's* website suggests that the Guardian website management team is interested in attracting visitors (readers) who wish to return to the web site and actively engage them on a regular basis. Therefore, certain tactics such as promising prizes for the best contributions or quizzes are used to achieve that purpose. In Thurman's (2008) study, he interviews the editors of online forums, blog-spheres and online message boards of ten U.K. online news websites to investigate their perspectives on reader-generated content. His study concludes that for mainstream

news media, readers' contributions to online news forums or blog-spheres are important both for increasing circulation and providing sources of news stories.

Some authors argue that participatory journalism in the online news environment has brought huge challenges to mainstream news media. For example, Dan Gilmor (2004b) indicates that grassroots journalists (readers-turned-reporters) are dismantling the mainstream news media's monopoly on the news, and transforming it from a lecture to a conversation. One example is blog journalism – journalism published and distributed in blogs or Weblogs. A blog is an online diary which has recently become one of the popular choices for readers' media participatory practices. The term 'blog journalism' has been gradually accepted by many news consumers and Internet users as part of journalism online. Many amateur writers contribute their personal journalism and news reports in blog space. Most journalism blogs (j-blogs) are maintained by people who are not professional journalists; they are consumers from the traditional viewpoint, but they are now engaged in another kind of news production practice similar to professional news-workers.

Studies of blog journalism indicate that this kind of journalism alters the traditional definition of news in the mainstream media. Authors indicates that mainstream news is usually authorized, polished, objective, second-hand, dependent, packaged, distanced, top-down, and a lecture; on the contrary, blog news is usually unauthorized, raw, subjective, first-hand, independent, behind the scene (see Allan, 2006), connective, interactive and conversational. Susan Robinson (2006a) also argues that journalistic blogs (j-blogs) have changed the traditional understanding of the mainstream press. Her textual analysis of j-blogs concludes that writers in this kind of journalism do not separate themselves from news events. That is, journalistic bloggers (j-bloggers) – authors who write blog journalism - sometimes participate in the news

events and write of their own eye-witness experiences of news stories. Thus, they do not act in a way that follows the traditional norms of the mainstream press, such as objectivity and impartiality of news professionalism which suggest that news-workers should keep a distance from what they write about (see earlier discussion in this chapter). Additionally, j-bloggers also follow different principles in selecting the topics they report. Any source, rumour, or off-hand remark is common in j-blogs in the name of 'public debate' (Robinson, 2006a:74).

Blog journalism has also changed the existing producer/consumer relationship in the process of circuit of journalism. Wilson Lowrey (2006) points out that many mainstream online news media have started to offer blogs on their websites, and online journalists have been vocal about the need to append blogging to journalism, adopting it as a news-gathering and fact-checking tool. Yet the embracing of blog journalism by the mainstream news media is, according to Lowrey (2006), more like a strategy for repairing its vulnerabilities and reducing the conflict between bloggers and journalists, rather than fostering democratic participation and debate. Some authors indicate that many j-blogs are dependent on mainstream news media for original reporting, or link to the mainstream news media content as sources to confirm their viewpoints or as supplementary material by using hypertext to link to the mainstream news websites (Lowrey, 2006; Singer, 2005). Seen from this angle, j-bloggers' practices seem to strengthen the position of mainstream journalism and its existing norms and values.

The practices of participatory journalism also challenge the status of institutional journalism. By providing alternative news, most the j-bloggers insist that their obligation is to report a truth of social events of different from mainstream media (Robinson, 2006a). They usually emphasize that their reports are based on real personal experience, eye-witness evidence, non-editorial material and independent positions.

Besides, blogger journalism also uses hypertexts to link different sources and materials, giving their readers multiple news contexts. Matheson (2004:457) suggests that the practices of blog journalism create 'a model of knowledge in which the truth of what is happening in the world cannot be channelled exclusively through one news text'. In other words, blog journalism creates a different way of representing truth and authority in contract with mainstream journalism (Matheson, 2004; Robinson, 2006a).

Mainstream journalism, as I discussed in the previous section, presents its authority and truth claims with professional norms (objectivity and impartiality), quoting official or elite sources, and multiple fact-checking. In contract, j-bloggers' practices, to a certain extent, challenge the traditional formula in mainstream journalism by providing a more 'contingent authority' and multiple truths in their reports.

Online journalism: the new public sphere?

In addition to its influence on news culture, consumer practices of online participatory journalism also yield several new meanings to the online media public sphere in the digital age. Firstly, by writing their own news in online space, online journalism can be a means of public discussion for citizens. Secondly, these practices, to a certain extent, also represent an action where consumers re-engage with their role as citizens and try to express their citizenship through their online participatory practices in the online news environment. I will discuss the two above aspects of online news practices in the media public sphere in the following section.

As mentioned, consumer's media participation in the online news environment leads us to the debate on some critical issues of the public sphere. One of the questions here is how online media participatory practices relate to the operation of the public sphere in contemporary society. Habermas's critical theory of the public sphere is useful for us to examine this aspect. Many authors have done this work from different

angles (Downey & Fenton, 2003; Papacharissi, 2002; Poster, 2001). In this section, I will first review briefly the key arguments in Habermas's discussion of the public sphere and connect his work to the discussion of the practices of online participatory journalism.

In Habermas's (1989) book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* he traces the rise of the bourgeois public sphere in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and its decline in the twentieth century. The bourgeois public sphere was the mediating zone between the private concern of individuals in their family, economic and social lives, and the demands and concerns of social and public life. The public sphere is thus the realm of social life which consists of information and where, ideally, citizens can participate freely in political debates about matters of general interest. For Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere is the realm in which public opinion is formed and can oppose state power (Kellner, 1999). This can, in turn, shape the policies of the state and the development of society as a whole (Dahlgren, 1995).

In his discussion, Habermas holds a strong rational viewpoint of the public sphere. He sees the public sphere as the domain in our social life where public opinion can be formed through our participating in rational debates on public interest related issues. Habermas's idealization of the public sphere is thereby based on free participation, equal opportunities for the public and rational discussion, which can ultimately lead to consensus and decision making. For him, this process is an important impetus for democracy.

News media, for Habermas (1964), contribute to the formation of the important public sphere in modern society. He makes this argument by referring to the political newspapers of the late eighteenth to nineteenth centuries in France. These political newspapers circulated in teas houses or cafés in Europe during this period, provided

material for public discussion, and formed public opinion. For Habermas, these newspapers were the medium which contributed to the public sphere in these tea houses or cafes which he called the bourgeois public sphere. Therefore, the political newspapers were no longer a mere organ for the spreading of news, but also played an important role where the public opinion was formed in that period (Habermas, 1964).

In contemporary society, mass media[3] have been seen as one of the important public spheres, although the operation of the mass media seems different from the tea houses and cafés or the political newspapers of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries which Habermas discussed. As one of the public spheres, the mass media set up issues relating to the public interest and provided a forum for citizens to discuss theses issues through which public opinion can be formed (Lewis & Wal-Jorgensen, 2005). However, Habermas engages in a deeply pessimistic critique of the modern mass media and their role as the public sphere in contemporary society. He argues that the growth of the mass media, together with the influx of private interests, has influenced their function as the public sphere. The mass media public sphere is transformed when private interests assume direct political functions and come to form the powerful corporations that control and manipulate the media and the state. As a result, most of the mass media in contemporary society usually aim to pursue economic interests or are intervened in by political forces, rather than providing space for public discussion or mediating public opinions. Daniel C. Hallin (1994) proposes three aspects whereby the mass media do not function as the proper public sphere. Firstly, in contemporary society, the owners of the mass media are not usually representative of the public at large, and it is apparently that the owner and the organisation's interests are the priority for most mass media. Secondly, it is also clear that what works to sell cultural

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[3] In Habermas's discussion, mass media mainly refers to newspapers. The term in media studies is used now to denote a section of the media specifically envisioned and designed to reach a very large audiences (e.g. newspaper, television, radio and so on).

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commodities does not necessarily coincide with the interests of society in the substantial and accurate reporting of public affairs. Thirdly, the use of propaganda – using communication as an instrument of power and profit rather than as a medium of dialogue – has also become pervasive in the private sphere as well as in political life, and erodes the critical function of the public sphere.

In his discussion of the public sphere, Habermas holds an idealized view of the earlier bourgeois public sphere as a space for rational discussion and consensus, which has led to his formula of the public sphere being sharply criticized. For example, one of the criticisms is that Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere functions merely as the realm for privileged men (especially white, property-owning males) to participate in the debates and excludes women and the non-propertied class (Fraser, 1992). Habermas (1992: 427) revised his theory of the public sphere, so that he does not emphasize the bourgeois public sphere as the only ideal public sphere. He acknowledges that there can be alternative public spheres and emphasizes the significance of a 'pluralistic, internally much differentiated mass public' (Habermas, 1992: 438). He also suggests that 'the culture of the common people apparently was by no means only … a passive echo of the dominant culture; it was also the periodically recurring violent revolt of a counter-project to the hierarchical world of domination' (Habermas, 1992: 427). John Downey and Natalie Fenton (2003) suggest that Habermas's new interpretation of the mass (general public) and the public sphere implies that the mass is able to resist the mass-media's representation of society and create its own political interventions. From my perspective, this emphasis on the ability of resistance of the public addresses the public's action in the public sphere which connects to the central concerns of practice theory.

Since the emergence of online media, there is a radical debate on their relation to

the public sphere. Media technologies from some authors' perspectives represent a possibility that our society could have diverse forms of communication, which provide an alternative form which is similar to interpersonal communication and a return to the idealisation of Habermas's public sphere in which everyone can freely participate in discussing public interest related issues (Garnham, 1992). For example, the Internet has been treated as a quasi-public sphere which can be used to promote citizens' participation in affairs of public interest, provide unlimited access to information, offer equal participation, and possibly erase economic inequality, thus paving the way for democracy (Papacharissi, 2002).

However, some authors have a different viewpoint on the role of the Internet as a new emerging public sphere for public discussion. For instance, Cass R. Sunstein (2001) thinks that online media technologies provide both opportunities and dangers to democracy. For him, the online media no doubt provide more opportunities and diverse information for users to get miscellaneous opinions, as well as creating, theoretically, an open space for everyone to participate in public debates. Yet, on the other hand, the public opinion may find it hard to form consensuses because the Internet in fact contributes to the fragmentation of public opinion (Sunstein, 2001) while providing more and more private and small-scale spaces for the public. Additionally, the Internet and most of the related news media are still constructed from market logic. That is, the operation of online media and related products is still influenced by capitalist patterns which transform them into commercially-orientated media and have little to do with promoting social welfare and public debates (Papacharissi, 2002: 20).

So far, only a few studies of participatory journalism address its relationship to public discussion and the public sphere. Melissa Wall's (2005) analysis of the genre of

blogs focusing on the US war with Iraq indicates that blog journalism embraces a more intimate relationship with its audience by treating it as 'co-creator' (Wall, 2005:163). Their practices, such as posting comments reciprocally and providing hypertexts to other blogs, establish j-blogs as a two-way environment. Therefore, a j-blog may ultimately pull more people into public conversation and debates. Wall thus concludes that online participatory journalism provides the opportunity for freeing ordinary people from the corporate media's standardized homogenization and discovering their own voices.

Robinson's (2006a) study of j-blogs suggests that many j-bloggers see the Internet ideally as a democratic space in which all social actors' voices can be heard and become active publishers. From this viewpoint, blog journalism, as a kind of online participatory journalism, might represent the multi-perspective news that will end up setting more and different agenda. Therefore, participatory journalism encourages people to develop opinions and discuss agendas which are relevant to their interests, and which also, to a certain extent, connect to the perspective of the ideal public sphere.

As mentioned, I will use blog journalism as a case study to examine the relationship between online participatory journalism and the public sphere. In fact, the blog has provoked debates on whether it can comply with what Habermas calls the public sphere (Wijnia, 2004). Gary Thompson (2003) indicates that blogs are one type of web text that offers more open participation in an electronic public sphere in contrast to print and broadcast media. Barlow (2008) has called the blog a new public sphere, but he argues that we cannot treat blogs or other online spaces as the Habermasian public sphere residing on the Web. Yet, much has been seen and observed about the democratic potential of the Internet and online space generally, and this

applies to the blog sphere as well. Nevertheless, studies of how this new public sphere is used and practised by citizens for public debates and other democratic activities, and how the blog sphere influences other media public spheres, are still few in the literature since the blog is still quite a new research domain for media and journalism studies. In this thesis, I will use some empirical cases to examine the practices of blog journalism in Taiwan, and to discuss the above questions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed the existing studies of online journalism and approaches to news production and consumption. These discussions provide significant frameworks for my following analysis. However, I also indicated in this chapter that existing online news production and consumption studies focus little on practice aspects. Therefore, so far we still know little about how online journalism is produced and how it is consumed in consumers' everyday lives. To understand these aspects, I argue that studying online journalism should look into its practices. In other words, we should examine what people do and say, and what activities are organised around online journalism as practice theory suggests.

My literature review also shows that, on the production side, some studies have started to adopt newsroom ethnography in the online newsroom to investigate the relationship between news-workers everyday routine work and online news production. Yet, some important issues still need further studies. Those issues which I have discussed in previous section, such as the criteria of news selection, news professionalism and the transformation of newsroom structure, which some studies from the sociology of news production have addressed in traditional news media, are still significant for us to examine the production practices in the online news environment. My case study in Chapters 4 & 5 will endeavour to link these aspects to

my analysis of the production practices in the online newsroom.

At the consumption end, market surveys on online news readers' demographic characteristics and studies of their reading motivations and habits have told us who reads online journalism and why they read online journalism. Nevertheless, these kinds of studies do not tell us how readers read online journalism and in what context they read it. Some existing media and news consumption studies have indicated that the consumption process does, in fact, involve various practices from textual interpretations to appropriating online media and its content to connect to other social practices as I have discussed in this chapter. Thus, to study online news consumption, we should investigate not only how online news is read, but also how its content is interpreted, and how online news consumption connects to other social practices. All these aspects will be analysed in Chapter 6 through my empirical data.

Additionally, online participatory journalism as discussed in this chapter is another important issue for online journalism. I argue that this kind of online journalism highlights the transformation of the existing news producer/consumers relationship in the circuit of online news information. Those who are usually at the end of receiving news information now participate in the process of news production by using different online media technologies. However, the meaning of online participatory journalism does not only lie in its influence on the producer/consumer relationship in journalism, it also influences how online journalism is practised by citizens to express their opinions and join the public discussion in the online environment. All these aspects lead us to think about the function of online media as the public sphere in the digital age. I will use my empirical data to analyse two common types of online participatory journalism – user-generated journalism and blog journalism – in Chapter 7.

Chapter 3 Cultural Regulations and Online News practice in Taiwan

In Chapter 2, I have reviewed existing studies and approaches relating to the production and consumption of online journalism. In this chapter, I will introduce media and telecom policies in relation to the development and practices of online journalism in Taiwan. The purpose of discussing these topics is to describe the regulatory framework of the journalism and telecommunications (telecom) industry and to provide important cultural background for the practices of online journalism in contemporary Taiwan. I will stress that, in this small island country/nation, journalistic practices have created a unique news culture, which has been shaped by the combined forces of regulation and deregulation of news media, and which has also fostered the development of online journalism in Taiwan. Following this, I will shift my focus to telecom policies (mainly Internet policies) and how it relates to online journalism in Taiwan. It will be pointed out that while the rapid penetration of Internet usage has accelerated the development of online journalism, especially citizen journalism (or grassroots journalism) practiced in the online environment, Internet penetration and grassroots journalism have also been somewhat integrated into the discourse of national development and media reform by the government sector in Taiwan.

One of my basic arguments in this chapter is that the development and practices of online journalism in Taiwan comprise two different but inter-related trajectories. On the one hand, mainstream online news media were developed while print news media tried to seize new opportunities to reverse the decline of their readership; on the other hand, non-mainstream online news also emerged around the same time, perpetuating the practices of alternative media, such as political magazines which have been developed since the relaxing of the authoritarian period of Taiwan in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the

two trajectories are connected to the government's media and telecom policies. I will indicate in my following discussion that development of both mainstream and non-mainstream online journalism in Taiwan relates to the government's media and Internet policy. Furthermore, on the side of non-mainstream online journalism, the government's e-citizen and deliberative democracy projects involving training citizen journalists and promoting citizen journalism, with the purpose of conducting media reform and dispelling political pressure. Taiwanese government's policies do, to a certain extent, assist the public's media participation in the online news environment.

The analysis in this chapter relates to the 'regulation moment' in the cultural circuit of online journalism (see Chapter 2). One noteworthy point here is that that study of regulation is not only about government policy, it should cover the entire social field, including patterns of industry activity, as a form of regulation. As Mosco (1996:201) writes, 'a social field primarily influenced by industry decisions, rather than by state intervention, can be characterized as a form of market regulation, as opposed to state regulation, which takes place when government plays the prominent role'. Kenneth Thompson (1997b) also suggests that regulation study consists of two significant aspects. Firstly, regulation refers to something as specific as government policies and regulation. This aspect of regulation includes changes to or the abolition of regulation, which has been treated as deregulation or re-regulation. Secondly, regulation also, at other times, has the more general sense of reproducing a particular pattern and order of signifying practices.

In the next section, I will begin by looking back at the historical development of the regulation/deregulation of media and telecom systems in Taiwan. I argue that the regulatory framework of media and telecom systems in Taiwan involves a 'hybrid regulatory framework'. By this term, I mean that the media and telecom regulatory

framework in Taiwan cannot be described with only one framework, but is interwoven with thoughts such as a free-market regulatory framework, a public service framework and state intervention. Under these circumstances, the activities of news media and telecom systems are swinging in a spectrum of different regulatory frameworks.

Two phases, hybrid regulatory framework

Studies of the regulation/de-regulation process of media and telecom systems in Taiwan usually divide the process into two time periods: (a) the authoritarian period (from 1949 to 1987), and (b) the post-martial law period (after 1987) (Hung, 2006; Lee, 2000). This time frame is useful for us to understand the changing regulatory framework of media and telecom systems in Taiwan. The authoritarian period in Taiwan began in the 1940s. Taiwan was Japan's colony from 1895 to 1945. In 1945, following Japan's surrender in World War II, Taiwan was taken over by the KMT led Republic of China (ROC). In 949, the KMT was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), later the founding party of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and retreated to the island. Since then, Taiwan has been established as the 'bastion' for resistance to the PRC. The KMT's leader, Chiang Kai-Shek and his son, Chiang Ching-Kuo, took turns at being president from 1949 to 1987. As the only 'military base' competing against China, the KMT regime in Taiwan tried to maintain effective control of civil society through a combination of coercion and cooperation. Martial law was enacted in 1949 which justified the media control that was essential to consolidating the regime's legitimacy base of the mainlander (people who retreated from China) minority rule and selective incorporation of local-born Taiwanese elites (Lee, 2000).

During the authoritarian period, Taiwan's media and telecom systems were basically controlled by political power. Former Taiwanese president Chiang Kai-Shek, at this time, imposed 'hard authoritarianism', and his son, Chiang Ching-Kuo,

following his father as president, imposed 'soft authoritarianism' on the island (Winkler, 1984, cited in Lee, 2000: 125). The ruling KMT in this period was seen as a quasi-Leninist regime (Lee, 2000). KMT not only assumed a central role in the state structure but was also almost synonymous with it. In other words, the political party established a 'party-state' regime during its governance of over fifty-years of the island. Most media during this period were owned directly by the state or acted as servants of the state.

Different media regulations were promulgated in the authoritarian period in order to ensure that media resources were controlled by a small circle of favoured clients or owned by the government and the ruling party, the KMT. A 'Press Ban' policy was declared in 1951 which stopped the releasing of new licenses for newspapers and froze the total number of newspapers at thirty-one (Sue, 1999). The 'Big Two' newspapers, the *United Daily News* and the *China Times*, owned by two mainlanders who had close relationships with the KMT, controlled two-thirds of newspaper circulation and advertising during this period. The broadcasting system was also controlled by the KMT party-state. Since 1949, KMT had dominated many of the radio frequencies in the name of national security. Among the thirty-three radio stations, some 73% were controlled by the KMT and the Ministry of National Defence; moreover, only three state/KMT-owned television stations were allowed to operate. Lin Li-Yung (2000) indicates that the political logic of the news media in the authoritarian period was to meet the requirements of authority. In the meantime, the KMT regime gave different favours and market protection to certain presses and news media in order to win over their support. Similar to the news media, construction and operation of the basic infrastructure of telecom systems during the authoritarian period were owned and manipulated by the state (this will be discussed later).

The second period, the post-martial law period, started with the abolition of martial

law in 1987. The lifting of martial law in Taiwan was due the control of the KMT's

party-state regime having gradually waned in the later part of Chaing Ching-Kuo's

governance. Prior to 1987, Taiwanese voices for democracy forced the government to

loosen some restrictions. It was a turning point for the development of the media and

telecom industry in Taiwan. Several policies have come into practice to remove the

control over the media and telecom systems in post-martial law. Deregulation of media

and telecom control includes the abolition of the press ban in 1988, and permission for

new licence applications for radio, cable television and broadcast television in 1993-4.

These deregulation processes have dramatically changed the media ecology on the

island. Table 3.1 compares the number of media in Taiwan before the lifting of martial

law and in 2007. It shows that the numbers of newspapers, radio stations, news agencies,

TV channels (especially cable television channels[4]) have all increased dramatically

after the abolition of martial law. The deregulation of telecom systems came after the

media deregulation of the late 1990s. Before the 1980s, all telecom systems in Taiwan

were controlled by the Ministry of Transportation and Communication. In the

authoritarian period, the military and the police force strictly monitored the operation of

telecom systems in the name of national security. After the abolition of martial law,

telecom systems were still controlled by the government sector for quite a long time,

because they were seen as important infrastructure for the country and not open to

operation by private companies. In 1996, the KMT government approved the *three*

telecoms Acts which set out the directions and goals for the deregulation of telecom

systems in Taiwan due to the demands for telecom liberalization and privatization. By

the end of 1996, a National Development Meeting held by the KMT government made a

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4   Cable television system in Taiwan in fact existed, illegally, for nearly 20 years during the
    authoritarian period, and most of the cable television companies were legalized in 1993.

decision to privatize all state-owned companies, including Chung-Hwa Telecom.

Therefore, the company has been selling government shares since then.

Table 3.1 Statistics of the media in Taiwan (till 2007)

	During Martial Law (1949-1987)	by 2007
Media	Number	Number
Newspapers	367	2,225
Television channels	3	5
Radio stations	25	178
News Agencies	238	1,263
Cable Television	--	77(155 channels)

1. Sources: The Ministry of Economic Affairs of Taiwan and the National Communication Commission of Taiwan.

2. There is no information on the number of cable television stations before the abolishment of Martial Law in Taiwan, because it was illegal during that period.

From some scholars' viewpoints, the post-martial law period represents the media

and telecom systems entering into an era of plural-liberalism in Taiwan (Lee, 2000; Lin,

L.Y., 2000). The central concept of neo-liberalism has been conjoined with the media

and telecom policies in Taiwan since the 1990s. The advocates of neo-liberalism

believe that an unregulated free market is the essential precondition for the fair

distribution of wealth and for political democracy (Hudson, 1999). Thus, neo-liberalism

opposes virtually any policies or activities that might interfere with the untrammelled

operation of market forces. To a certain extent, the pursuit of the free market has been

seen as another kind of regulation from the viewpoint of political economy theories

(Mosco, 1996).

Although neo-liberalism seems to have been the dominant principle for media and

telecom policies in Taiwan since the 1990s, demands for the government to play an

aggressive role to intervene in the media systems in order to improve the poor quality of

Taiwanese media and telecom systems due to market failure has become a strong voice since the beginning of the twenty-first century (Hung, 2006). Based on the viewpoint of social responsibility, which believes that outside intervention is necessary in order to ensure proper operation of the free market and to assure citizens' communication rights (Hutchison, 1999), many ask the government to play an aggressive role in supervising the media and telecom sectors and urge the establishment of public broadcasting systems and a National Communication Commission (NCC)[5]. These voices basically oppose neo-liberalism and are close to the public service position found in many European countries.

Therefore, media and telecom policies in Taiwan since the early twenty-first century have formed a 'hybrid regulatory framework'. This hybrid regulatory framework implies that, on the one hand, the 'free market' allows individual consumers to express their preferences for suppliers through price mechanisms and provides more variety of choice as advocates of neo-liberalism have argued; on the other hand, advocates of social responsibility theories consider an appropriate range of governmental intervention as the best way to assure the public interest. The opinion of Feng Jian-San (2002), one of the media scholars who strongly support the appropriate intervention of authoritarian power, represents this hybrid viewpoint. He indicates that, in order to solve the problem of media and preserve communication right, the state should 'plays an empowering role and intervenes to make the media market work more efficiently' (Feng, 2002:118).

The media and telecom systems in Taiwan have experienced different periods and different regulatory frameworks – from authoritarianism and neo-liberalism to the returning of social responsibility theory – since 1949. These different regulatory

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5 NCC is the media and telecom supervision institution, like Ofcom in the United Kingdom or the FCC in the USA.

frameworks have directly or indirectly influenced the practices of online journalism in Taiwan, as I will demonstrate in the following section. My analysis begins with the discussion of news media activities and the particular news culture in Taiwan.

Enthusiastic about news: the news culture in Taiwan today

The media and telecom market in Taiwan is highly competitive. According to official statistics (see above, Table 3.1), there were 2,255 newspapers, 1,263 news agencies, 5,376 magazines6, 178 radio stations, 5 broadcasting television stations and 77 cable television stations providing 155 channels in Taiwan by 2007. Considering the market size of Taiwan, with a population of 23 million people, is seems that media on the island are overcrowded. The overcrowded ecology of the media is very special and fosters a unique news culture in Taiwan. As I stated earlier in this chapter, the formation of the news culture in Taiwan relates to regulation/deregulation of the media. We can understand their relationship in the following ways.

Firstly, the deregulation of the media in Taiwan created an environment of 'free-competition', but as a result of over-competition brought about by the hasty deregulation as well. The Taiwanese media started to pursue sensational stories in order to stimulate circulation or audience ratings. The Taiwanese media used to be controlled by the government under martial law regulations. Newspapers were only allowed to print three sheets of paper, and with a restricted daily circulation, because of the three rules of media limitation – limitations on licences, circulation and sheets (T. B. Wang, 2002). Likewise, television could not broadcast any programmes after midnight. After the abolition of media and press bans/restrictions, newspapers increased their number of pages to forty from three, and television channels began to broadcast on a 24-hour

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6 The number is a registered number, which means that many newspapers or magazines were not actually published.

basis. The dissolution of page and time limitations for the news media has led to a highly competitive environment.

The series of abolitions of media ban has facilitated a huge increase in the number of media outlets in Taiwan, both in broadcasting and printed media, however media observers and audiences within the country complain that the 'excess of media freedom has given rise to media sensationalism and loss of quality' (IPI, 2006:online). According to a market survey, there are at least 70 cable channels in Taiwan providing about 1,500 programmes, but the audience ratings (broadcast popularity) for 94% of programmes are less than 1% for each one (Z. Z. Lin, 2004). Newspapers in Taiwan face the same situation. Most leading newspapers in Taiwan offer their readers free newspapers in order to boost circulation. An unofficial estimate suggests that the number of free newspapers is around 20,000-50,000 (Z. Z. Lin, 2004).

The overcrowded media environment has resulted in poor quality of media performance (particularly news media) in Taiwan. Part of the reason is probably that the Taiwanese government did not intervene in any way in the early stages after the abolition of the media bans. A report from a famous Taiwanese magazine – the Common Wealth – describes the media in Taiwan as 'bonehead media' (M. L. Yang, 2002). The report concludes that the problems with the news media in Taiwan include pursuing sensational news, digging into famous peoples' private lives and making up fake news. One dramatic case is the Ba-Chang river tragedy. Criticism of media content seemed to peak after the tragedy, which occurred in 2000, when four people were stranded by a rising flood in the middle of the Ba-Chang River. All television news reported the rescue attempts live for hours and showed their deaths on live television as the four people disappeared completely in the river (see Figure 3.1). The deaths shown live and their repeated broadcasting raised huge criticism but no news media admitted that they

were wrong. After the tragedy, the voices demanding media reform were actively urged

on by the public in Taiwan.

Figure 3.1 Television news live coverage of the Ba-Chang river tragedy in 2000

* The above picture (captured from ETTV) was a
live TV scene of the four people trapped in the river.

Secondly, many media in Taiwan have strong ties with political forces, and are

criticized also for their alleged bias toward certain political parties. The political ties

between the media and political forces in Taiwan have historical roots. Since the

authoritarian period, many media have established intimate relationships with the

ruling power. In the post-martial law period, the 'state apparatus' still used different

methods to control the media. These methods include: (1) giving indirect subsidies

such as propaganda advertisements or exclusive information to news media which are

friendly to them. For example, after winning power from the KMT in 2000, the DPP

(Democratic Progress Party) government usually placed policy advertisements with

certain media, which is another way of subsidizing the media; (2) Issuing licences to

enterprises that have good relationships with them as this makes the media 'speak for

them'. Two examples are that ex-president Sui-Bain Chen often promises Set TV or

Formosa television, the two media that support the DPP, exclusive interviews, while the KMT usually leaks important information to the *United Daily* and the *China Times*, which are famous for their pro-KMT stance.

The media, on the other hand, also appear to enjoy these intimate relationships with political forces. For example, the founders of both the *United Daily* and the *China Times* were key members of the KMT's central executive committee. Moreover, management positions in state/KMT-owned media, such as TTV (Taiwan Television), CTV (Chinese Television) and even Public Television System were assigned to members of the KMT. Likewise, the DPP government adopted similar strategies after it came to power in 2000, as the government still controlled major shares in some media. Therefore, it has been criticised in that, in Taiwan, many news media are servants of political power (L. Y. Lin, 2008). Commercial media also become partisans as they attempted to take advantage of the stand-offs between the pro-independence and pro-unification campaigns[7] by favouring particular parties to attract their support. This complex network of capital and political power has made the Taiwanese public distrust their news media.

Trust crisis of the Taiwanese news media

Despite the trust crisis, news consumption in Taiwan is still a very important activity in people's everyday lives. Some surveys suggest how the Taiwanese perceive the news media in their everyday lives. According to a survey conducted in 2007, 50% of the respondents indicate that news broadcasts are the TV programmes they watch most frequently in a day, compared with drama (35%) and entertainment (34%) in Taiwan (IFII, 2007). The market share of television channels (see Table 3.2) also

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7   A long term argument about the status of Taiwan is whether Taiwan should be re-unified with the PRC or not. The DPP obviously insists that Taiwan has already been a independent country while the KMT tends to think Taiwan might reunify with the PRC someday. However, this is only an approximate discrimination and the real situation is more complex than this.

shows that news channels (news channel here means the entire output of the channel is news-related like CNN or the BBC 24-hour news channel) occupy 18% of total market share, second only to the broadcasting television channels (Taiwan Government Information Office, 2006). Ironically, in 2003, another survey indicated that over 50% of the respondents do not trust newspapers comparing to 33% saying that newspapers are trustworthy. Nearly half (47%) the respondents in the same survey said that television news was not trustworthy compared to 43% of them who trust TV news (Hu, 2003 cited in Hung, 2006:11).

Table 3.2: Market share of television channels in 2004 in Taiwan

Type of Channel	Market Share
1. Broadcasting Television Channels	22%
2. News Channels	18%
3. Multifarious Channel (channels with various programmes)	13%
4. Drama Channels	17%
5. Foreign Film Channels	7%
6. Chinese Language Film Channels	7%
7. Children's Channels	4%

Sources: 2003-2004 Taiwanese Television Yearbook, 2006:282.

News media have been called trouble makers affecting society in Taiwan. A national survey about Taiwanese people's future perspectives on 2008 asked its respondents: what do you think is the reason that causes trouble in Taiwan today? The results showed that 47.7% respondents answered the 'government', 35.6% respondents chose the 'media' and 14.8% respondents chose the 'political talk show hosts and commentators' (Global View Monthly, 2008). If we consider that political talk shows are in fact part of the media, then over 50% respondents of the survey

thought that news media should be responsible for corruption in Taiwan. Another extraordinary survey, presented in 2007 by an international public relations firm, Edelman, showed that only 1% of Taiwanese respondents thought that news media are a trusted information source (Edleman Regional Stakeholder Study, 2007) . The survey also indicated that respondents trust local mainstream media less than foreign media outlets, online media and even j-blogs.

Digital Taiwan: technological island discourse and the nation's development

In the previous section, I have analysed the change of regulatory frameworks and their impact on media practices in Taiwan. This gives us a background for my later discussion of online journalism in Taiwan. In this section, I switch my focus to telecom policies, particularly with respect to the Internet. In the following analysis, I will indicate that telecoms and Internet policy on the island is strongly articulated to the state's national development project, and the Taiwanese people's obsession with technology. The practices of online journalism are influenced by these policies. Two government projects, the NII (National Information Infrastructure) plan and the E-Citizen project, will be discussed to see how online journalism in Taiwan relates to telecom policies.

The telecom systems are usually the basic communication infrastructure from most governments' perspectives (Hesmondhalgh, 2005). Likewise, in Taiwan, a 'top-down model' in which the government plays a major role in intervening in the development of telecoms and the Internet has been seen as essential regulation for the nation's development. For example, in 1990, the Ministry of Education cooperated with several universities and constructed TANET (Taiwan Academic Network), which was the first Internet system in Taiwan. Later, in 1994, a second Internet service – HiNet, operated by the government-owned Chung-Hwa Telecom – was established and provided

one-year's free use for customers. Chung-Hwa Telecom, though privatized today, still monopolizes 80% of fixed-line services in Taiwan.

One of the biggest projects for developing the telecom systems was the NII plan, commencing in 1994. The project describes a long term blueprint which aims to promote use of the Internet in Taiwan. The KMT government established an NII Subcommittee and set up several goals which included amendments to telecom policies, the building of Internet infrastructure, popularizing Internet usage, developing Internet-related industry, extending international cooperation, and promoting the application of the Internet in different domains (Sung, 2001). The slogan of the NII project – 3 million people can access the Internet in 3 years - was simple and clear, to make the general public understand the policy: to make Taiwan a 'technological island' and the Asia-Pacific Regional Operations Centre (APOC). It was the KMT's blueprint to boost Taiwan's competitive advantage for the twenty-first century. The NII project reflects a long-term belief in the power of technology for the nation's development. Since the 1970s, the authority has made a lot of effort to develop technological industry[8]. Two enormous projects were the establishment of the Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI) in 1972 to help technological research, and the setting-up of the Hsing-Chu Science Industry Park in 1980 for high-technology companies. By 2006, there were nearly 400 high-tech companies located in the science park and this has become a global centre for high-tech products.

In 2000, the political situation in Taiwan changed dramatically. Taiwan's long-term ruling party - the KMT - lost its power to the opposition, the DPP, in the presidential election. For the new government, one of the big challenges was the economic recession started with the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and continued with the bursting of global

8 In the 1970s, Taiwan faced two crashes including being expelled by the United Nations (U.N.) due to China's boycott and the 1973 oil crisis. The two crashes forced Taiwan to take aggressive action to solve confidence and economic problems.

high-tech bubbles in 2000. In 2001, the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth rate declined from +6% to -2%, the lowest level seen in Taiwan in decades. The worsening economic situation forced the new government to adopt several policies to recover from economic recession. Again, technology was still the focus. The government announced the 'Green Technology Island' manifesto. In the DPP's *Resolution for Creating New Economy for Taiwan,* which showed the political party's guarantee to establish a fundamental structure for information flow, and the notion of a green technology island were mentioned for the very first time. As written in it:

[The DPP will] construct... an optical fibre broadband network actively...in order to make information communications flow freely without obstacles...to develop Taiwan as a 'green technology island'. (DPP, 2001:307)

The serial project, that of developing Taiwan into a 'high-tech island', has influenced the Taiwanese people's attitudes toward technology. In Taiwan, the term 'technology' carries multiple symbolic meanings. For some, pursuing the latest versions of technological products represents their capability to be fashionable and advanced. Taking computer lessons and access to the Internet has become a popular movement for Taiwanese citizens as well. As the technology sector produces abundant employment opportunities, computer skills have been seen as a basic skill for students and have become a compulsory course in senior high school and at college. The statistics in Table 3.3 shows that computer and information-related departments have become the most popular courses in colleges.

The government's efforts in promoting the public's access to the Internet have been

a huge success. According to official statistics, the number of Internet users (over 12 years old) has increased 248 times within 15 years, from 50,000 in 1992 to 12,400,000 by the end of 2006 (CFCA, 2003; TWNIC, 2007).

Table 3.3 The number of new undergraduate student enrolments in departments in Taiwan (2006-2007)

	Department	number of students	percentage (%)
1	Information management	34,980	16.75
2	Electrical engineering	34,735	16.64
3	Mechanical engineering	28,913	13.85
4	Microelectronics engineering	28,297	13.55
5	Information technology	24,370	11.67
6	Business management	20,859	9.99
7	Industrial engineering	10,780	5.16
8	Finance	10,240	4.90
9	Civil engineering	8,589	4.11
10	Accounting	7,042	3.37

Sources: Ministry of Educational Affairs (2007)

The E-citizen project in Taiwan

Accompanying the NII project, a range of 'E-citizen' projects has been conducted by the government's sectors. One example is the *Elementary and Senor High School Teaching Guide,* announced in 2001 by the Ministry of Education (Taiwan). This guide shows that the term 'information society' had been connected to the basic abilities of being a modern citizen in Taiwan. As it writes:

> In the information society, every citizen has to own the knowledge and capability of using information technologies…this is fundamental for a modern country in the 21st century. The aim of informational education is to cultivate students as the citizens who own….healthy values to society and an open-minded view of the world (Ministry of Education, 2001).

In the vision of the Taiwanese government, e-citizens (or Netizens[9], which means those people who know how to use information technologies in their everyday lives properly or those persons who actively involved in online communities) support the construction of an information society. This can be seen in the Digital-Taiwan (also called E-Taiwan) Program which started in 2002. The program is a part of a six-year plan to 'develop the information and communications infrastructure across the country, boost industry competitiveness, upgrade the government's performance, and transform Taiwan as an e-leader in Asia' (National Information and Communication Initiative, 2005:online). In this programme, the future vision of the Taiwanese government is an e-government, which means most work in government sectors will be 'digitised', and this e-government needs e-citizens. In this scenario, different government departments propose their projects to foster these e-citizens[10]. As Ho (2006), the director of Department of Information Management, Research, Development and Evaluation Commission of Taiwan, writes:

> E-government gives citizens greater access to information held by public authorities and makes government more transparent and accountable. That enables and empowers citizens, and leads to greater participation in the information society. Inclusion and participation through ICTs, or e-Inclusion, then becomes the key tool at the disposal of a socially inclusive government (Ho, 2006:98).

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[9] The word 'netizen' itself was coined by Michael Hauben, who was a computer specialist and an author.

[10] Some examples of these projects include: the construction of websites for government departments (2002), the People Post website for citizens to express their opinions (2005), and the National Policy Think-Tank Online for citizens to participate in policy making (2006).

Ho's words indicate that the Taiwanese government tends to adopt a 'top-down model' to propel the e-citizen program and further articulate it to a democratic discourse. According to an E-government 2.0 Manuscript declared in 2002, the digitised government aims to provide a better public service, enforce sustainable development, and encourage citizens' social and political participation through the penetration of information technology utilization. Therefore, the top-down model is considered necessary for the development of civil society, social equality and a mature information society (National Think Tank Online, 2006).

Re-regulation, globalisation and the development of online journalism

So far, I have reviewed several of the Taiwanese government's media and telecom policies and how these have impacted on the development of the news media and telecom systems in Taiwan. In the next discussion, I will focus on how these policies are relevant to both production and consumption practices of online journalism in Taiwan. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the development and practice of online journalism in Taiwan contain two trajectories: mainstream online news media and non-mainstream online news media (also known as online alternative news media). I will first describe, in brief, the emergence of mainstream online journalism in Taiwan, and then move on to the online alternative news media.

Both mainstream and non-mainstream online journalism in Taiwan emerged in 1995 and reached their peak in 2000. The first mainstream online news website, Chinatimes.com (http://news.chinatimes.com/), began to provide news contents by posting reports online from the *China Times*. In the same year, a non-mainstream online newspaper, the *Southern Electronic Newspaper* (http://www.esouth.org/modules/wordpress/), was also launched in the form of a newsletter as its main content; *UDN.com* (http://udn.com/NEWS/), the major rival of

Chinatimes.com, which belongs to the *United Daily* in Taiwan, also started to provide online news in 1997, and soon replaced *Chinatimes.com* as the most popular mainstream online newspaper. In 2000, three online news websites began to provide news information at almost the same time, including *Tomorrow Daily* (the website was closed in 2001), *ETtoday.com* (http://ETtoday.com/ or http://www.nownews.com/) and *CnYes.com* (http://www.cnyes.com/). The three online newspapers called themselves 'web-only' news websites, which means news reports on these websites were originally produced for website use, rather than for adoption as newspaper articles or television news clips.

Initially, most mainstream news outlets constructed their online news websites with the aim of expanding their consumer base. Chen Shi-Ming and Chen Bai-Lin (1997) interviewed news-workers in Taiwan, querying their motives in setting up online news websites. Most of the interviewees attributed their decisions of going online to the news organizations' strategies for developing 'new channels' for delivering news, in part to save their declining readerships, this applying especially to the newspapers. Since the opening up of the media sector in Taiwan in the late 1980s, some conventional news media, such as the Big-Two (the *United Daily* and the *China Times*), which had monopolized the news market because they owned special media licences permitted by the KMT government after the authoritarian period, faced challenges brought about by certain new rising news media and the change in consumer taste[11]. Particularly, younger readers in Taiwan appeared to be spending less time reading printed media, but more time in surfing the Internet and watching television. Therefore, digitisation and going online were seen as the solution for the print media and their opportunity to attract a younger readership. In the meantime,

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[11] The overall readership of newspapers in Taiwan has decreased by 12.5% during 2000-2005 (Nielsen, cited from *Singapore United Morning News*, 29 June 2007).

new arrivals of the online news market such as *Tomorrow Daily* or *ETtoday.com* saw the increasing population of Internet users as potential customers for online journalism.

The government's media and telecom policies tend to encourage the development of online journalism in Taiwan. This can be divided into two dimensions for discussion. Firstly, the Taiwanese government's Internet and digital culture policies play a significant role in facilitating the penetration of online journalism consumption. Most mainstream online news websites on the island were launched during 1995-2000. The timing apparently fits in with the government's 'Technological Island' plan and the project to expend the population of Internet users (e.g. the NII and E-citizen projects). At the same time, the population of online news readers also increased rapidly. According to a market survey, online news readers in Taiwan have increased by 131%, from 1.26 million in 2000 to 2.91 millions in 2005 (Nielsen, cited from *Singapore United Morning News*, 29 June 2007). The rapidly growing population of Internet users and online news readers convinced investors into believing that Taiwan was already a mature market for online news media. For example, Hong-Chi Zhan, the chairman of *Tomorrow Daily,* said that 'online reading and online advertising were mature enough to support the survival of bigger mainstream online news media in Taiwan' when *Tomorrow Daily* was launched in 2000.

Secondly, the development of mainstream online news in Taiwan is also linked to a vision of media globalization. In Taiwan, both government and media have strong ambitions to be the leader of Chinese language media in the Greater China media market (including China (PRC), Hong Kong, and Taiwan and other regions where Mandarin Chinese is the major language). In the middle of the 1990s, the KMT government had already mapped out a series of projects to construct the island as the

Asia-Pacific Regional Media Centre (the sub-project of the Asia-Pacific Regional Operations Centre blueprint). This global viewpoint influenced media owners' strategies in Taiwan as well as online journalism investors. For instance, *Tomorrow Daily* called itself 'the first professional online newspaper in the Chinese world. Another online newspaper, *ETtoday.com*, launched in 2000, also declared that its strategy was to depart from Taiwan and take a broader view to the world' and was destined to be the 'leader of Chinese news media.

Another important dimension relating to the development of mainstream online news in Taiwan is its special news culture. My earlier analysis has shown that watching news seems to play an important role in the Taiwanese people's everyday lives. Many portal websites, such as *Yahoo.com* (http://tw.yahoo.com/) or *Msn.com* (http://tw.msn.com/), use news reports as the headline on their Taiwanese websites to attract Internet users to visit them. The Taiwanese People's enthusiasm for news, the growing population of Internet users, and the fact that creating a news website costs much less than a newspaper or television station, and without the huge expense of distribution and machinery equipment, all encouraged business investors to partake in the online news industry. They believed that online journalism could be a brand new territory for media and promised to provide a wide choice and good quality of content for readers who were disappointed by the conventional news media in Taiwan. For example, one of the important online newspapers in Taiwan, *Tomorrow Daily*, announced that its news includes: globalised knowledge, a proactive viewpoint and a 'youthful angle'. As the chairman of *Tomorrow Daily*, Zhan, once indicated, the emergence of *Tomorrow Daily* makes people 're-imagine the possibility of journalism'. A financial news website, *CnYes.com*, also aims to provide readers with real-time and high-quality business information and news.

Nevertheless, the overcrowded media environment also influenced the practices of online journalism. At this early stage, most of the mainstream online news websites were the by-products of newspapers or broadcasting news. Chen and Chen (1997) investigate how news-workers and managers in Taiwan perceive online media. Their study suggests that conventional news media acknowledge that online media can be an important form for 'future journalism', but they also worry that the emerging news media might derail the traditional news media. One of the respondents from Chen and Chen's study (1997) describes how in the early stages, newspapers or television news only disclosed part of their news contents online and this content was approved by managers, in order to attract consumers to buy newspapers or watch the news programmes if they wanted to get more information.

The situation did not last long when online news websites such as *Tomorrow Daily* or *ETtoday.com* joined the market and provided full news content for free. These online news websites have made the overcrowded news market even more competitive than ever. Therefore, many online news websites during this early period had difficulty in making a profit. For instance, *Tomorrow Daily* closed two years after its launch due to a shortage of funding. As newcomers to the news industry, many mainstream online news websites in Taiwan recruited lots of senior and experienced news-workers from traditional news media in order to compete with the conventional news media. These news-workers, to a certain extent, brought the 'conventional production logic' to the new news media. Thus, similar production processes, norms and practices in the conventional news media were transplanted to online news. For example, many online journalists were asked to follow the headline news in newspapers or on television news because these news reports were still seen as newsworthy. Nevertheless, online news media do develop their own production practices that are distinct and different from

other news media, due to competitive pressure and the features of the online interface. Later, in Chapters 4 & 5, I will examine these practices in detail with the support of my empirical data.

The rise of online media participation in Taiwan

While mainstream online journalism began to penetrate Taiwan in the middle of 1990s, another kind of online journalism, what I define as non-mainstream (alternative) online journalism, was also taking possession of the online environment and later became a part of news culture in Taiwan. In the authoritarian period, some alternative media, such as political magazines and illegal cable television channels, played a crucial role in Taiwan's democratization, as they dared to speak out and express different opinions while the mainstream media were controlled by the authorities, under martial law. The spirit of the alternative media later integrated with that of online alternative media. To a certain extent, it is also the spirit which fosters an online media participatory culture in Taiwan. Additionally, the Taiwanese government's digital policy, such as the E-citizen project, also plays a significant role in the development of online alternative journalism.

Before online media, there are three significant alternative media in Taiwan which include political magazines, illegal cable television and underground radio stations. Under authoritarian rule, magazines were not included in the press ban (Lee, 2000), thus political magazines[12] became an alternative source contesting the official version

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12 Two famous political magazines are Free China and Formosa. Free China was first published in 1949 in Taiwan. Since the 1950s, Free China has published articles making political comment. In 1956, the magazine published a serial of articles that opposed Chiang Kai-Shek's third term as president, and in 1960 some publishers from the magazine founded a new political party. In the same year, the chief editor of the magazine was arrested on a charge of spying for China. The magazine was forced to close down at the same time. Formosa was first published in 1979. The members of the magazine included many important people in the later DPP party. Formosa advocated the independence of Taiwan which was in opposition to the then ruling KMT party. In the same year of its first publishing, the magazine held a meeting on Human Rights Day. Some participants were in conflict with some military policemen. Many of the magazine's staff were thus

of 'truth' of the KMT-controlled media. Illegal cable television, which emerged in the 1970s, was usually run by local companies, broadcasting pirated copies of American or Japanese films and some self-produced programmes, which provided additional opportunities for information and entertainment. The most significant function of these illegal cable television stations was that some of them started to broadcast political advertisements for the opposition parties in 1989 and 1990[13]. Video-shooting and recording technologies enabled users to produce programmes for the cable television system (Feng, 1995). Political magazines and cable television channels, during the era of the media ban, were two important media for the people's media participation in Taiwan. The intention of this media participation was to oppose the information control of authoritarian power. However, apart from political activities, few of the general public were actually involved in alternative media participation because participants who expressed their opinions via these media openly were often sent to jail.

In the post-martial law period, the political magazines began to lose their function as alternative media because diverse opinions had been brought to the media market. Similarly, illegal cable television stations were gradually commercialised after their legalisation in 1994. From the 1990s onwards, radio media become another channel utilized for broadcasting alternative information. These alternative radio stations are called 'underground radio' because they operate illegally without any licences[14]. In fact,

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arrested and given heavy sentences. The magazine was also closed down, and only issued five volumes.

13 The emergence of illegal cable television can be traced back to the mid-1970s. Some pipeline and electricity workers in northern Taiwan began to construct cable systems and offered Japanese TV programmes, porn, and wrestling programmes. The service soon became popular. By 1990, there were at least 300 illegal cable televisions stations on the island. Some of them, such as democratic television, started to broadcast political programmes. However, most of these cable television stations tended to support the DPP which was the then opposition party. In 1993, the KMT government passed the *cable television broadcasting law*, and most of the illegal cable television stations got legal licences then.

14 The development of underground radio stations can be dated back to the 1990s. In the early 1990s, some underground radio stations such as the Voice of Democracy (established in 1992) and the People's Radio Station (established in 1993) went on air. In 1994, many political candidates or their supporters joined the queue to establish underground radio stations. Some religious groups and

underground radio stations have existed since the 1990s, and some of them have survived to this day by selling illegal medicines (e.g. diet pills) to make huge profits. Many underground radio stations, like political magazines and illegal cable television stations are utilized by the opposition political party, and some social movements such as those opposing construction of nuclear power plants.

In the case of political magazines, illegal cable television channels and underground radio stations represent different forms of alternative media and have encouraged media and political participatory cultures in Taiwan at different times. These media participatory practices began as resistance to media control and a demand for democracy, but some of them later lost their democratic function in order to make profits. It is hard to say that the alternative media in Taiwan really provide media space for the general public because most alternative media were illegal back then and were not allowed by the authorities.

It is obvious that alternative media established a media participatory culture in Taiwan. These activities continued after the deregulation of the media. For example, some underground radio stations even now still provide alternative news information for certain audiences, but are often utilized by political parties as a means of propaganda or even blackmailing. This media participatory culture also influences the mainstream news media, such as the popular political call-in shows. There are at least 12 political call-in shows on television every night, attracting audiences of around 8.6 million (Sheng, 2005), and each call-in show receives nearly a hundred calls on average where people express their opinions. The case of political call-in shows implies that Taiwanese

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social movement advocates also use the radio media to promote their opinions. Call-in shows became popular on these underground radio stations, and during some protests and strike activities the radio stations also played an important role for recruiting participants during these periods. Famous underground radio stations in Taiwan include Green Peace and Dan-Shui River. In recent years, many underground radio stations have become integrated with political parties. For example, the Justice Network only propagates the DPP's policy. However, since 1994 authority has taken many actions to prohibit these radio stations, but according to NCC, there were still over 130 underground radio stations in 2007 (Chu, 2007).

people are still highly enthusiastic about media participation after the deregulation of the media, but in more open ways.

Media participatory culture and mainstream online news in Taiwan

From the mid-1990s, the Internet has provided its users with another medium for media and political participation in Taiwan. Many online alternative media were launched after the Internet was introduced to the island. Different from the previous alternative media, the practices of online alternative media expand topics from the demands for political democracy to more diverse aims such as media reform, environmental protection, and community reform. One significant aspect of the practice of non-mainstream online media in Taiwan is that they have been used by the general public for media participatory practices. This is very different from the previous alternative media in Taiwan where participants were usually political elites or people who owned the media. Mainstream news media and some commercial organisations started to provide free space for general Internet users to construct their own online news websites from 2000. These services have facilitated what I discussed in Chapter 2 – online media participatory culture. In the following discussions, I will continue analysing how this online media participatory culture is formed in Taiwan in relation to the practices of commercial news organisations.

The trend for online media participation from the general public can be traced back to the use of the bulletin board system (BBS) – an early and simple way for people to communicate and express their opinions online. The BBS was originally used in colleges in Taiwan when the government tried to promote the Internet. Later some forums on BBS became a popular space for college students to communicate with each other and exchange opinions. Particularly, some news issues were usually 'hot topics' for discussion. The advantages of the BBS are its simple design and ease of use for

users to post their articles, but later the BBS was replaced by the World Wide Web because it enables users to do more complex activities such as attaching photo, video clips and other objects. By the late 1990s, online media had gradually been adopted by political parties, social groups and individuals as important platforms for media participation. Many alternative news websites were launched during this period. One pioneer, the *Southern Electronic Newspaper* (SEN), launched its website around the same time as the first mainstream news media, *Chinatimes.com,* started to operate in 1995. The content of SEN focuses on environmental protection, community construction and minority issues. Some alternative online news websites were subsequently founded to advance diverse political, social and cultural movements[15].

The alternative news websites have, since the late 1990s, provided the general public with various online spaces for their media participatory practices. On the one hand, the online alternative media often adopt readers' letters as their major content and thereby establish a more open media space for the general public than the conventional forms of alternative media. On the other hand, these alternative online news media do not need any licence or registration in Taiwan, as long as they do not operate as corporations. This is a great advantage compared with the risk of running traditional forms of alternative media.

It is worth noting that, unlike earlier alternative media initially involving political purposes, most online alternative media in the late 1990s focused on media reform. They aimed to compete with the commercial, sensational and poor quality mainstream news media in Taiwan and to provide the public with 'plural voices'. However, some are also criticized for their content which usually reflects 'elite viewpoints' only. For example, readers' letters on the *SEN* are usually from college professors, graduate

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15 For instance, *Coolloud Network*, launched in 1997, has a strong tie with different labour groups and major themes of the website relate to labour movements. The *Post* which used to be a weekly newspaper edited by college students focuses on sub-cultural activities in Taiwan.

students, and professional writers.

While the alternative news websites in the late 1990s operated on the basis of creative work, *Tomorrow Daily* in 2000 provided a 'personal news station' service for its readers, and opened a new landscape for the general public's media participation in Taiwan. It was originally an attempt to use user-generated content on their websites, but unexpectedly encouraged a formation of online participatory culture in Taiwan. This personal news station service provided by *Tomorrow Daily* allowed Internet users to establish their own 'personal news web pages', to write any content they wanted on it, and to interact with their readers through this web-based interface. Before the closing down of *Tomorrow Daily* in 2001, there were 15,000 personal news stations on their news website, which were later moved to *PChome online*, another web company in the same business group, and became a popular blog space in Taiwan.

The personal news stations can be seen as an early form of journalism blog in Taiwan. Since *Tomorrow Daily*, blog space and blogging became popular practices in cyberspace during 2002-2005. The most popular blog hosting company in Taiwan, WRETCH, was founded in 1999 by several college students at National Chaio-Tung University and started to provide free blog space in 2003. Later WRETCH was merged into the Yahoo Group and is still the leading blog space provider. From 2005-2006, many mainstream online news websites and portal websites also launched blog hosting services on their online news websites. *Chinatimes.com*, the second largest online news website, initiated their blog space in 2005 and invited their journalists, editors and some famous people (e.g. politicians, celebrities and columnists) to write blogs on *Chinatimes.com*. *UDN.com*, the largest online news website, and *ETtoday.com* also launched their blog forum around the same time and opened blog space both to their

employees, namely journalists and editors, and to general Internet users16.

J-blogging practice and digital policy in Taiwan

From the previous historical review of the general public's media participatory practices in Taiwan, we can see that Taiwanese government's telecom policies have also played a significant role here. For example, the promotion of the BBS obviously related to the government's policy of promoting Internet use in colleges. This policy later had some impact on online participatory culture in Taiwan. WRETCH, the most popular blog hosting website mentioned above was, to a certain extent, developed in a university under the encouragement umbrella of the government's Internet policy. As my previous discussion has indicated, official power in Taiwan set up different digital policies to encourage the general Internet users to use the online medium to practice their citizenship, in other words, to become e-citizens.

The e-citizen vision is based on two perspectives. Firstly, being able to access the Internet has been seen as a basic skill for citizens who live in the information age; and secondly, media performance in Taiwan in the past decade has been strongly criticized as the public's media participation is used by official power as a means of media reform. Various government reports have considered the Taiwanese government's intentions to articulate Internet usage, citizenship and 'deliberative democracy' together (National Think Tank Online, 2006). As for deliberative democracy, the National Taiwan Think-tank, an official policy-making institution, defines it as a sort of democracy which 'entails the idea that all citizens should be eligible to participate in collective decision-making, which should be conducted in a rational manner' (National Taiwan Think-tank Online, 2006:online). By stating deliberative democracy as meaning 'all

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16 Later *Chinatimes.com* also opened it blog space to the public but *Chinatimes.com* seems to prefer blogs written by 'famous persons' and usually puts their blogs on the front page.

citizens can participate in the government's decision-making', the Think-tank suggests public participation in policy-making as the ideal form of democracy, especially in the context of Taiwan. As the policy making institution indicates:

> In the course of Taiwan's democratic development, social divergence has occurred because of a difference in political standpoints. Some have wondered whether Taiwan's democratic transformation has stalled in a bottleneck... [The] idea of deliberative democracy...rebuilds people's trust in the democratic system and passion for participation with the ultimate goal of deepening Taiwan's democratic practices (National Taiwan Think-tank Online, 2006:online).

Online (Internet) space, from the government's point of view, is one of the ideal 'platforms' for citizens to practice deliberative democracy. Under this scenario, different government sectors propose their plans to foster e-citizenship and deliberative democracy. For instance, in 2004, the Taiwanese Department of Health held a 'consensus conference' that invited 'citizens' to participate in the discussion on how to solve the National Health Insurance (NHI) financial crisis. The activity was also sponsored by *Yam.com*, a portal website, by providing a blog space and inviting 'citizen journalists' to report the conference. The design of the conference originated from the design of citizen meetings in some western countries, with the purpose of gathering the public's opinions.

The government's 'top-down' action to encourage people to participate in deliberative democracy also articulates media reform in Taiwan. As I mentioned earlier, the Taiwanese government has been urged to take aggressive action to enact media

reform due to the poor quality of media performance. After coming to power, the DPP government claimed that Taiwan would need to develop citizen journalism to train citizen journalists in the name of media reform. Additionally, the government's intervention also involved political purposes. During the DPP's eight-year (2000-2008) period in power, the relationship between the government and the media was always tense. In particular, in 2004, the DPP candidate, Chen Shui-Bian, won the presidential election against the rival KMT by only 0.2% of the votes. Many media that supported the KMT questioned the legitimacy of the 2004 presidential election and held an antagonistic position toward the DPP government. News reports and comments on these media usually impugned the DPP government as incapable and corrupt. The DDP government, by contrast, advocated that all these accusations showed the bias of the pro-KMT media (all these media are called 'Pan-Blue' media because KMT use the colour blue to represent their party) in attempting to besmirch the government and bring the old political force (the KMT) back to office. Under these circumstances, several influential conflicts occurred. In 2000 and 2002, the District Prosecutor's Office searched the offices of the *China Times Evening News* and *Next Magazine* on suspicion of violating national security; and in 2006, the NCC (National Communication Commission) refused to renew the licence of TVBS on the grounds that the television company received investment from the PRC[17]. Coincidentally, most of these media are Pan-Blue media.

In order to countervail the pressure from the Pan-Blue media, the DPP government started to promote citizen journalism in Taiwan. Yang Kai-Cheng (2006) uses the citizen journalism activities promoted by the National Youth Commission (NYC) as an example to analyze official power's top-down model of citizen journalism. He suggests

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17 The Taiwanese government still bans mainland China capital from investing in media businesses in Taiwan. However, the TVBS case is that the company has capital from Hong Kong, it does not come directly come from China, and this seems acceptable under the law.

that, based on NYC's logic, the media should provide 'spaces' for public debates, but the commercial media in Taiwan do not fulfil this expectation. Therefore, the government sector should help Taiwan construct an ideal 'public sphere' for public debates by supporting the development of blog space. Under this circumstance, citizen journalism or blog journalism was described by the DPP government as a grass-roots medium reflecting what citizens are really concerned about, and mediating citizens' voices in contrast to the poor quality of mainstream news media aiming at pleasing popular taste. Blogs have thereby been seen as an online space with fewer barriers for the general public's media participation where everyone can be a 'journalist' and speak out with their own voices. In order to support the development of citizen journalism in Taiwan, training 'citizen journalists' is an essential move to support citizen journalism and deliberative democracy. Thus, many related activities started in 2004. For instance, the National Youth Commission (NYC) began to run a series of short courses on training 'citizen journalists' and set up an 'official version' of its platform for citizen journalists. In the meantime, the notion of 'citizen journalist' has been seen as part of the e-citizen plan. The NYC also held two training courses in 2005 and trained up to 200 'citizen journalists'. The first *Citizen Journalist Principle of Taiwan* was also issued by the NYC and those citizen journalists after the training courses. In 2007, a semi-official website, People Post (http://www.peopo.org/), was also launched for the general public to publish their news reports.

The official version of citizen journalism did attract some attention, but it also received much criticism. The state's intervention in developing citizen journalism was questioned by some j-bloggers. They criticized that the top-down model had set up an 'official definition' of citizen journalism and the pre-determined route of public online media participation. For example, The NHI conference mentioned above was criticized

for its pre-selection of issues and participants; and it was also questioned about whether the conclusion could really represent the public's opinions since it was made up of people selected by the official department. Under the top-down model, media participation or citizen journalism was used by the governmental sector as propaganda for the government's policies. For instance, the NYC, in 2005 and 2006, held several conferences on national affairs and invited young people to attend these conferences and report on them. The conferences included three general topics, the Taiwan-China relationship, social development, and media reform. However, the conclusions of these citizen conferences apparently echoed the policies of the DPP. The most manifest example is that some conclusions on the issues of the relationship between Taiwan and China, such as control over investment in China, reconciliation of different political parties, enhancing the assimilation of different ethnic groups in Taiwan, and reinforcing Taiwanese identity are similar to the DPP's political position, and oppose the stand point of the KMT, the opposition party.

The top-down model of encouraging online media participation shows how a new media practice is utilized by political force to facilitate the nation's development and authority's special purposes. J-blog or media participation in the online environment in Taiwan are used to confirm (or re-confirm) and communicate the political position of the ruling party. This political purpose is conducted through the discourse of democracy or media reform in order to legitimise the policy.

Nevertheless, the public's media participation in journalism in Taiwan does not precisely follow the route set up by the official authority. This links to another aspect of j-blogging practice in Taiwan –blog users' automatic and independent media participation practices. For instance, some j-blogging practices succeed the tradition of the previous alternative media since the authoritarian period, but have turned their focus

onto broader social and cultural issues rather than only the political one. On the other hand, more and more general users start to use online media for their media participation in journalism. According to a market survey, 70% of Internet users in Taiwan had their own blogs by 2007, although not everyone updates their blogs every day (Insight Explorer, 2006). Different from the alternative media that have strong relations with political parties or social groups, these general users seem to conduct their media participation practices independently and these general blog users seem to be more concerned about issues which occur in their everyday lives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed the development of the media and telecom systems in different periods of time, from the authoritarian to the post-martial law period, in Taiwan. Both the media and telecom systems in Taiwan during the two periods experienced different ranges of regulation and deregulation processes. However, media and telecom systems in Taiwan today are operated under what I have called a 'hybrid regulatory framework' which combines the idea of neo-liberalism, social responsibility theory and state intervention. This hybrid framework has yielded a special news culture in Taiwan. On the one hand, deregulation of the media ban on the basis of free-market competition has led the news media in Taiwan to pursue circulation and audience ratings by using sensational material; on the other hand, the government tries to interfere with the performance of media in response to the urges for media reform from the general public. In the meantime, the operation of telecom systems also relates to the hybrid framework. As I have indicated, after the abolition of martial law, telecom systems have also experienced progressive deregulation. The government has vowed to establish a liberal, equal and free competition environment for telecom systems. However, the Taiwanese government, to a certain extent, still adopts different policies

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to intervene in the development of telecom systems because it has been seen as one of the important infrastructures to the nation.

The practices of online journalism in Taiwan are relevant to regulation and deregulation of media and telecom systems. As I have indicated, the development of online journalism in Taiwan includes two different trajectories, mainstream online journalism and online alternative journalism. The two types of online journalism emerged around the same time in Taiwan. Mainstream online journalism in Taiwan has developed for two reasons. Firstly, conventional news outlets, especially newspapers, try to use the online medium to extend their declining readerships, and secondly, the increasing Internet population encourages new businessmen to invest in the highly competitive news industry market in Taiwan. Both reasons are triggered, to a certain extent, by the government's policy of promoting Internet usage. Nevertheless, the production practices of mainstream online journalism in Taiwan are also intricately connected with the special news culture in Taiwan. One aspect is that the highly competitive media environment has made the production practices of mainstream online news a struggle between making a profit and upholding their occupational professionalism. These aspects will be discussed with the support of my empirical data in Chapters 4 & 5.

Another online journalism, online alternative journalism, emerged from a different social and cultural background in Taiwan. As I have suggested, its development can be traced back to the spirit of alternative media activities in Taiwan since the authoritarian period such as political magazines, illegal cable television and underground radio stations, but the practices of most online alternative media have shifted their goals from political purposes to media reform or other purposes. Official power, on the other hand, tries to lead the practices of alternative online journalism to the route they set up for the

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purposes of national development (e.g. the e-citizen project) and to reconfirm the government's policy (e.g. the consensus conference held by the governmental sector). However, the general public tends to conduct the practices of online alternative journalism in different ways. This topic will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 4 The everyday production practices in the online newsroom: the case of *ETtoday.com*

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the culture of online news via its production practices. I focus on mainstream online journalism in Taiwan and use one of the famous mainstream online news websites, *ETtoday.com*[18] (http://www.ETtoday.com/), as a case study for the investigation of the routine production practices in the online newsroom. I wish to explore how production practices are conducted in an online news environment by professional news-workers. As argued in Chapter 3, online journalism in Taiwan has developed via two trajectories, mainstream online journalism and alternative online journalism. In this chapter I start my empirical study with mainstream online news websites because these are what most people read or visit while surfing the Internet in their everyday lives in Taiwan.

As argued in Chapter 1, I treat online journalism as an emerging cultural form in journalism. It has gradually developed its own cultural characteristics, and moved away from being only a subordinate or subservient news product to print and broadcasting news media, which, as some authors claim (van der Wurff, 2005), are still seeking their own position within news media. In other words, online journalism has created its own culture. However, this thesis does not claim that online journalism has brought us an entirely novel or unique news culture. In fact, online news culture did not come into being abruptly; the culture of online journalism has two main characteristics: firstly it combines with conventional and contemporary news culture, and secondly, it converges with cultural forms of different news media and its own to make one culture artefact. We could say that it has developed on the basis of certain

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18 *ETtoday.com* merged with a new company and changed its name to 'NOWnews.com' (http://www.nownews.com/) in 2008.

existing news culture, as well as mixing with some new media and technological forms thus yielding its own culture.

My ethnographic observations in the online newsroom of *ETtoday.com* and interviews with news-workers aim to investigate everyday routine practices in online newsrooms. My basic argument in this chapter is that part of the online news culture is created through its production practices. As discussed in Chapter 1, culture is not an abstract concept such as internal idea or meaning. It resides in social actors' different practices. Therefore, to understand online news culture, one of the gateways is to study online news practices. Furthermore, I also argue that the process of online news production does not simply include one single practice, but rather a set of practices which are structured around the production practices of online news. These practices include the use of online media technologies in online news production, the practices of different norms and principles which are used in guiding reports in online journalism, the practice of re-structuring the working model in the online newsroom, and so forth.

It should be mentioned here that attempting to discuss online news production in just one or two chapters is insufficient. From my viewpoint, time, space, news flows, and the use of technologies are four significant and intertwined dimensions for investigating the production culture of mainstream online journalism. The four dimensions involve complicated notions which will be explained later in my analysis. Using my empirical data, I will argue, in this chapter, that the production practices in mainstream online journalism create several features of online news culture, including timeless time, placeless place and non-stop news flows (planned or unplanned). All these features are related to practitioners' use of technologies[19]. I will show in my

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[19] By technologies, I mainly refer to communication and media technologies such as different ranges of digitizing techniques.

analysis in this chapter that all the above dimensions in the online news environment are organised into a 'network model' through production practices. The term network is a very old form of social organization, but has taken on a 'new life in the information age' (Castells, 2000a:15). The term network usually refers to 'individuals who are linked together by one or more social relationships' (Marshall, 1998:446). Van Dijk (Van Dijk, 199/2006:28) suggests that 'a network is a connection between at least three elements, points or units'. The concept of network and its use in the online news environment will be discussed further, later in my analysis.

The issue of technology in the process of online news production should be discussed briefly here, primarily because it is the central topic in many related studies of online news production (Boczkowski, 2004b; Cottle & Ashton, 1999; Garrison, 2001). One popular viewpoint to explain the development of online journalism is to highlight that online technologies are the most important dimension that drives the formation of online news culture. Although this might be true in some respects, this viewpoint only describes part of the picture of online journalism. In certain ways, technology is indeed the source from which online news culture is formed, but it does not means technology is the only decisive element. In my later analysis, I will show that the meaning of technology toward online journalism should be discussed along with other aspects within its practices. Therefore, I view technology as one of the aspects of online news production practices. Accordingly, in the following discussion, I will use my empirical data to show how technologies in the online news environment are used to sustain different purposes of production practices, and how the application of technology to online journalism can vary via different practices.

Regarding my research purposes and the aspects I am concerned with, this chapter is structured as follow: Firstly, I will analyse the textual content of *ETtoday.com*. From

my viewpoint, the textual content (including news reports and their format) is the manifest result of the production practices of online journalism. Two time-related policies, immediacy and constant updates, are the major principles for managing the website, and also influence the production practices. Secondly, I will investigate the practices of online news production, the news-workers' daily work, both inside and outside the online newsroom. My analysis in this part relates to the spatial dimension of the production practices of online news because the online newsroom and other locations where news-workers work are the spaces that relate to production practices. The third aspect will focus on how technologies are used in association with online news-workers' daily work. Finally, I will analyse how the above aspects including time, space and news flows and technologies all together relate to online news production practices and shape online news culture.

Brief history of *ETtoday.com* and research method

Many mainstream online news websites in Taiwan launched their websites between 1995 and 2000. *ETtoday.com* joined this 'war of online news' in 2000, the year in which at least four other similar online news websites started to provide a news service at around the same time, and received more attention than its competitors due to its special political and economic background. *ETtoday.com* belonged to Eastern Media Group (EMG), a well-known media enterprise that owns three cable television channels, an ISP (Internet service provider), a property company plus two newspaper companies. The owner of *ETtoday.com*, Lin-Ling Wang, was a former legislator of the KMT, and thus had a long-term friendly relationship with certain politicians. Initially, *ETtoday.com* recruited about 250 experienced news-workers from newspapers and broadcasting news media by paying larger salaries. This was a common strategy adopted by many of the newly-launched online news websites in Taiwan in order to

compete with the conventional news media, but this also resulted in a serious financial burden, due to the high expenditure on employment. At first, *ETtoday.com* made no profit, like many other online news websites in Taiwan, and relied on EMG's support. Later, the website had two large waves of redundancies and downsized its employees to around fifty to reduce expenses. With the financial support from EMG, *ETtoday.com* survived whilst other mainstream online news websites collapsed (e.g. *Tomorrow Daily*, see Chapter 3). In 2002, a market survey showed that *ETtoday.com* attracted five million page views per day and ranked as the most frequently visited news website in Taiwan[20]. In Taiwan, *ETtoday*.com is called web-only (or online-only) online news media, as its main content is original and produced by its online news-workers, mainly for use on the website. This makes *ETtoday.com* a good case to examine how journalistic content is produced in an online news environment[21].

To understand how news-workers conduct their day-to-day production practices in the online news environment, I spent time in the *ETtoday.com* newsroom to observe the daily work of its journalists and editors. I focus in particular here on their production practices, including the norms and principles which are used to select news (these norms and principles are usually called 'news values', see discussion in Chapter 2), and how they adopted online media technologies in their online newsroom. These two aspects, together with the institutional setting and practices, are seen as essential aspects for our understanding of media production (Corner, 1995). I also accompanied some *ETtoday.com* journalists to see how they covered news away from the newsroom. Those practices outside the newsroom provided me with opportunities to investigate how

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[20] The other two major online news websites, *ChinaTimes.com* attracted 3.5 million and *UDN.com* attracted 2 million page views everyday (Liu, 2006).

[21] In Taiwan, many online news website still use news reports from other print or broadcasting media, for example, *UDN.COM* uses the contents from the *United Daily*. These kind of online news website, from my point of view, are inappropriate for us to examine the online news culture because its contents are not originally for online journalism.

journalists work in different social spaces and how their production practices are connected to the newsroom. In addition to these ethnographic observations, I also conducted several in-depth interviews to understand how news-workers perceive their daily work. Details of the observations and backgrounds of the interviewees are described in Appendix 1.

Content of *ETtoday.com*

With nearly fifty news-workers (journalists, editors and other staff in the news department), *ETtoday.com* produces, on average, around 400-500 news reports every day. Figure 4.1 is an overview of the homepage of *ETtoday.com*, which is managed in a manner similar to a newspaper's front page. In the middle of the page, the most significant position is the headline news with a news photo or a video clip which is updated every hour or two. The headline news is put in the most important position on the home page. Readers can read the leading paragraph of the headline news story at first glance when visiting the website. If they want to read more details, they have to click the hypertext to read a complete news report. 'Click' here is a special reading action. To read information contained in the inferior layer of the web page, viewers need to move their mouse cursor to one of the objects or items (e.g. reports, pictures or hypertexts) on the web page, click, and link to the information they intend to read. Internet users' clicking actions yield substantial outcomes for the production practices of online journalism. By calculating the clicking times, online news producers get page-view times (also called click-through numbers) and this information is used in production practices. This topic will be analyzed further in Chapter 5.

Figure 4.1 An overview of the homepage of *ETtoday.com*

hyperlink to different news pages

headline news and

hyperlink to related news

area for more important news, popular news and ETTV news

hyperlink to non-news information

online opinion poll

real-time ETTV news, weather forecast and market information

interactive area
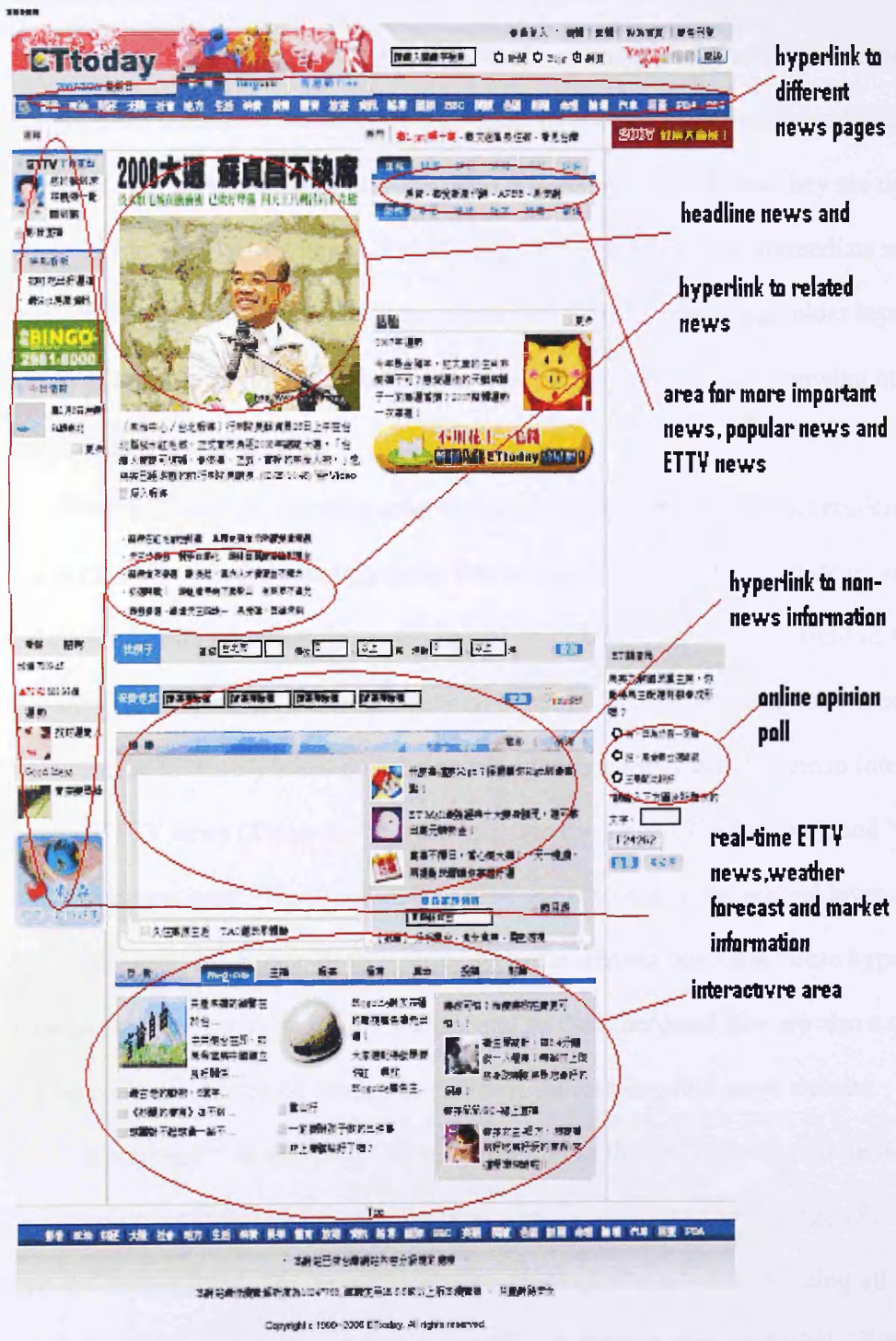
Time is of the utmost importance for *ETtoday.com*. Immediacy and constant updates are two basic editorial policies relating to time, which is also an important criterion for managing the website. According to Shi-Pei Yu, editor of the domestic news page, editors of *ETtoday.com* normally choose three significant news reports as the headline news for each page, and arrange other news reports by order of time they are uploaded. Some labels, such as 'hot news', 'latest news', 'breaking news' or 'immediate news' are used with such a heading to stress the significance of the news. In an older layout (pre-2006) of the web page, there are banners with 'sliding information' showing online newsreaders the latest news.

ETtoday.com uses various special designs on their website to attract readers' attention and guide their reading order. For example, several hypertext items are listed below the headline to provide related stories and backgrounds. To the right of the headline (see Figure 4.2), there are several columns labeled 'more important news', 'recommended news', 'most popular news', 'gossip news' (usually human interest news), ETTV news (TV news from the in-group media of *ETtoday.com*), and 'reader's news comment area'. These columns use hypertext to link to the second layer of the web page on *ETtoday.com* or to external websites. On the one hand, these hypertexts provide readers with further information; and on the other hand they are also a means of media convergence which integrates different sources into one news website.

Convergence[22] in electronic communication usually indicates that all modes of communication integrate into one grand system via electronic technology (Pool, 1983, cite in Gordon, 2003: 58). In media studies, convergence refers to bringing all forms of media together, which appears to be a common phenomenon in the digital environment. However, for online journalism, Rich Gordon (2003) argues that the implication of

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[22] The notion of convergence was introduced in Chapter 1 and is one of key aspects in this thesis to understand the culture of online journalism.

convergence cannot simply be reduced only to the integration of media forms. Convergence, from his viewpoint, involves the integration of ownership, information gathering, news organization and news presentation (Gordon, 2003). Gordon's idea can be seen in practice in the content of *ETtoday.com*.

Figure 4.2 Different hypertext items on *ETtoday.com* which are used to guide readers to different news pages
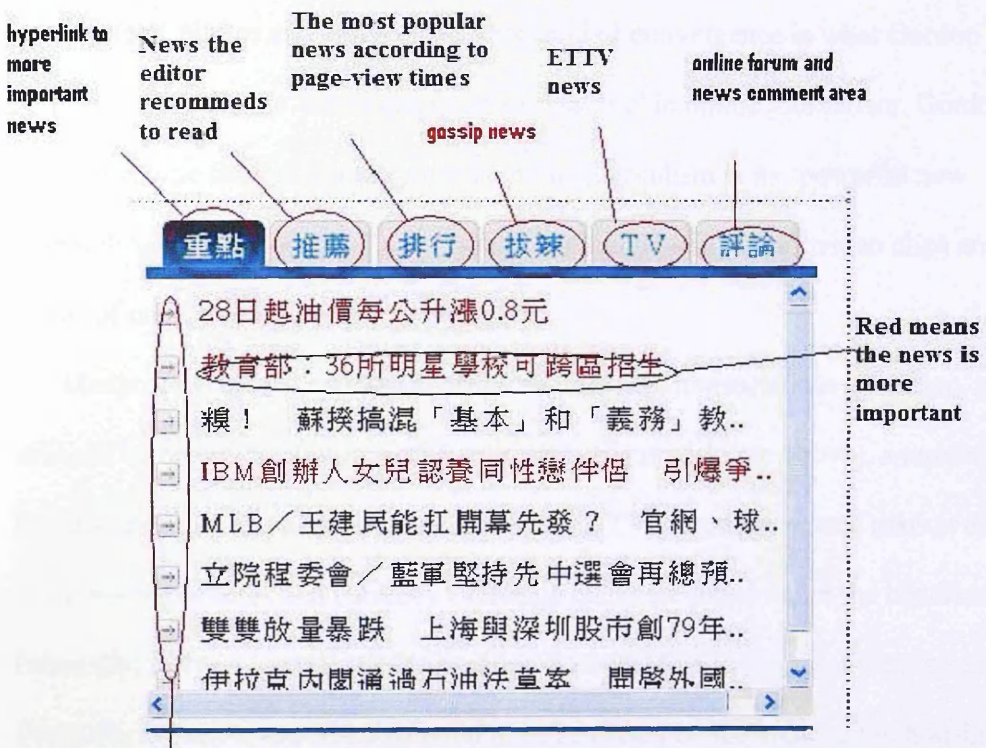
News listed in this area changes while the user clicks the different icons above, and if the user clicks on the different icons, it will link to the web pages of this area

The news content in *ETtoday.com* is a product of convergence. Although *ETtoday.com* claims that it is a web-only news website, a certain proportion of news reports is actually produced by other in-group EMG media, such as the *People's Daily* and ETTV (the news channel of EMG). To the left of *ETtoday.com*'s home page, several

hypertext items are provided to invite readers to link directly to the ETTV website. TV clips produced by ETTV are also embedded within some of the news stories on *ETtoday.com* which means these news reports become a multi-media reporting format. All these production designs are based on the convergence and integration of different news organizations within the same media group. At EMG, different news media can use news reports and content reciprocally from in-group media (cross-media usage). This allows *ETtoday.com* to generate diverse narrative styles or forms of story-telling for news presentation. Thus, news reports on *ETtoday.com* can combine with textual descriptions, photos and video clips. This level of convergence is what Gordon (2003:70-71) calls the 'convergence of storytelling' in online journalism. Gordon argues that one form of convergence in online journalism is its 'powerful new storytelling tools' (Gordon, 2003:71) which integrate text, audio, video clips and other forms of presentation into one news report.

Media convergence on *ETtoday.com* includes non-journalistic information, which is utilized for commercial purposes. As shown in Figure 4.1 (see above), a number of hypertext items link to commercial information, TV programmes, and market data (e.g. stock market indexes and currency exchange rates) are listed under the headline. Generally, the non-journalistic information leads readers to in-group businesses of EMG. For instance, two kinds of popular information in this area are the housing and fortune-telling sections provided by EMG's real estate company and its TV channel. The content of the fortune-telling section is usually provided by fortune-tellers or feng-shui experts with hypertext linking directly to their companies. *ETtoday.com* just offers a platform for them to promote their businesses (this aspect will be discussed further in Chapter 5). At this level, media convergence involves ownership, organization and information gathering.

So far I have given a general introduction to the main content of *ETtoday.com*. More detailed discussion of its content occurs later in my analysis. In the next section, I shift my focus to production practices inside and outside the *ETtoday.com* newsroom. I am interested in how the of online journalism links to different production practices.

Everyday practice in the *ETtoday.com* newsroom

The online newsroom (see Figure 4.3) of *ETtoday.com* is the vital space for online news production practices, which includes the news department, the management department and the information technology department (the I.T. department, which is in charge of computer systems and maintenance). The news department is the nexus for producing news content[23]. Editors of each news page, the chief editor and the chief reporter work in the newsroom, while journalists visit the newsroom occasionally when asked to support newsroom tasks.

When I first visited the newsroom, it was quiet and everyone was concentrating on their computer screens. The quiet atmosphere was explained by the heavy workload that left news-workers with no time for leisurely gossiping. Besides, the adoption of online media technologies has reduced the necessity for physical interaction (e.g. face-to-face contact, group discussion or telephone conversations) among staff (this aspect is discussed later in this chapter).

News-workers in the newsroom begin their day with a 9 a.m. meeting every morning. The major task of the meeting is to decide highlight news of the day. Participants at the meeting include the chief editor, the chief reporter whose work is to supervise the journalists, the editors of each page, and journalists' delegates from each section. The meeting topics typically include issues which have lasted for several days

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[23] Due to the limitations of my research resources, in this thesis I focus mainly on the news department. Other departments might be mentioned when they are relevant to my analysis. However, I spent little time in other departments at *ETtoday.com*.

and are still newsworthy, news which is expected to happen that day (scheduled news events), and the headlines of other news media, such as daily newspapers.

Figure 4.3 The online newsroom of *ETtoday.com*

(The picture shows the central newsroom at *ETtoday.com*. Most news-workers in the newsroom have their own desks and PCs to cope with their daily workload. The newsroom is like many other offices. TVs are hung from the ceiling and tuned to news channels so that the editors can monitor the latest TV news constantly.)

After the meeting, news-workers will be informed of the decisions of the meeting and assigned to relevant tasks. One of my interviewees, Judy Hu, a journalist from the economic sector, who regularly participates in the meeting, showed me the meeting record for 10 February, 2006. The meeting record listed several outlines for news events and issues. All of them had been labelled with different 'weights' according to their newsworthiness. According to Hu, spot news, follow-up news and unimportant news

are three major types of labels, which are often seen on the everyday meeting record. Spot news is a newsworthy event and must be covered. Follow-up news is a headline reported by other news media or news events that has lasted for a few days and still needs to be tracked. Unimportant news is the kind of event that is defined as 'news-worthless' or too trivial to cover. However, this does not mean that this trivial news will be discarded. Because *ETtoday.com* needs a huge amount of news content every day in order to maintain continual news updating and fill the enormous online space, unimportant or trivial news may still need to be reported.

News-workers in *ETtoday.com*'s newsroom take charge of two major tasks. Firstly, they have to do traditional editors' work including selecting news, editing articles, giving titles to news stories, and checking details of stories with journalists, confirming that everything is clear. Secondly, editors in the newsroom have to re-write news stories. This work is essential when news breaks happens but journalists are occupied by other events. Usually, an agency wire is a major source which is often used by *ETtoday.com* for such re-writing work. Digital technology enables online news editors to copy and edit news from other media more easily than in the past. It also allows online news-workers to cope with the pressure of updating news and producing news reports efficiently (Deuze & Dimoudi, 2002; Domingo, 2006; Quandt, Altmeppen, & Leoffelholz, 2003). At *ETtoday.com*, the news-workers thus have a greater workload than workers in other news media. This seems to be the 'double-edge sword' of media technologies for online journalism, i.e. online media technologies do indeed improve efficiency and productivity but, on the other hand, they also increase the pressure on news-workers and their workload. For example, Liu, (2006) in his study of the effects of ICT on Taiwanese reports, found out that ICT has increased the workload of reporters. Some online news-workers, in his interviews, complained that they were becoming

simply 'typing machines' (Liu, 2006:709).

As already mentioned, immediacy and constant updates are two major policies of *ETtoday.com*, and are emphasized in everyday production practices. Ching-Hui Cai, the chief editor said that, 'One of our greatest strengths is the immediacy of reporting news, and we update news very quickly'. Essentially, immediacy and constant updates are two news values related to time. Time has been one of the most important news values in journalistic studies. Prior studies have discussed at length the importance of time to news. Allan Bell (1995) indicates that immediacy (Bell uses the term 'recency' in his study) is one of the news values related to time, which means 'the best news is something which has only just happened'(Bell, 1995:320). Immediacy and constant updates are not only essential to online journalism, but are also emphasized by certain conventional media. For instance, similar to online journalism, 24-hour television news or radio news are other news media that participate in this 'constant war' of disseminating news.

The breaking news about former Taiwanese president Chen Shui-Ban's unexpected speech is a good example that shows how immediacy and constant updates are put into practice at *ETtoday.com*. One afternoon, during my observation in the newsroom, the chief reporter, Yu-Ling Zhuang, noticed that former president Chen Shui-Ban was making an important announcement on his visit to a charity institution. TV news had shown the news live and then rebroadcasted it later repeatedly. According to a standard procedure, all the president's public schedules are pre-announced. Correspondents of the president's office should pass a message to editors in the newsroom, and then the editors' morning meeting can assign the appropriate tasks to journalists. Zhuang found out that their team had lost track of the event and no journalists were available to deal with it. Thus, Zhuang asked Yu, the editor of the domestic news page, to 'write a short

report about the speech'. Holding a different opinion, Yu thought they should wait a few minutes because the journalist who was in charge of the news might be able to write the news later. However, Zhuang said she had not had any notice from the journalist yet. Under these circumstances, she suggested that they could write a short report, in advance, from the newsroom. If the journalist managed to write a more detailed report later, then they could combine the two articles.

Yu agreed with the chief reporter and started to write about the president's 'unexpected talk'. She knew little about the issue the president was talking about, but Yu told me that there were several methods to solve this problem. The first action she made was to call the president's office and ask if they could provide information about the president's announcement. Unluckily, the answer was that they did not have that information because it was an unexpected speech so the official news release might have to wait. Yu then checked the 'Central News Agency' (CNA), the largest news agency in Taiwan which is sponsored by the government, to see whether they had already reported the news. Luckily, the news agency had a few lines about the news, and it was enough for Yu to generate a short report. By using all the information she had, Yu finished her news report in a very short time, she also searched the databank of *ETtoday.com* to find some prior reports as reference. She 'copied' some paragraphs and 'pasted' them behind the report so that readers could have some background to the story. This example of the president's unexpected speech shows that the online newsroom plays a role in producing immediate and constantly updating news. A flexible procedure which breaks the standard processes of news production is employed in *ETtoday.com* in order to achieve this goal. Similar situations happen in the online newsroom everyday.

Production practice outside the newsroom

In the previous section, I described some production practices inside the online

newsroom. In this section, I will discuss practices outside the online newsroom, which is another crucial part of the production process of *ETtoday.com*. Outside the newsroom, *ETtoday.com* journalists work in different social spaces. They are assigned to at least three 'theme areas' for coverage. These theme areas are usually called news-beats (see Chapter 2) which are full of 'raw material' for news. Everyday, journalists shuttle between these theme-areas which make them the places for their everyday work. Themes areas can be a concrete location such as a press room in a governmental division, or a news category (e.g. a journalist who specializes in 'high-tech industry' might have to visit high-tech enterprises and attend related news conferences). Figure 4.4 is a photograph taken in the press room at the Ministry of Education when I followed *ETtoday.com*'s journalist, Chung-Ping Chu, to her workplace outside the newsroom. Press rooms in Taiwan usually provide basic communication equipment such as telephones, Internet connection, fridge and computers. Journalists from different news media bring their own laptops to the press rooms and share the space and equipment provided.

When doing my fieldwork, I followed two journalists, Hu (on 08/07/2005), a journalist of the economic news sector, and Chu (on 14/03/2006), a journalist from the educational news sector, to observe their daily work outside the online newsroom. Hu's main work is to cover financial news, so she usually works in the press room located at Taiwan's central bank. Chu usually works in the press room of the Ministry of Education.

If there are no other scheduled events, *ETtoday.com* journalists arrive at the place they usually work around 9 a.m. every day because they have to upload the first report within one hour. On the day I followed Hu, she arrived as usual at the central bank's press room in the morning.

The first work Hu did was to switch on her laptop and start with her work. She then

read the morning newspapers. While reading them, she pointed out that the headline

news in the *Economic Daily*, a Taiwanese newspaper specializing in business news, was

'not news' because there had already been many previous related reports.

Figure 4.4 Production Practice outside the Online Newsroom

The picture shows a journalist at *ETtoday.com* (the nearer person
in the picture) working with a journalist from another news
medium in the press room located at the Ministry of Education,
Taiwan. The press room provides all the office equipment and the
ETtoday.com journalist needs only to take her own laptop. She can
access the Internet, communicate with the newsroom and conduct
her everyday work.

However, Hu still decided to follow the report because she thought the story had a

'new angle', so she should inform her readers of the updates. Later, she logged on to a

web-based interface on her laptop, wrote a short outline about what she was going to

report, and then she sent it to the online newsroom. The outline was as simple as

'following up the headline news in the *Economic Daily* today', so that the newsroom

would know what she was going to write.

At *ETtoday.com*, every news-worker uses the same web-based interface. It is both software for conducting everyday news work and being a content management system (CMS) for the website. The short outline was later uploaded to the news outline page on the interface, so all the news-workers, both inside and outside the newsroom, could see the message on their own personal working page. Thus the chief editor, the chief report and the editor of the economic page would know what Hu was going to write and expect the story to be finished within one or two hours.

To cover the news, Hu phoned someone she called 'the news source' – the person whom she thought she could get information about the story from. On the telephone, she asked her source some simple questions such as, 'Is the headline news on the Economic Daily true?', and, 'Is there anything else?' These questions, to a certain extent, were merely to confirm the details of the *Economic Daily* headline. It took five minutes to complete the phone call. Hu then shifted the web page to another area on the interface called the 'report writing area', and started to write her report.

Hu explained that although the news had been reported by the other newspaper, it was still worth reporting on *ETtoday.com*, because firstly, their readers might not have had the chance to read the newspaper, and secondly, it was an important issue and had seen a new development that day. She wrote a 500-600 word article and gave it a title. The interface also allows users to link to the *ETtoday.com* databank, searching related news for hypertext. Hu chose several related news reports, some were reports she had written before while some were written by her colleagues, and attached them to the 'hypertext area' on the interface. These news reports were later shown on the website as hypertext forms which allowed readers to read related news for the news report by linking to other news reports or websites. At last, Hu submitted the news article to the newsroom via the Internet, and then the other news-workers could read her news report

on their working areas of the interface.

What Hu did was standard working procedure outside the newsroom. The actual work might involve more flexible practices. For example, on the day I followed another journalist, Chu, the Ministry of Education announced a new policy at an early morning media conference at 10 a.m. Chu was late that day and missed the conference, but she already knew the content of the new policy from other journalists, so she phoned the editors at the newsroom before she entered the press room and asked them to write and upload a short message as breaking news to the website. After arriving at the press room, she wrote a complete news report to replace the earlier one.

From the above cases, we can identify several features of journalists' work outside the online newsroom. First of all, journalists who work outside the newsroom are expected to work independently and cover all news in their assigned theme areas. As mentioned, most of the journalists of *ETtoday.com* have to cover at least three main theme areas or even more. It is a heavy workload compared to other new media. Sometimes, the editors in the newsroom help journalists in writing and posting some short messages on the website, but later the journalists still have to write a complete story. Secondly, the web-based interface bridges the production practices inside and outside the newsroom. My observations suggest that news-workers both inside and outside the newsroom rely on the interface for news production practices. As we can see from Hu and Chu's examples, the interface is not just a word processor, but is multi-functioned software for news writing, a CMS, and, more importantly, a platform to integrate all the production practices for journalists working in different locations and news-workers in the newsroom. It is thus necessary to examine the use of the interface and how it impacts on online news production practices.

The adoption of online media technologies and their practice

The use of the interface at ETtoday.com addresses the relationship between online media technologies and production practices in the online news environment. As mentioned, some authors believe that media and communication technology are the external or only single force which has direct or indirect effects on the workplaces of news organizations, patterns of management and management-labour relationships. Timothy Marjoribanks (2000:16) argues that this kind of viewpoint 'does not accord sufficient attention to social and political relation in capital economies, and does not consider adequately the power relations that exist in industries and institutions which may influence relationships between technology and workplace reform'.

In this thesis, I argue that technology is one of the material aspects for practices, rather than seeing them as external forces which determine human practices. That is, technology is integrated into practices together with other aspects (or we could say other practices). Yet we still have to admit that when some media technologies are designed in association, the practices, human actions, are sometimes constrained by technology. This aspect will be discussed in Chapter 5 when I discuss how the interface is used as the mechanism for evaluating news-workers' performance at *ETtoday.com*, but first of all I shall indicate, in the following analysis, how online media technologies are integrated into production practices at *ETtoday.com*. My analysis will focus particularly on web-based interfaces and related media technologies which are used at *ETtoday.com* in their everyday production practices.

Figure 4.5 shows the home page of the interface used by editors and journalists at *ETtoday.com*. On this home page, the top part is a list of the editors' names for each news page on each working day. Every news page has one editor to manage the whole page; users who log on to this page will know immediately who is in charge of which

news page that day, and who they can contact if they are having problems with their work. The bottom part of the homepage is the 'function area' which users can utilize to link to different pages of the interface, either to start their work or to check related information.

Figure 4.6 is the main working page for journalists and editors and is called their 'personal working page'. At *ETtoday.com*, every journalist, editor and staff member logs on to their personal working page with their own name and password. On this page, news-workers can do all their work relating to news production practices, including typing news articles, giving titles to news reports, uploading articles to the website and sending them to other news-workers via the Internet. Additionally, news-workers can use different functions embedded in the interface to elaborate their news reports, such as previewing the look of their news report when it is published on the website, searching for information in the databank of *ETtoday.com*, and attaching related news to their news stories as hypertexts.

Figure 4.5 The home page of the interface used for generating news stories at

ETtoday.com

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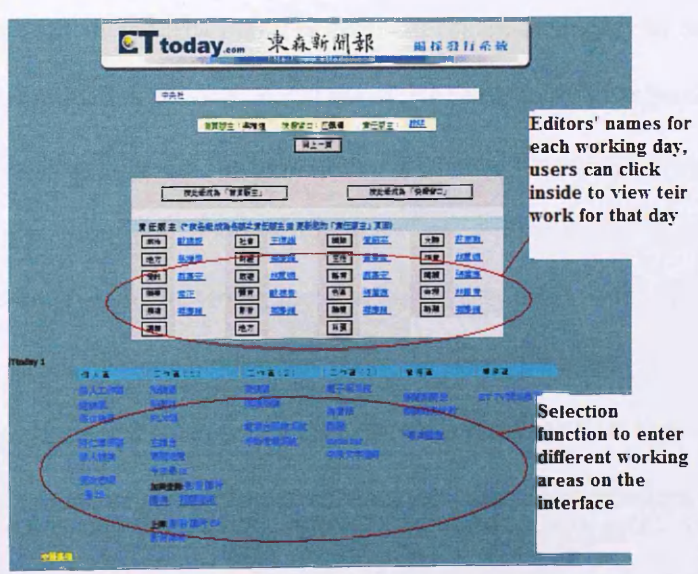
Figure 4.6 The personal working page of the interface
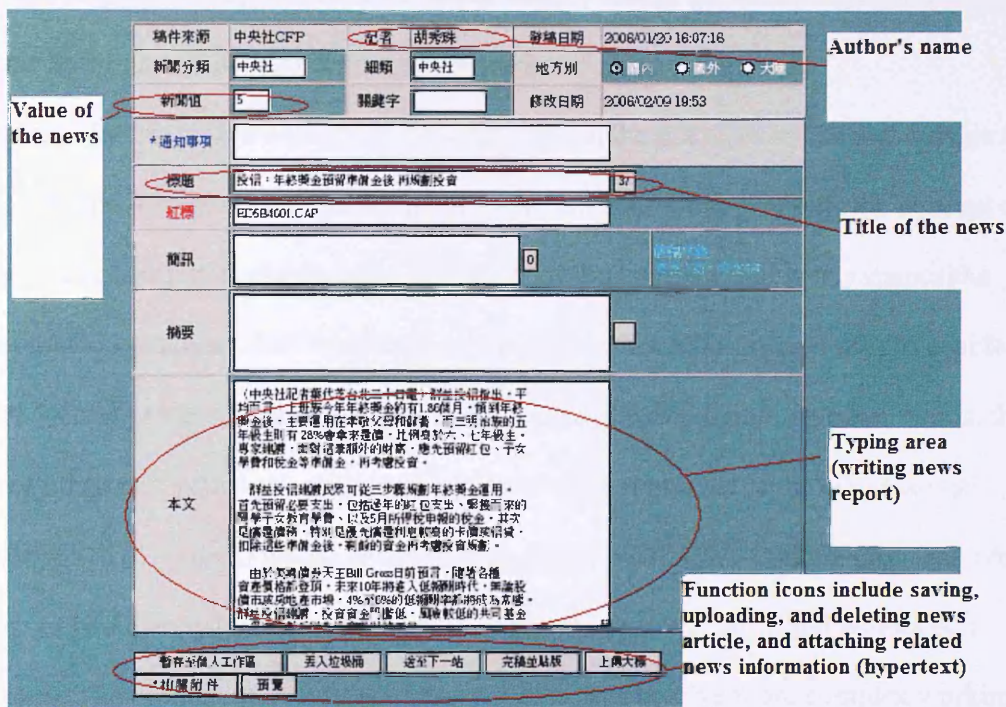
In the personal working area, a rating system is designed for news-workers to score

each story they write in order to indicate the significance of the news. News-workers

give a score of 1-10 points for each news report; the higher the score, the greater the

importance of the news. The rating system reduces the frequency of human interaction

in the news production process. For instance, when the journalists mark their news with

higher scores, the editors at the newsroom understand the news is important and

newsworthy so the editors may consider it for headline news. When the editors disagree

with the score given by its writer, the interface allows them to change the score

previously given. If there are disputes about the score, both parties will discuss it.

Usually they discuss it on an online chat system such as MSN or Yahoo Messenger, and

only use telephone or group discussion when necessary. Nevertheless, disputes about

newsworthiness do not occur very often, because most news-workers of *ETtoday.com* are experienced and seldom have very different opinions about newsworthiness. When major disputes do happen, the chief editor usually makes the final judgment to save the time spent on arguments between news-workers.

The Interface also works as a 'bridge' between the practices inside and outside the newsroom. To make the practices in different locations work properly, the concept of 'individualization' is employed in the design of the interface and hence shapes the production practices. Individualization here means that *ETtoday.com* tries to enable its production process to be carried out by as few people as possible. In other words, the individual news-worker's workload is higher when compared to the conventional elaborated division of labour in newsrooms where most news-workers only deal with one or two dimensions of news work (e.g. journalists cover news and editors edit news). The production practices of news stories thus involve more complex working procedures in the conventional newsroom as I have discussed earlier (see also Chapter 2). Fundamentally, there are still clear divisions of working tasks among the staff at *ETtoday.com*, but in some circumstances, the whole news story can be completed by just one news-worker. Individualizing news work enables the news website of *ETtoday.com* to publish news reports faster than other forms of news media. For example, Yi-Wen Tzao, the journalist specializing in economic news, told me that, ideally, most of the news-workers in *ETtoday.com* can finish a whole news story independently. She indicates that most journalists at *ETtoday.com* 'do nearly all the work by themselves, from writing the story, checking for typos, giving titles to postings (uploads) on the website' (10/07/2005).

Individualization at *ETtoday.com* as a strategy relates to the requirement for immediacy and the constant updating of news and aims to co-operate with the flatter

newsroom structure as well. A complex newsroom structure means that a news organization needs meticulous division of the labour force. Nevertheless, for *ETtoday.com*, a complex newsroom structure and going through multiple negotiated processes before presenting news reports to consumers seems to obstruct the requirement for immediacy. By contrast, reducing the vertical hierarchy of news production enables news reports to be published promptly. Moreover, individualizing news work is particularly important when short-staffed, which is common in many online news website offices in Taiwan.

The case of Hu shows us how the interface helps to individualize production practices. My observations of one day of Hu's work outside the newsroom revealed that she did not enter the newsroom on the day I shadowed her. In fact, she only contacted the chief reporter by phone and that was less than five times on that day. Most of time the newsroom only monitored Hu's works via the interface, and vice versa. For example, the newsroom checked the stories Hu wrote on the interface, and, conversely, Hu checked the progress of her story on the interface. Figure 4.7 is the outline page on the interface. It lists the outlines of all news stories which are in process everyday. News-workers at *ETtoday.com* can browser the short titles of all news articles freely, the author's name of the news, the progress (status) of the news (in writing, editing or being published), the classification of the news and the 'value' (score) of the news. All news-workers at *ETtoday.com* acknowledge, interact, and perceive others work via the information on the interface. For instance, on the news outline page, a journalist staying outside the newsroom knows who is writing what story, to which column this story will be assigned, whether or not the story is finished, and how the journalist 'scores' the news. From this information, journalists outside the newsroom can follow the updates and the progress of news production in the online newsroom. News-workers in the

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newsroom can also know all the progress of the news work outside the newsroom, and

take further action as and when necessary.

Figure 4.7 The news outline page of all news articles on the interface

The trend of individualization does not occur in online journalism. In fact, in certain

news media, so-called 'one-man-bands' (Deuze, 2008:15) or 'backpack journalist[s]'

(Stevens, 2002) have been growing in importance in the process of news production.

These reporters are 'sent out on assignments alone, being solely responsible for

shooting video, recording audio, writing text and putting it all together in a coherent news package' (Deuze, 2008:15). What is different at *ETtoday.com* is that individualization seems to link to a change in power relations between different occupational and role positions in the online news environment. This aspect will be discussed later in this chapter.

The design of the interface also consists of many 'standardized functions' in order to help news-workers do their jobs more easily and efficiently. As the prior analysis has indicated, the personal working area of the interface includes several functions for news-workers to do their jobs. Using these functions does not require complicated knowledge or skills, the users only need to select and click some buttons on the interface. Thus, news-workers can finish all their work by themselves without any difficulty. In other words, the standardized functions also aim to assist the individualized working model. Another example of the standardized design is the layout of the web page of *ETtoday.com*. All the pages use a 'patterned' layout design. When news reports are uploaded to the website, the entire outcome is expected and easy to comprehend. As Yu, the editor of the domestic news page, told me,

> *the layout of our web pages are all designed with a similar style and mode,*
> *which means they are all designed with the same pattern. This has made*
> *news coverage and editing easier [...] the design saves us time and*
> *manpower. (Yu, online news editor, female, 34 years old, 05/07/2005)*

Yu's description above shows that the layout design of *ETtoday.com* is, as I have stressed, standardized. The benefit of standardization is that it eliminates a complex design process. For example, newspapers usually need layout designers and composers

to design the news pages before publishing. For *ETtoday.com*, due to the web page use the standardized layout, it does not need extra layout designers and compositors. The procedure and workforce are reduced at the same time, which enables online news stories to be produced more quickly.

Network structure and online news production practices

In the previous discussion, I have demonstrated that the production practices inside and outside the newsroom of *ETtoday.com* are connected by a combination of communication and media technologies – the interface. In this section, I will show that all the production practices at *ETtoday.com* are organised using a network working model, and that this network model at *ETtoday.com* is established and operates with the assistance of the interface and other communication and media technologies .

Discussions about the concept of 'network' are to be found in the journalistic and industrial literature. Manuel Castells's (2000b) efforts to investigate the network structure of social organization is one of the influential works for exploring this notion in the information age. From his point of view, the information society is made up of networks. As Castells suggests, 'the prevalence of networks in organizing social practices redefines social structure in our society' (Castells, 2000c:695).

In Castells's formulation, a network includes a set of interconnected 'nodes'. These nodes can be from an organisation to the state. These nodes and central places are arranged as a network based on different practices. Castells's network theory argues that a modern network is decentralized and shares decision-making. Therefore, the centre of a network system does not control the whole decision process; on the contrary, the nodes can play the same role as the centre. Information/communication technologies appear to be one of the crucial aspects in his discussion of network. As Castells suggests, 'technologies allow a network to keep its flexibility and adaptability, while, at

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the same time, helps network systems to comprehend complexity' (Castells, 2000a:15).

The notion of network has also appeared in some media and journalistic studies. Tuchman's (1978) study of the four newsrooms in the 1970s suggests that network is adopted in news-making practices in order to comprehend unexpected news. Different locations are defined as news-beats according to their newsworthiness and journalists are assigned to these locations. According to Tuchman, different news-beats form a news-net which allows news organizations to obtain sufficient news resources (see discussions in Chapter 2).

In Taiwan, many newspapers organize news-making practices based on the concept of news-net. *ETtoday.com* seems to use a similar model to organize its production practices but shapes it by utilizing communication and media technologies to attain the goals of immediacy and constant updates. At *ETtoday.com*, the newsroom can be seen as the centre of its network, and journalists outside the newsroom who are assigned several theme areas can be seen as being the nodes. The significance of *ETtoday.com*'s network is that communication and media technologies are largely utilized to make the network operate productively and efficiently.

Before introducing how *ETtoday.com*'s network operates, I shall use a picture to show the general working conditions of journalists in Taiwan. Figure 4.8 shows journalists from different news media working in the press room. This picture is similar to the one I took in the press room at the Ministry of Education (see Figure 4.4), but it shows more clearly the equipment which journalists use in their work. As can be seen from the picture, all the journalists are assigned to their places by the media they belong to. After their works of covering news, these journalists do their jobs in a small crowded press room with their laptops, cell phones, digital cameras and memory cards, and a cable connected to the Internet or wireless. This equipment moves with them everyday.

In other locations, there are other journalists with similar equipment doing their jobs during work time. Every journalist is a small unit of news production, a node in a network; they can connect with their newsrooms and other journalists via the Internet and other communication technologies. These journalists, together, thus form a network structure of news production practices.

Figure 4.8 Journalists as 'nodes' in the network structure of online news production practices

So how is *ETtoday.com*'s network different from other news media in Taiwan? To discuss this, it is worth noting that my study does not claim that *ETtoday.com* constitutes a revolutionary network model for news production. In fact, as many existing studies have shown, the network working model and technology adoption have already been seen in many conventional news media. My aim here is to show how the network has been adapted to fit production practice in the online news environment. Bearing this in mind, I shall discuss how the network relates to the production practices of *ETtoday.com*.

First of all, *ETtoday.com*'s network operates with a shortage of staff. Like other

online news media, *ETtoday.com* suffers from the problem of lack of workforce, especially after two large waves of redundancies. In these circumstances, some strategies are necessary for its network in order to achieve the requirement of immediacy and constant updates. As I have demonstrated, the working interface has been designed and is used to enable the production practices to be individualized and standardized. Therefore, as the 'nodes' work outside the newsroom, news-workers at *ETtoday.com* have to cover most of their work independently. For instance, they might have to write stories and take pictures for the news events they cover. To a certain degree, Individualization and standardization make journalists less dependent on the newsroom assistance and also enable the network to operate more flexibly.

Secondly, the network model also restructures the power relationship in the newsroom. At *ETtoday.com*, it is not only the production practices that have been organized within a network model, but also the newsroom structure has been re-organized to become a flatter one as well. In Chapter 2, I have discussed how the newsroom structure of newspapers and television news usually involves a complex hierarchic role structure and the elaborate division of labour. A similar newsroom structure and division of labour can still be seen in many Taiwanese news media[24]. In some respects, the complex hierarchic role structure in the newsroom sets up a complexity process of gate-keeping which functions at the same time as a cross-check mechanism for news information. Theoretically, it is the way that the newsroom prevents personal bias in the process of news production. Differing from the traditional newsroom structure in Taiwan, *ETtoday.com* adopts a relatively flatter structure in order to enable better time-management and work efficiency in news production. In my

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24 According to my personal experience of the news media in Taiwan, many medium-size news media similar to *ETtoday.com* in Taiwan still employ an elaborate division of labour. For example, news covering and editing works are separated, and multiple gate-keeping and negotiated processes are still necessary in most news media in Taiwan.

observations, I found that the multiple gate-keeping processes which cross-check news information have nearly disappeared at *ETtoday.com*. Tin-Tin Chen, the journalist specialising in political news, told me that her reports are usually checked by one editor only, and sometimes her reports have no-double check at all, before being uploaded to the website (Chen Tin-Tin, online news journalist, female, 27 years old, 11/08/2005).

The flatter newsroom structure in *ETtoday.com* obviously aims to meet the requirements of immediacy and constant updates. It means that news reports can be generated as soon as possible by reducing certain procedures in the newsroom, and the two strategies, individualization and standardization, which I have discussed earlier in this chapter, are also employed in association with the flatter newsroom structure.

To a certain extent, the network model and flatter newsroom structure seem to change the role hierarchy and power relations in news media. In a conventional news medium, the newsroom seems to have more power and a higher priority in making final decisions about the news content. In other words, the 'central newsroom' plays a role as the final gate-keeper with ultimate control over news flows. Some studies have suggested that at least 80% of all the information that flows into the newsroom gets discarded instantly (see Deuze, 2008). Unconventionally, at *ETtoday.com*, the central newsroom largely reduces its control over the process of news selection.

As I have mentioned, the complex role hierarchical structure inside the newsroom has been eliminated in order to increase the efficiency of news production, while the journalists' production practices outside the newsroom have been given more 'free space'. All the production-related information is revealed on the interface to which every news-worker in *ETtoday.com* can access. This is quite different from other news media in Taiwan. According to some news-workers at *ETtoday.com*, they found that most news media in Taiwan now also use different kinds of web-based interface,

software, and the Internet to help their work. However, the software seems to be embedded in traditional newsroom hierarchies. For example, journalists do not have the right to see the articles other colleagues write and they do not know whether their stories will be published or discarded in advance, because these are rights held by the news-workers in the newsroom.

Chen (Tin-Tin) told me that, compared to other news media, working for *ETtoday.com* means more 'autonomy' to decide what they want to write without too much intervention because online news is published in an enormous 'virtual space' and there is no time for online news to go through a complex news-filtering process given the requirements of immediacy and constant updates. As Chen (Tin-Tin) said that,

Our reports are not checked by many people as other news media do.
Sometimes what we write might not have any editing work and is uploaded
to the website directly. (Chen Tin-Tin, an online news journalist, female, 27
years old, 11/08/2005)

The network of *ETtoday.com* is thus a decentralized one. This seems to be a common feature of network systems in the information age (Castells, 2000b). The online newsroom and the journalists who work outside with their laptops share almost an equal status in accessing all the information and doing almost the same work when necessary. This decentralized network enables *ETtoday.com* to report news productively without many interventions caused by a vertical hierarchical structure in the newsroom, and also allows the news-workers to do their work more efficiently.

Timelessness culture in production practices of online journalism

In my earlier discussions in this chapter, I described the production practices at

ETtoday.com. Certain important dimensions of online news production practices have been addressed, including time-related policy, restructuring of the work spaces (e.g. the newsroom and the network model), technology-in-use (e.g. the interface), and news flow in the online news websites and the newsroom. These dimensions highlight certain important features of online news culture, which will be discussed in detail in the following sections. Firstly, I will begin with time-related policies.

For online journalism, time seems to be the most important news value. Online news production usually emphasizes immediacy and prompt, constant updates. As Robert Kautsky & Andreas Widholm (2008:87) indicate, 'one of the unique characteristics of online news is its relation to time and especially to its regime of immediacy'. This comes as no surprise because many online news studies have shown a similar outcome. In a German survey (Quandt et al., 2003), 97% of online news journalists stress that quick updates are the most important feature of a successful news website; a study of Flemish online journalists suggests that 90% of respondents think that disseminating information quickly is the crucial element of online media (Paulussen, 2004). At *ETtoday.com*, as I have demonstrated, immediacy and constant updates are two major time-related news values. Domingo (2006:339) calls the two time-related principles 'the immediacy utopia' and the 'always-updated news paradigm for online journalism'. The two time-related principles are also emphasized and embedded in the news-workers' everyday production practices at *ETtoday.com*. The case of the president's unexpected speech that I described earlier is an example of how online news-workers adjust their routine production processes in order to publish the news on their website as quickly as possible. In other words, to fulfil the promise of immediacy and constant updates in the online news environment is a practice.

However, certain immediate and constantly updated reports are obviously produced

by special practices. For example, at *ETtoday.com,* journalists often tend to 'make' news reports look like real-time reports. Tzao, another journalist from the economic sector, described how she covers some news reports to fit the requirement of immediacy and constant updating principles of online journalism. For example, she indicated that:

Our boss expects us [journalists] to provide news anytime, anywhere as soon as we can, so I do my best to provide news immediately when it occurs. During the daytime, only one report is not enough...so I usually separate one news report into several short messages or different forms of reports. For example, last time I wrote some news about the latest release of the GDP (gross domestic product) growth rate. It was the kind of news which could be scheduled in advance. So I first wrote a short message by using the style of 'forecast news' to predict the news before the information was actually released. When the information was officially announced, I wrote another short message with some important updated data, in the style of breaking news, because I wanted our readers to see the news as quickly as possible. After doing this, I had plenty of time to write the whole story. (Tzao, an online news journalist, female, 36 years old, 10/07/2005)

Tzao's description of how she covered the GDP news implies that the illusions of immediacy or constant updates are sometimes made by news-workers intentionally. Journalists from *ETtoday.com* use different kinds of formats (e.g. breaking news, forecast news, or hot news) to remind its readers and to emphasize the value of time in news reports.

The timing of updating headline news on the front page of *ETtoday.com* provides

another example to help understand my point. At *ETtoday.com*, there are no strict rules about the frequency of shifting news reports; the only requirement is to upload news to the website as soon as possible, especially when other news websites have already posted it. During the period of my observations in the newsroom, I noticed that the chief director of news coverage often said, 'UDN already have that news, why do not we have it?', or, 'Can someone write a short paragraph and change the headline right now?' Sometimes, a news update is arranged on purpose. For example, the front page editor, Tan, said that, in principle, he has to update the headline news every hour and this can make the news website look 'informative'.

Sometimes news reports with the same issues are published at different times in order to give readers the impression that ETtoday.com is following the latest developments of a news event. For example, one day when I was in the newsroom, Tan used a speech given by Ma Ying-Jeou25, the then KMT leader, as the headline news. The speech addressed the KMT's future position about the relationship between Taiwan and China (PRC). Tan asked other journalists to cover the official reactions toward Ma's speech, from both the Taiwanese and PRC governments, soon after they knew the content of the speech. However, Tan did not upload the related news to the website immediately, but held the official responses of both sides as the headline news for the following two hours. On the one hand, this strategy made the news look like a series of events, 'the Taiwanese political party threw a political ball, and later China caught it'; on the other hand, it was also a practice to demonstrate that the website was closely following the development of the issue and updating the news constantly.

The emphasis on news time (immediacy and constant updates) in online journalism has made *ETtoday.com* embrace a different rhythm of production practices from

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25 Ma Ying-Jeou later won the presidential election and became the president of Taiwan in 2008.

conventional news media, especially when comparing with newspapers. In online journalism, news time seems to become a 'timeless time'. The term 'deadline' used to be familiar to news-workers: they finished their work by this time-frame and any news after the deadline was useless. For online journalism, there is no clear deadline, unlike newspapers or television news. Immediacy and constant updates mean that news-workers do not have a final deadline everyday; instead, anytime can be the deadline. That is why, for online journalism, production time has now become a 'timeless time'.

This culture of timelessness in online journalism, as a result, blurs the working circle and breaks down the rhythmicity of production practices. My observations have shown that most news-workers at *ETtoday.com* have to keep writing and updating new information for the website caused by this timelessness culture. Hu told me that, on average, she has to write about ten news stories everyday, and her record was nearly fifteen stories in one day. When I shadowed the work situations of her and Chu, I noticed that they seldom had time to stop or ponder their news reports. One day when I called Hu around midnight, she told me that she had just finished a story because there was an unexpected news release and she had had to write the report immediately.

Production practices as the mobile electronic terminal

Besides the timelessness characteristics, another feature of production practices in *ETtoday.com* relates to space. At *ETtoday.com*, as my earlier analysis has suggested, the production practices involve different sorts of spaces, including the newsroom, outside locations where news-workers go to work, and the virtual space (the website) where the news content is presented. My analysis suggests that all these spaces are integrated by the interface and are operated under the network model at *ETtoday.com*.

By observing the practices both inside and outside the newsroom of *ETtoday.com*, I

noticed that a fixed and concrete working space is not necessary for online news production practices. It looks as though communication and media technologies enable the journalists to create a 'mobile working space', combining virtual and concrete spaces, which have changed the meaning of space for news production practices. This change has been discussed by some authors. John Tomlinson (2007) uses the notion 'electronic terminal' to describe the change of relationship between space and human practices in the digital age, which I think is proper to use to understand the change in online journalism also. A terminal in our common perception is normally a space for carrying out various human practices. In general, our concept of terminal, as Tomlinson (2007:103) suggests, 'implies a limit, a boundary, a set of fixed spatial co-ordinates for travel or for communication' (e.g. a railway terminal; the newsroom can also be seen as a terminal for news-workers). Nevertheless, the electronic terminal shifts the original concept of terminal. It is 'portable and individualized', according to Tomlinson (2007:105). This electronic terminal is created by different ranges of communication and media technologies and enables news-workers to work anywhere. As Deuze (2008:15) indicates, 'With wireless internet-enabled laptops, high speed telecommunication networks, and other portable communication devices', many news workers today can work almost anywhere.

In the case of *ETtoday.com*, these electronic terminals in online news are constituted by different news production related practices, including the different ranges of communication and media technology uses and a re-assignment of news work. My analysis has shown that all the related news production practices are integrated into the working interface. It is an individualized and standardized interface which allows news-workers of *ETtoday.com* to finish all the production work independently; and it is also a portable interface because users only have to type the web address or URL on any

Internet-connected computer and log on to the web page of the interface with personal passwords, and then they can start to do their work.

I can use the case of Hu, the journalist I shadowed and whose daily work outside the newsroom I observed, to explain how the electronic terminal works. On the day (05/07/2005) I accompanied Hu, she participated in a news conference, which was about a new product announced by a credit card company and which was held in a hotel conference room. I noticed that Hu brought her laptop to the conference room from the central bank, the place she usually works. While the news conference was still in progress, Hu started to write the story. She finished in a very short time, even before the conference was finished. She also used her digital camera to take photos. The hotel provided a cable that enabled her to access the Internet. Hu told me that if an Internet facility is not available on the spot, she uses her mobile phone to connect to the wireless Net to send her articles to the newsroom. Hu told me that she had covered this type of news many times, so she knew exactly the key point of this event and thus did not have to wait till the conference finished. Later she connected to the Internet provided by the hotel, her individualised working interface enabling her to work anywhere.

The case of *ETtoday.com* implies that concrete locations or terminals might not be necessary for online news production. More and more production practices are now completed via virtual spaces or software (e.g. the interface used at *ETtoday.com*). Jan Van Dijk (1996/2006:109) suggests that some traditional procedures are 'formalized by programming them in software'. As a result, online news production practices are not only embracing the practice of timeless time, but also the practice of placeless place. As I have stated, in the *ETtoday.com* network, every journalist can be seen as a node, working independently. With the support of communication and media technologies, all

nodes in the network work as mobile electronic terminals. The interface provides the software they need and other technological objects, such as laptops and mobile phones, which are associated with their production practices.

News flows in the online news environment

The last dimension of online news culture that I would like to discuss is news flows in the online news environment. 'Flow' is a metaphor used in many media and journalistic studies. There are diverse viewpoints about the meaning of flows[26]. Early studies of news flows in the newsroom focus on the stream and distribution of news information (Tunstall, 1971; White, 1950). Analysis of flow in these studies has concentrated on the news selecting process in news media (Tunstall, 1971), particularly in the newsroom. Certain authors have suggested that news information, before it is received by consumers, needs to pass the gate-keepers[27] (Shoemaker, 1991; White, 1950). In other words, news flows have to pass through at least one gate before they are presented in news media.

Williams' (1974) discussion of flows in his book, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form,* analyses news flows from a different angle. Williams' analysis focuses primarily on the sequence of broadcasting media content. For him, the idea of flows seems quite an apt metaphor for the general process of broadcasting media, especially television. 'Flow' in Williams' perception is thus 'a steady outpouring of imagines and sounds from channels and stations into homes and the minds of viewers' (Corner, 1999:60). Williams argues that a flow in televised content is a 'planned flow'. He stresses that this planned flow has become characteristic of broadcasting media and influences programme order.

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[26] The meaning of flow exceeds what I introduce in this chapter. Another meaning of flow will be introduced in Chapter 6. However, for analytical purposes, I leave it to be discussed later.

[27] See discussion in Chapter 2.

For Williams, a flow is not random but deliberate and planned in advance. As he indicates, 'a programme of discrete unit with particular insertions' is a planned flow (Williams, 1974:90), and this planned flow is composed of a sequence of the real flow presented in news media. The purpose is to make the programmes sequence a 'packaging of items into a viewable whole' (Corner, 1999:64). It seems that, in Williams's account, a flow is part of the pathology of television, a feature of general programme organisation rooted in the commercial condition of production. For example, TV programmes, as is apparent on most of the commercial channels, are divided up to meet the demands of commercial breaks, a strong opening and trailers for forthcoming programmes inserted within the programme sequence are required for the designed flow to keep viewers watching. Therefore, a flow in Williams' analysis is 'the process of organizing a pattern of programmes, each one leading on to the next; each one being a tempter for the audience to stay tuned to a particular channel' (Watson & Hill, 2000:251).

The examination of news flows in the online news environment is useful to understand the production practices and culture of online journalism. Kautisky & Widholm (2008) used a methodology called Regular Interval Content Capture (RICC) to study the news flows on the CNN website for the U.S. 'Crucial Tuesday' primary elections in March 2008. They argue that 'the most remarkable aspects of online versus print journalism are the new possibilities for updating, changing and reshaping news that online publication has brought' (Kautsky & Widholm, 2008:82). From this point of view, the content of online journalism is dynamic. Domingo (2006:345) indicates that 'news stories on websites are usually considered open-ended pieces that could be edited several times a day or even through different days'. Therefore, news flows indicate another dimension of the production culture of online journalism.

From my study of *ETtoday.com*, I argue that in the online news environment, news flows are related to time, space and the use of technologies. More importantly, I argue that news flows in online journalism do not usually follow their natural (or actual) sequence, but are influenced by news-workers' practices, and vice versa.

Firstly, at *ETtoday.com*, the emphasis on immediacy and constant updates and the reduction of the newsroom role hierarchy have influenced the control and selection process of news flows. As I have just argued, at *ETtoday.com*, the production practices are conducted under the umbrella of immediacy and constant updates policies, a flatter newsroom hierarchy, and a network working model. News flows, in this context, go through 'a less interfered environment' at *ETtoday.com*. As Chen (Tin-Tin), the journalist from the political sector, indicated:

I think, in general, our newsroom does not intervene in our writing strongly, because they do not have the time and sufficient workforce to do what other news media do, such as multiple–checking of news or spending a lot of time discussing the news angle. (Chen Tin-Tin, an online news journalist, female, 27 years old, 11/08/2005)

Secondly, news flows in *ETtoday.com* involve an intentionally-arranged sequence as Williams has suggested. That is to say, news updates in *ETtoday.com* do not stick to the natural order of chronological time in which social events occur, but are arranged according to the intervals set up by the news-workers' production practices depending on a given situation. These planned news flows are essential because, for online news, to maintain sufficient news flows every day is a difficult task, since newsworthy events may not occur every hour. Most online news websites in Taiwan promise that whenever

their readers surf the websites they can read abundant information and the latest news. This promise seems to become a source of pressure for online news-workers. Consequently, an online news website needs to plan news flows carefully. In a previous example, I described how the front page editor, Tan, handled the KMT leader's speech and related reports to present a special sequence of news flow which enabled him to have sufficient headline news to update every hour.

Figure 4.9 is an entire page of one day's news on the website of *ETtoday.com*. The timing of the uploading every news report is marked at the end of every news entry on this page, and shows that there is a new story posted on the website nearly every 10-15 minutes.

As can be seen, from 17:29 to 19:10 of the news uploading time on the page, the interval between each news report is even shorter. It seems to me that *ETtoday.com* tries to create a non-stop flow of news on their website, because some news entries on the page are in fact covering the same or similar issues, but they are separated into different news reports and uploaded at different time intervals. By carefully planning the flows of news, the website proclaims that it is following the latest progress of news and keeps updating it.

The purpose of these planned news flows is to try to make readers stay longer on the news website. Kautsky & Widholm's (2008:92) study of the news flows on the CNN website draws a similar conclusion. As they indicate, to segment news into different breaking news stories is to try to exhort online news readers, like television news, to 'stay tuned' as 'there is always more to come' (Kautsky & Widholm, 2008:92).

Figure 4.9 An overview of one day's news on *ETtoday.com*

So how do journalists adapt their practices in response to the demands of constant and abundant news flows? Journalists at *ETtoday.com* adopt several strategies to provide sufficient news flows. One is to report forthcoming (or expected) events before they actually happen. Chen (Tin-Tin) described how she covered the parliamentary news. One important part of her work is the resolution of bills in parliamentary meetings. Every morning, she writes 'forecast news' about drafts of bills that are scheduled to be discussed that day so as to 'let readers know what is going to happen' and 'how important these bills are'. Then, every time a bill is passed, rejected or

under-way, She writes another breaking news report to describe the latest development of each bill.

Thirdly, these planned flows are also arranged so as to coordinate with the everyday schedule of online news readers. For example, every morning, according to the front page editor, Tan, *ETtoday.com* prefers to re-post some headlines that were published the day before, because these news reports are usually the major content of Taiwan's newspapers every morning. As Tan indicates:

Although these reports were published yesterday, we still select some important news items and re-post them every morning. It is the time that most people arrive at their offices and start to surf the Internet. We found that at this period we usually get busy 'web traffic'. I think some readers might have changed their habits from reading morning newspapers to surfing online news in the office. (Tan, online news editor, male, 42 years old, 16/02/2006)

The case above illustrates the relationship between news flows, online news production and consumption practices. News flows, as I have argued, are re-arranged on the website to fit online news readers' reading habits. A practice related to this is that *ETtoday.com* usually asks their journalists to upload more news reports at certain times, such as lunchtime. The lunch break is important for online news because many people use their free time to read online news. News reports do not often have to update into the night or during holidays because, according to web traffic statistics, there are not many people surfing *ETtoday.com*.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have used *ETtoday.com* as a case study to show the production practices of online journalism. My purpose is to investigate online news culture in Taiwan. Through my analysis, we have seen that time, space, news flows and the use of

technologies are significant dimensions to help us understand the production practices in mainstream online news.

My study of the production practices in the online newsroom at *ETtoday.com* suggests that production practices consist of various practices organised around the process of online news production. Part of online news culture, as I have argued, is thus created though these different practices in the online newsroom. One of the common practices which creates online news culture is the re-invention of some aspects which existed in conventional journalism. My analysis has shown that some online news culture, such as immediacy or the network working model, were in fact stressed or adopted by conventional news media. Nevertheless, these dimensions in online journalism are performed through various practices according to the context of the online news environment and create a different news culture.

The time-related practices seem to be an important aspect for online news culture. My case study indicates that two time-related practices - immediacy and constant update - are emphasized in mainstream online journalism in its production practices. These seem to be the common values for online journalism, and can be seen not only in Taiwan but also in studies of online news in other countries (Domingo, 2006). My analysis of *ETtoday.com* suggests that, in order to fulfil the demands for immediacy and constant updates, the everyday working schedule and rhythmicity in online journalism are blurred and involve a timelessness culture. There are no clear deadlines for production practices and online news-workers may have to write reports anytime, anywhere.

Space is another important aspect in relation to production practice in online news reporting. My analysis of *ETtoday.com* suggests that the structure of the online newsroom has been reorganised to form a flatter structure by reducing certain role

hierarchies, thus enabling the online news product to be produced and disseminated as quickly as possible. Besides, it has also been shown that all the production practices are structured under a network system with the coordination of the web-based interface. For online news media, the integrating function of digitizing technologies enables them to integrate all the production practices in different news media. Online news websites seem to benefit from this media convergence. The adoption of communication and media technologies also makes production practices in the online news environment become individualised and standardized and has caused online news-workers to have heavier workloads.

The different practices of time and space in online journalism have influenced news flows. My case study suggests that the arrangement of news flows in online news websites is also a kind of practice which involves complicated considerations from news-workers. The reduction of the vertical level of the newsroom seems, consequently, to have loosened the control and gate-keeping process of news flows in the online news environment; nevertheless my analysis of *ETtoday.com* shows that news flows sometimes involve a deliberate arrangement in order to keep readers tuned to the online news website.

There are still questions regarding the production practices of online journalism and these need more analysis. One important question is the relationship between online news producers and consumers. In the cultural circuit model, the two are fundamental processes which have a significant relationship with each other, as well as with other processes. In the next chapter, I shall again use *ETtoday.com* as the case study to explore the producer/consumer relationship and its connection to production practices.

Ch5 Sorting and shaping news in online journalism: How do market logic, news professionalism and technology-in-use influence online news-making practices?

In this chapter, I examine how social event is represented in online journalism through its production practices. Representation here refers to the use of languages, images or signs to describe or depict social events meaningfully; or to represent the world meaningfully to other people (du Gay et al., 1997). Journalism, as many studies have shown (see Chapter 2), involves the work of representation. News that we read, watch or listen to every day is produced through a representing process. As Hall et al. (1978:249) indicate, 'news is the end-product of a complex process which begins with a system of sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories'. Hall's remark here suggests a key aspect of news representation and production practices of journalism, which is that social events are not randomly selected to be presented on news media: it is through news-workers' practices that some parts of social events are included and some are excluded; some are made explicit or left implicit; some are used in the foreground and some in the background in everyday news reports (Fairclough, 1995).

For journalism studies, representation is a complex and extensive research subject, but my concern in this chapter is modest. My interest in this chapter concerns two aspects which I think are significant to our examination of the process of representation in the online news environment. Firstly, I examine the practices of some new digital forms created as a result of the invention of digital technology and how these digital forms influence news representation of online journalism. Some authors have argued that these digital forms enable online news-workers to use different narrative styles or

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ways of storytelling to represent social events. For example, multimedia can be used to describe news with a combination of text, video, and audio. This aspect does not only relate to representation itself, but also relates to the technology-in-use (practice) in the online news environment.

Secondly, I am also concerned with how online news-workers determine the social events and angles they report in online news media. As I have argued in Chapter 4, online journalism has gradually established its own 'news culture', thus it is important to ask the question: does the online news culture also create a different framework to present/represent social events? One key aspect which is also related to the use of technology is, as some authors have claimed, that online media have changed the traditional producer/consumer relationship (Poster, 2001; Jenkins, 2002). This change, to a certain extent, has also influenced online news-workers' production practices and how news is represented in the online news environment. In this chapter, I will use one important technological mechanism - which resembles a 'consumer tracking mechanism' - which automatically calculates online news readers' reading records, for my analysis. The key point here is that such technology provides a new way for online news producers to make sense of their readerships, which simultaneously influence the determination of what social event is selected to be presented, as well as how they are represented. I will introduce this consumer tracking mechanism later in the discussion. Therefore, regarding my research concerns, this chapter is not only about news representation; it also relates to production, consumption, and the technology-in-use in the online news environment.

Production practices here are still the core aspect to investigate online news representation. In contemporary society, news media is one of the influential institutions of representing the social world; and news-workers are at the centre of news

media - who conduct the works of representing social events. They are 'mediators' who mediate the social world in journalism via their everyday practices. As emphasized, news-workers' mediating works do not direct 'translate' social events in their reports but through subjective selections - so their actions also involve meaning circulation (Silverstone, 1999). The principles of how news-workers select what issues and angles to represent have been discussed in many journalism studies. The explorations of news values and news professionalism are studies of this kind (see Chapter 2). In my later analysis, I will try to analyse how online news-workers determine their news representation actions, guided by what principles, values, or framework, and how these relate to the old principles, values and frameworks.

To answer this question, in this chapter I use two logics of journalism – the market logic and the logic of news professionalism – for my analysis. The two logics represent a long-standing argument over the characteristics of journalism, which, in my view, also influences the production practices and representation functions in online journalism. The former logic tends to identify journalism as a public good; suggesting that the rules of journalism are the rules of public services (Allan, 2004; McManus, 1994). Under this logic, news media plays a decisive role in establishing a discursive space for public debates on issues related to the publics' interests (Allan, 2004). The task of news-workers is thus to report issues related to the public interest while following their professional norms. Therefore, although news media in contemporary society might inevitably be commercial organisations, 'a key tenet of journalistic professionalism is that there should be a clear line between the commercial and the journalistic part of such organization' (Hesmondhalgh, 2006:53). Contrary to news professionalism, the market logic emphasizes that journalism is essentially a commodity to be bought and sold on the market, so copy sales, audience rating, and profit accumulation are the priorities for

media owners and advertisers.

By using the two logics to examine the production and representation functions of online journalism, I will point out that in my case, the relationship between production practices, news representation, and the technology-in-use in online journalism is embedded in the two logics of journalism. I argue that technologies do not only provide digital forms for online journalism; they are also used as a means of control and to re-structure the different journalistic markets - which constitute a new way of media centralization, and constrains news-workers' production practices and news representing function. However, in my research case, I found that the logic of news professionalism still influences online news-workers' practices. In order to cope with the market pressure, certain 'tactical practices' are adopted by online news-workers to reconcile some possible tensions, conflicts and pressures.

Based on the above discussion, this chapter is structured with three inter-related themes. Firstly, I discuss how a consumer tracking mechanism which calculates the click-through number (CTN) is used in online journalism; and influences the work of news-making. Secondly, I focus on how certain digital forms are used in the representing functions of online journalism. These digital forms are varied and can hardly be discussed in sufficient detail in one chapter. I choose two significant digital forms – hypertext and convergence – for my analysis in this chapter. Thirdly, I will discuss how some news professional norms act in news-workers' everyday practices; and their relation to news representation. My research case is the web-only news website – *ETtoday.com*, and the empirical data in this chapter derives from my observations and interviews with the news-workers at *ETtoday.com*.

Market journalism and news professionalism

News professionalism and the market logic of journalism represent two long-term

viewpoints of the characteristics of contemporary journalism. The 'Market', in our common understanding, refers to the marketplace where people come to buy and sell goods and services. Some news-workers apparently dislike to be linked to the market and commercialisation. However, from a historical perspective, since the emergence of the popular press in 1830s, most news organisations have been related to commercial business. Thus news has long since been a commodity which was bought and sold on the market. John H. McManus (1994) in his book *Market-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware* proposes a useful framework for us to analysis the market logic of journalism, which divides the journalistic market into four dimensions: media owners; advertisers; consumers; news sources. For McManus, the market logic of journalism is built up on a mutual-relationship of the four dimensions with the news department.

The owners (investors) of news media, in market-driven journalism, contribute major capital to news departments and set general operating conditions, which in the meantime expect economic profits in return. Advertisers, on the other hand, pay the media department for attracting the public's attention. Advertisers value two aspects of news: the scale of readership and the credibility of news media. The assumptions here are that the larger the audience scale is, the greater the advertising effects are; and the more credibility the news media has the more believable the advertisements could be. The major role of consumers in market-driven journalism is that they pay money and give up their time to buy, read and watch news information - which the news department produces and sells to them. However, in modern journalism, the major profit of news media usually does not come from consumers' direct purchase of news product. The main profit of news organisations today comes from advertising; and advertisers spend their money on news media in order for their product information to be seen by the media audience. From this perspective, consumers in market-driven journalism can be

seen as trade (or have traded) their attention for information. The last market for journalism is the news source market. The sources market is more abstract than the former three dimensions. Sources (e.g. people or organisations) sometime trade with news departments for public appearance - particularly those 'who must win the elections or who depend on the public to buy their company's product' (McManus, 1994:30). Sometimes news sources are directly involved in the exchange of cash. Those who sell their personal stories to news department are examples of this.

The basic assumption of the market logic of journalism is that, ideally, a free market can protect democracy because 'it is, by nature, a democratic mechanism based on free choices by buyers and sellers operating as they – rather than professional elite of journalists – see it' (McManus, 1994:3). Therefore, just as the free market supposedly provides consumers with better goods; market-driven journalism, if working properly, brings audiences news that corresponds to their needs and wants. This seems to be the ideal situation for market-driven journalism. In reality, the free market appears to lead to excessive competition, and some news media gradually increase the space devoted to sensational news in order to attract advertising revenue (news media in Taiwan is an example of this, see discussion in Chapter 3).

Contrary to market journalism, news professionalism emphasizes the public service role of news media. It argues that journalism should be 'as a rigorous watchdog and present a wide range of informed positions on the important issues' (McChesney, 2003:299). In news-workers' everyday practices, these professional norms are necessary for journalists' work of 'interposing some forms of expertness between the private citizen and the vast environment in which they are entangled' (Lippmann, 1950:238). Based on news professionalism, the public should be treated as citizens, not as consumers. Journalists should use their profession to tell their audiences (citizens)

what is important and what they ought to know. Their professional roles are to investigate the important issues, provide analysis, uncover the concealed secrets behind government claims, and develop cultural intellectual interests (Brill, 2001).

Two prevalent viewpoints are often mentioned when discussing the relationship between the market logic and news professionalism in contemporary journalism. The first one sees market journalism and commercialisation as an invasive force in a journalist's profession (Bourdieu, 1996, 2005; McChesney, 2003). Robert McChesney (2003) analyses contemporary American journalism and indicates that commercial penetration of professional journalism assumes two direct forms in journalistic products: the first one is that 'commercial interests directly penetrate the news', and the second one is that 'journalists use their privileges to report favourably on their owner's commercial ventures or investments' (McChesney, 2003:310-311).

The second viewpoint regards news professionalism as a strategy for combating the commercialisation of journalism (McManus, 1994; Soloski, 1989, see also Chapter 2). Journalism education, professional groups, and compliance with newsroom ethical standards are methods of constructing news professionalism, which has been seen as important in efforts to improve the quality of journalism (McManus, 1994). The question here is not simple. News professionalism and the commercialisation of journalism in practice are not diametrically opposite concepts. In fact, news professionalism - which did not emerge until 20th century - is originally a product of the consideration of economic profit (Schudson, 2001). For example, objectivity was employed in journalism with the purpose of selling more copies, because with a politically neutral, non-partisan, even 'objective' news product, media owners could sell 'their neutral monopoly newspaper to everyone' (McChesney, 2003:302). Additionally, nowadays more and more news is produced by commercial organisations

in which their companies' shares are sold in stock market to maximise the return on their investments. At the same time, news-workers are mostly the employees of the news organisations. They are paid by media owners rather than those who consume their services. Thus, they are not as free to follow the professional norms as those working in other professions, such as doctors or teachers.

Selecting and representing news in the online news environment

The discussion of the market logic of journalism and news professionalism in the previous section are significant for my later analysis. Starting from this section, I will analyse how social events are represented in the online news environment through news-workers' production practices. My analysis will first use a news report from *ETtoday.com* to see how a car promotion event is represented with a human interest angle and framed by a superstitious angle, as well.

On 22 November 2005, one of the leading stories on *ETtoday.com* concerned a famous Taiwanese entrepreneur, Kai-Tai Yan, who had become a father for the first time. When I was conducting my field work in Taiwan, the front page editor, Tan, mentioned this report and told me how they dealt with the news. The main report concerned an entrepreneur talking about his newborn baby. The entrepreneur was over forty years old and there were some unconfirmed rumours that his wife had been undergoing artificial insemination treatment for several years. That day, it was the entrepreneur's first time speaking in public about his newborn daughter. The news story (see Figure 5.1) reported that the 'novice father' said he had anticipated for having a baby for eight years, and he, for a time in his speech, 'burst into happy tears'. The report was used as the evening headline on the front page. Related reports were put below the main news with hypertext. One of the hypertexts was a report related to the headline; the others were linked to different news items. The first hypertext was about 'tips on having a baby at

forty years of age'. The content of this hypertext was several fortune-tellers teaching readers 'how to get pregnant at the age of 40'

Figure 5.1 The report and the layout design of the entrepreneur and his newborn baby

In fact, on that day, the journalist who reported this news was to attend a news conference that aimed to promote a new car, but the entrepreneur - who was also the president of the car company - mentioned his newborn baby in his open remark, and then the message became the main focus of the news. The front page editor of *ETtoday.com*, Tan, said:

We got the message first that the news was about the car company launching a new car, but then the journalist decided to write another news story with this angle [a middle-aged father and his first baby]. After working in journalism for a long time, I know other news media, and our 'Net-readers' would also prefer this angle, so I used this news as a headline

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and we also accompanied it with background news and the 'fortune-telling articles'. (Tan, an online news editor, male, 42 years old, 16/02/2006)

Later, I interviewed Tan, asking him about the 'Net-readers' he mentioned earlier. He expressed that he had been 'observing' the preferences of these Net-readers for quite a long time. If some news issues are what the Net-readers like to read, usually they will add some 'special emphasis' (for example, a headline, a picture, more related news or follow-up news) because these news stories can get a high 'click-through number' (CTN) for their website.

The case of the entrepreneur and his newborn baby shows some significant features of how some angles of a common commercial story are selected to be represented in online journalism, and how online news-workers 'frame' a news story using some new digital forms. One vital point which determines the new car promotion ceremony to be represented as a story of a 'middle-age father and his newborn baby' rather than a 'new car' (in fact, the new car information was still reported in this case, but only with a short message) articulates to the use of technology and the knowledge of online news readers (Net-readers) in online news-worker's mind. According to Tan, CTN is the device that helps him ascertain what online news readers prefer to read. It is usually known as a 'web server log-file technology', which automatically recodes the information of online news readers' reading behaviour. In other words, the device calculates online news readers' click-through (impression) times and is expressed by number or percentage.

At first, CTN in online media was adopted to measure the success of online advertising. By checking the CTN data, advertisers know how many times their advertising banners on websites are hit or viewed by Internet users, which allows them to evaluate the effect of advertisements. In *ETtoday.com*, the CTN data is used to

calculate how many times a news report or online advertising banner is read by readers. Obviously, in the entrepreneur's report, CTN is an important reference for news-workers in their decision to turn the car promotion news into a human interest story. Tan told me that he knew this kind of news would always get a high CTN.

Another significant aspect in this report is the use of hypertext. Hypertext is used here to link to the further information associated with the main story. This is similar to 'package-news' that we often read or watch on other news media; where one news story is represented with a pack of related issues. For online journalism, package-news is used with different forms and styles on the website - such as hypertexts to link to different news reports, or multi-media content. In the case I used here, the front-page editor used several hypertexts attached following the main report. The first hypertext was a report related to the main story, in which several fortune-tellers were asked to provide tips to teach middle-age people the secrets of having a baby like the entrepreneur. The second hypertext was also a related report which gave readers more background about the entrepreneur and his family. Other hypertexts were unrelated to the main story. One of the interesting hypertexts here is the fortune-telling content. In Taiwan, fortune-telling content is common in the media. From the traditional journalistic perspective, fortune-telling can hardly be seen as 'news'. Thus, it is very interesting to ask the questions why and in what context the newsroom made the decision to use the non-journalistic information here as part of the 'package' of the story.

The opening report reveals two main topics I will discuss in the following analysis: the use of CTN in online journalism and the use of hypertext - a kind of new digital form in online journalism. I will start from the use of CTN and its relation to the production practices and representation of online journalism.

CTN and production practices in the online news environment

The opening case addresses the role of CTN in the process of producing and representing news stories in online journalism. CTN, as mentioned, can be treated as an online 'consumer-tracking technology' which enables news websites to capture what has been called the 'direct knowledge of their audiences' (MacGregor, 2007:280). As indicated, the calculation of CTN is based on a record of the web server log-file data. When readers surf on a news website, their movements and clicks are recorded by a web server system. CTN yields an outcome similar to an audience rating but is faster and can be calculated instantly by news producers. It can be treated as a 'non-human' and 'semi-automatic' device which does not require readers' intervention because whether they realise it or not, their activity is logged.

Academic studies have started to notice the relationship between the use of CTN and the production practices in the online news environment (Brill, 2001; MacGregor, 2007). Online news-workers view this technique as a sort of consumer feedback monitoring system or audience measurement technique, which enables them to build up a connection with their consumers. Unlike other consumer research and measurement techniques (e.g. audience ratings or consumer surveys), CTN only provide 'metric data'. Through CTN, news producers can track the geographical regions of readers from where the reports are surfed, when they are viewed and in what numbers (hits). Detailed demographic data is impossible to get through CTN. However, this metric data still has significant meaning to contemporary journalism. As MacGregor (2007:280) indicates that this device (CTN) 'for the first time in journalism history, allows journalists to observe, almost directly, the audiences, as they access website content'.

When I interviewed with the news-workers at *ETtoday.com*, nearly all of them

mentioned the role of the CTN in their everyday practices. The process of disclosing the CTN data in *ETtoday.com* includes many considerations. At first, only staff at management level can access the CTN data. It provides the management with instant information to make editorial policy and understand online news readers' preferences in favour of certain news stories. Besides, it is also used to convince the advertisers to invest in more advertising on *ETtoday.com*. Later, the CTN data was made public to every news-worker at *ETtoday.com* in the name of 'letting the news-workers understand their readers more closely'. Figure 5.2 is one of the pages on the web-based working interface of *ETtoday.com*, which outlines the information of the news-workers' everyday work at *ETtoday.com* including the title of each news report they write and the CTN data of each news story. Journalists and editors at *ETtoday.com* can read the latest CTN data every time when they log onto their personal working spaces on the interface.

My investigation of the use of CTN in *ETtoday.com* focuses in particular on how the data is rooted in news-workers' everyday practices; and gradually becomes one of the variables to consider when making a decision. The construction of the CTN data to become one of the principles of news selection is the result of three different processes. Firstly, the CTN data is linked to the discourse of consumer needs. Secondly, the data is used as a means of evaluating the working performance of the news-workers. Thirdly, the data is also linked to the organisation's economic interests.

In the first process, the CTN data is treated as 'mediation' or a 'bridge' between online news producers and consumers in ETtoday.com. Theoretically, there is no doubt that CTN is yielded by online news readers' reading behaviour – their clicks on news reports and related items, as well as their web page view times.

Figure 5.2 The outline page of the information of reports for one journalist on the interface of ETtoday.com
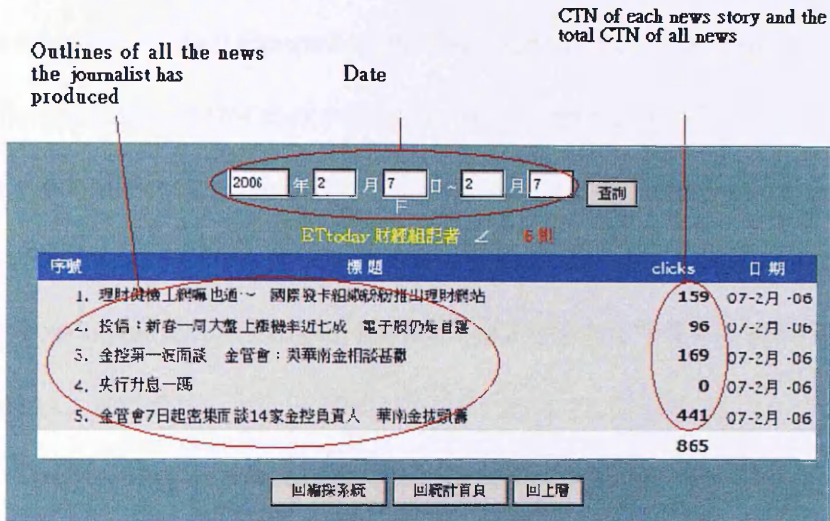
Therefore, a report with a high CTN indicates that it attracts the attention and interest of more readers in reading or clicking on this report. Staff at management level tend to use this data to judge that reports with high CTN are 'good news' because 'news should fit in with your readers' interests and concerns'. This kind of discourse on consumer demands is often mentioned in ETtoday.com. As the Chief Editor, Cai, indicates:

My viewpoint is that readers and the Internet change the character of journalism. In the past, news media used to be 'the boss', they gave readers what they wanted readers to know...but at ETtoday.com, we are different - we always think about readers' interests and needs. (Cai, an online news chief editor, male, 45 years old, 10/02/2006)

CTN is also utilized as the means of evaluating the news-workers' working performance. This seems to be an open secret at ETtoday.com, although the news organization never discloses it publicly. In my interview, the front page editor, Tan, expressed that 'ETtoday.com lets all journalists and editors see the CTN data, not only the data of their own reports but the calculations of all news reports from their colleagues, just so that they will know their performance'. Tzao, the journalist from the economic sector, said in an interview with me: 'I know our company uses CTN and the quantity of reports we write every day to evaluate our working performance. My boss never says it straight, but he does apply this "off the record" policy to us once in a while'.

The working interface plays the role of promulgating the CTN data to assure its effect can be communicated to every news-worker. In Chapter 4, I indicated that the major function of the interface is to assist production practices. However, at the same time, it is appropriated as a 'non-human delegation' of censorship to assure that the newsroom policy works smoothly. This non-human delegation does not need human intervention very often. Once it is established, it records and calculates online news readers' reading behaviour automatically, and transforms this data into numbers to be displayed on the interface immediately. On the surface, enabling the news-workers to access the CTN data is to let them 'get to know their readers better' and also to 'understand their working performance'. However, after the CTN data of all news reports is disclosed, it creates a competitive atmosphere at *ETtoday.com* such that news-workers start to compare their CTN data with the results of others. For example, one of the journalists, Hu, told me that those who cover soft news usually got higher CTN. As a result, journalists covering hard news tended to write more news reports every day, in order to give their boss the impression that they work hard.

The emphasis of CTN in *ETtoday.com* also relates to its economic pressures. Like many online news websites in Taiwan, *ETtoday.com* website is provided free of charge and made virtually no profit for the first five years since its launch. Many rumours have indicated that *ETtoday.com* might close once its parent company refuses to support it anymore. Therefore, for *ETtoday.com*, earning money has become the first priority for the staff at management level. The editor-in-chief, Cai, told me that making profit was essential for maintaining a free online news website, since economic profit guarantees the website's survival. Online advertising is a possible financial resource apart from the support from its parent company. *ETtoday.com* believes that expanding the size of its readership is a vital way to attract advertisers. The CTN data has thus been seen as a benchmark to show the scale of its readership, which is also the key data used to convince advertisers to invest in *ETtoday.com*. My interviews with news-workers revealed that CTN appears to have been widely accepted as part of editorial policy at *ETtoday.com* when it relates to the subsistence of the online news websites. As one of the journalists, Tzao, told me: 'This is the thing you cannot argue with because the company needs more profit to survive and we also want to keep our jobs'.

CTN as the criteria of news selection

Through the linkage of CTN to consumer demand, working performance and the survival of the company ETtoday.com has successfully make audience data to become one of the values in the newsroom. This 'new news value' created by the automatic calculating mechanism is penetrating to the news-workers' everyday practices and seems to have gradually assumed a dominant role in guiding news representation. News-workers at ETtoday.com treat CTN as instant feedback from readers about their

individual news preferences. Yu, the editor of the domestic news page, told me how she makes sense of reader's preferences through CTN:

For a long time, we have found that..., for example, in the entertainment

news, Lin Chi-Lin [a supermodel in Taiwan] always gets high CTN if her

name is shown in a headline [...]. Thus, from CTN we can see how certain

news reports are clicked to be read by readers, [...] we can understand the

preferences of 'Net-readers' from CTN, and we can use this as the principle

for selecting news. (Yu, an online news editor, female, 34 years old,

05/07/2005)

The above quote from the editor implies that through the CTN data, online news-workers accumulate knowledge about online news readers. For them, CTN represents valid and reliable consumer data. This seems to be a general assumption for most audience measurement techniques, which treats them as pure, simple and more objective methods of gaining knowledge of, and understanding media audiences (Ang, 1991).

The following two examples give us a further understanding of the impact of CTN at *ETtoday.com*. Hu, the journalist from the economic sector, once told me how she acknowledges the meaning of CTN to her and her work. She said:

In the online news environment, CTN is a very important 'guide'. Every

news report has its CTN information and both the journalist and our boss

can see this information. [...] If you write a news report with a very boring

angle, then no one will want to read this news, so you have to find the

interesting aspect of the news event. (Hu, an online news journalist, female,

36 years old, 08/07/2005)

Hu described how she re-wrote a boring news story and unexpectedly got a high CTN. Once she had received a press release on the news about the Committee of Fair Trade. She said the press release was in fact very boring, because press releases from government departments were always 'dry and in the same style'. However, this press release was about a fraudulent advertisement that had received 12 serial fines by the Committee, so Hu used a more exaggerated descriptive phase, 'do not revise till death'[28]. According to Hu, it is probably because of the word 'death' she used in the title and the article, the news attracted thousands of clicks in a very short time, and even got into the top ten news items for that day. Hu said to me excitedly: 'My colleagues were astonished because news from the Committee had never gotten into the top ten before'.

Another example is from the experience of Tzao, another journalist from the economic sector. She told me about a news story that she, in her professional judgment, thought was not important at first, so she had just written a short message just in case she 'missed out on the news'. However, when the message was posted on *ETtoday.com*, she found that the news got a very high CTN, and then she got the impression that the issue was important from the readers' perspective. So, the next time she covered the same issue, she included more detail in her piece.

The two cases above both show the effect of CTN on online news production practices and news representation. In Hu's case, the same news story written with a different reporting angle produces a very different outcome in terms of CTN. A boring

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[28] This is the four-word phrase in Chinese, which means a person is 'set in his ways and is hard to change'. It is not a proper description for this news story, but it might be that the journalist wants to create some dramatic effect, so she uses this phrase.

news or news worthless story (according to their professional judgments) can also become popular in the online news environment, if online journalists discover that some angles of the story attract the reader's attention to click on their reports. Under these circumstances, some journalists at *ETtoday.com* admitted that they sometimes use exaggerated descriptions and headline to attract the reader's attention, because their task was to provoke readers to click on their news reports. In the latter case, we have seen that a story that was news worthless from a professional perspective could get high CTN and could change the journalists' judgment of the news. The possible outcome is that the high CTN news stories will be valued by online journalists, and in the meantime those stories or issues unable to attract the reader's interest will be discarded or excluded when CTN is taken into account.

CTN also has some instant consequences for production practices in online journalism. Unlike other news media, such as newspaper and television news, which need a complicated process and various workers to create their final product, the presentation of online journalism can be changed almost immediately with very few requirements regarding to the instruments or workforce. As such, online media can respond to the outcome of CTN more quickly than other news media. For instance, if *ETtoday.com* discovers that certain news reports get high CTN, the website asks its journalists to write more news on the same issue, in order to attract more online news readers. Alternatively, journalists may sense the news is popular and write more related reports. Conversely, if some news is defined as 'important news' according to the news-workers' judgment from the perspective of conventional news values, but is found later to be 'uninteresting' to the readers, *ETtoday.com* can withdraw it and replace it with another popular story. As Yu, the journalist from the domestic news page, said to me:

If the news is important, I will re-arrange its place on the website.

Generally speaking, news reports related to 'sex' or 'crime' are popular

and will put in a more significant place. This is based on the CTN. (Yu, an

online news editor, female, 34 years old, 05/07/2005)

Sometimes, the job of changing news can also be done by an automatic system. One of the columns on the website of *ETtoday.com* is the 'top news' column (see Figure 5.3). This column lists all the popular news reports automatically according to their CTN ranking. In other words, news-workers at *ETtoday.com* do not have to change news items by themselves; the online media technologies do it for them. The cultural meaning of this practice is that the work of news selection and representation could theoretically exclude human operations and be done by non-human machine in the online news environment. This automatic news selection device based on CTN illustrates a totally different social world in the online news environment. Compared to other conventional news media in Taiwan that still prefer political, economic or foreign news as the headline news items or important stories, on the whole, news stories which often showed on the top news column of *ETtoday.com* are entertainment, sport, celebrity gossip, and sometimes some fortune-telling reports. Political or economic issues hardly become the top news stories except when these issues have already aroused huge attention across the whole of society.

ETtoday.com claims that its news reports are trying to fulfil their promise of giving 'what readers want to know' and 'consumers' interests'. The automatic news selection device, to a certain extent, has been seen as part of the practices which gives readers the power to decide their own news; it is geared towards the perspective of reader

empowerment. For example, the Editor-in-Chief, Cai, claims that *ETtoday.com* gives 'more authority' to their readers to make decisions in the process of the production practices. As he indicated: 'We let readers tell us what news is, rather than us deciding what readers should know' (Cai, an online news chief editor, male, 45 years old, 10/02/2006).

Figure 5.3 The top news column on *ETtoday.com*
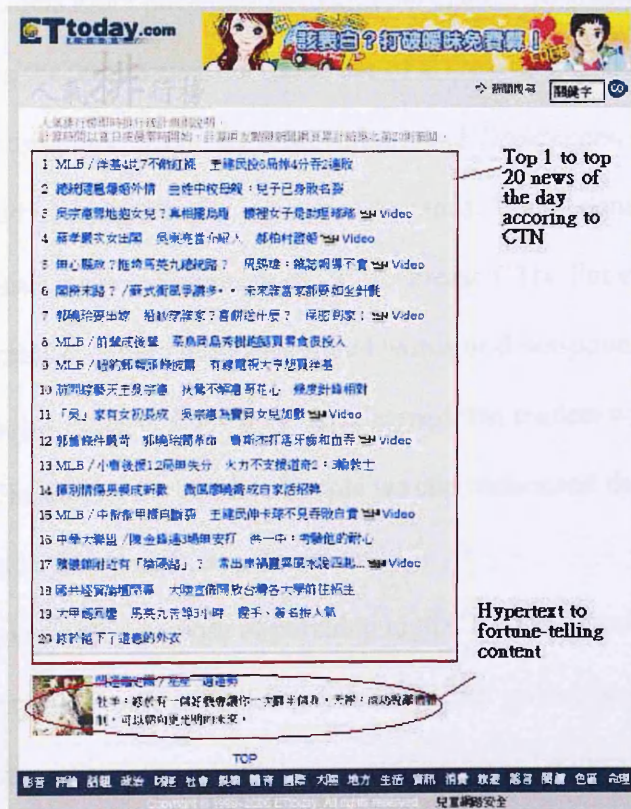
CTN: a practice of control or empowerment?

Aligning the use of CTN to 'consumer need' or 'reader's empowerment' supports the claim of legitimacy of CTN for *ETtoday.com* and becomes the dominant value in the news-workers' everyday practices. In conventional news media, there has been

criticism from some authors that news-workers give little room to their audiences in the process of the production practices (McNair, 2000; Cohen, 2002; Gillmor, 2004a). As Cohen (2002:536) indicates: 'market journalism gives little power to consumers to influence the news market'.

Conversely, *ETtoday.com* claims that they are not afraid of the reader's power. They give readers the chance to tell them what they want to read through the mediation of CTN. One question that arises here is whether CTN, the new online audience tracking technology, can be considered as an empowerment mechanism which gives readers more power, as *ETtoday.com* claims. To answer this question, we should examine the real motivation of the use of CTN which is hidden behind the empowerment discourse. From my observation, for *ETtoday.com*, CTN is more important for advertising than for consumer demands. The evidence is that *ETtoday.com* uses many strategies in order to increase CTN. For example, Yu told me that some journalists tend to use exaggerated words or descriptions in headlines because for the purposes of CTN they have learned that readers will be attracted by these kinds of headlines. From this example we can understand that CTN is used for other purposes besides reader empowerment.

It is obvious that the purpose of pursuing high CTN for *ETtoday.com* is more likely to attract much more advertising. The CTN data gives advertisers the scale of potential consumers who might click on their advertising banners on the website. Advertisers and investors can thus ascertain precisely how they are profiting from the money or information they offer. Thus, through the linkage of CTN, the consumer market is traded to the advertiser market in order to yield more profit for the news organisation.

As indicated, CTN can be seen as one of the audience measurement techniques to

a certain extent. Ien Ang (1991) analyses audience measurement techniques and suggests that such techniques are a 'control through visibility' (Ang, 1991:86). For her, the aim of audience measurement is to 'put media consumers under constant scrutiny', so as to turn their media reception behaviour 'into suitable objects in and for industry practices, to judge their viewing habits in terms of productivity for advertisers and broadcasters alike' (Ang, 1991:86). CTN here can also be seen as a technology that turns online news readers into an object to be sold to the advertising market. However, the process of turning readers into an object to sell invokes the discourse of consumer empowerment in online journalism, as *ETtoday.com* claims that news selection based on CTN is a kind of practice that fits consumer demands and their wishes.

Ang's (1991) analysis of audience measurement explains this empowerment viewpoint by using Michael Foucault's discussion of the power/knowledge linkage. In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault (1979) investigates how discourses are put into practice through tracking the historical development of modern punishment techniques and the evolution of the design of prison. In his book, Foucault discusses the panoptic modality of power – a method of control through visibility. Foucault's concept comes from the panopticon, a model of prison constructed at the end of the 18th century. The panopticon allows warders to be stationed in a central tower with the cells of jail arranged in a circle around it. Therefore, the prisoners can be seen by their jailers at will, through spy-holes in the prison yard. The key aspect of this kind of control is through surveillance. Ang claims that 'the principles of panopticism are central to the technological operation of audience measurement: its core mechanism and ultimate ambition, is control through visibility' (Ang, 1991:86).

However, media consumers are not like prisoners in a place of strict disciplinary

arrangement like a jail. Ang (1991) suggests that media consumption usually occurs in the context of domestic leisure, the space such as living room. The space of media consumption, however, is emphatically not like a prison cell. The problem here is that media audience are 'free consumers', therefore, 'audience measurement can only be an indirect means of disciplining the media consumers' (Ang, 1991:87). This does not mean, as Ang argues, 'there is no power and control involved in the set-up of audience measurement' (Ang, 1991:87). In fact, these techniques do involve actual entry into the private space of consumers (e.g. living room) 'in order to put them under constant examination' (Ang, 1991:88). It is an ingenious means for the media industry to obliquely penetrate people's private space in order to make them 'visible'. For instance, when a sampling family agrees to allow a 'people meter' to be set up in their household to record their television viewing activities, part of their private life has been made visible and intruded upon by the audience rating corporation.

In parallel to Ang, Mark Poster uses the concept of 'super-panopticon' (Poster, 1995:69), which is a useful explanatory notion for us to understand the operation and meaning of CTN. The super-panopticon for Poster refers to databases which 'work continuously, systematically and surreptitiously, accumulating information about individuals and composing it into profiles' (Poster, 1995: 69). In our everyday life there are countless super-panopticons, from government departments to credit card companies, working and processing on a daily basis. As Poster (1995:69) indicates: 'databases "survey" us without the eyes of any prison guard and they do so more accurately and thoroughly than any human being'. Poster also argues that the impact of the super-panopticon is that the boundary between our private and public life are cancelled by databases because 'whatever one is doing, traces are left behind, and these traces are transformed into information for the grist of computer' (Poster,

1995:69).

The operation of CTN is also similar to an electronic panopticon in the online news environment. Readers' reading activities are collected by a central electronic mechanism and online news readers are the subjects to be scrutinised. Whether they know it or not, their online reading practices are monitored by the website. Although CTN does not record as much detailed information of online news readers as other super-panopticons do (e.g. credit card companies collect consumer's shopping information from what goods they brought to how much they spend); it is enough for *ETtoday.com* to accumulate online readers' information as their property, as a valuable asset to sell on to the advertising market.

Apart from using CTN as a means of accumulating economic profits, it is also a means of newsroom control in *ETtoday.com*. As indicated, in *ETtoday.com* news-worker's working performances are evaluated by how much CTN their reports get. In this respect, CTN is also a panopticon for news-workers. When CTN information is open to every news-worker at *ETtoday.com*, they are the subjects of surveillance. Through this method, *ETtoday.com* confirms that high CTN reports can be reproduced repeatedly - which also confirmed the owner's economic interests.

The use of digital forms in online journalism

In the previous discussion, I indicated that CTN in *ETtoday.com* is like an electronic panopticon which is adopted to accumulate media owner's economic profits and serve the advertising market. Following this, in this section I will point out that at *ETtoday.com*, different strategies are developed in order to extend the power of the electronic panopticon. These strategies relate to the practices of other technologies in

online journalism. I will analyse how two digital forms, hypertext and convergence[29], which are often used in online news contexts, are practised and aligned to the use of CTN at *ETtoday.com*, as well as to the market logic of journalism. However, I do not claim that commercial purposes determine the only logic for the practices of the digital forms in the online news environment. In my following analysis, I will also point out that, to a certain extent, news professionalism is also embedded in the use of the digital forms.

It is necessary that I introduce the major digital forms which I will discuss in my later analysis. The first technology I need to discuss first is hypertext. It is a technological capability that enables, in principle, one specific website to connect seamlessly with another (Park & Thelwall, 2003) through an electronic link. The shared hypertexts among websites allow texts and images to be referred to each other. Many online news websites claim that hypertext is 'giving news consumers a more comprehensive and varied set of perspectives on a story' (Gunter, 2003:69). Authors conclude several meanings of the use of hypertext in online journalism. Firstly, hypertext provides a new form of storytelling or narrative. Inspired by Roland Barthes, George P. Landow (1997:3) defines hypertext as 'a text composed of blocks of words (or images), open-ended, perpetually unfinished by multiple paths, chains, or trails in a node, network, web and path'. For Landow, hypertext structures information with a network form. Every single text or image can be treated as a node within the network (see Chapter 4); authors use this new narrative form in their writing, which enables readers to compose their own ways of reading the story by selecting different links to other texts or images. Therefore, an hypertextual text is in flux; is non-permanent; designed to change, rather than prescribing a fixed, linear reading order which we

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[29] The two concepts have been mentioned briefly in the porous chapter (see Chapter 2 & 4). This chapter focuses mainly on their practices in relation to news representation.

used to experienced in most print text (Huesca & Dervin, 1999).

Secondly, hypertext is fundamentally an 'intertextual system' and has 'the capacity to emphasize intertextuality in a way that page-bound books cannot' (Landow, 1997:35). Intertextuality can be defined as 'a structural analysis of texts in relation to the larger system of signifying practices or uses of signs in culture' (Morgan, 1985, cited in Landow, 1997:35). That is, in the hypertextual writing, a single text can be referred to other texts, images, and other symbolic objects, which makes it an open-ended text. For online journalism, authors argue that hypertext enables journalists to incorporate multiple perspectives and expressions to tell the same story, rather than the information being communicated through a singular voice of authority (Huesca & Dervin, 1999; Rost, 2002). Hypertext thus has been said to encourage multiple perspectives of reality, which challenge a single reality, single integrating world view, and single angle on social events in the traditional news media (Bolter, 1991; Huesca & Dervin, 1999; Murray, 1998).

Thirdly, hypertext transforms in the way authors and readers are conceptualised (Huesca & Dervin, 1999; Landow, 1997; Rost, 2002). Since readers in the hypertextual writing can choose different links and paths, therefore they can also structure their own meaning of news story by linking to different texts and images. Hypertext, from this viewpoint, is 'a narrative form that does not exist until readers produce it through a series of choices made according to their desires and interests' (Huesca & Dervin, 1999). Alejandro Rost (2002) suggests that in online journalism, hypertext is a technology of selective interactivity which offers multiple possibilities of access to content. Readers are given more power in the construction of reality (Rost, 2002). However, some empirical studies have shown that most websites of printed news media and web-only news websites in general provide fewer so-called 'external

hypertexts' – hypertexts that enable readers to connect to external websites – than 'internal hypertexts' – hyperlinks that only link to the information on the same website (Oblak, 2005).

Convergence is another technology related to the production practices and comprehension in online journalism. In Chapter 4, I have briefly outlined the concept. Here I would like to further discuss how convergence links to other technologies - especially hypertext and CTN, in news-workers' production practices. One of my central arguments in this thesis is that convergence for online journalism is more than a form of technological congregation. Convergence encourages and creates what Deuze calls 'a convergence of the culture of media production and consumption' (Deuze, 2007b:243). Thus, online news culture is a 'culture of convergence'. This argument will be developed further in the following chapters when I discuss the consumption practices of online journalism (see Chapters 6 & 7). In this chapter, I mainly focus on convergence in the production process of online journalism.

For online journalism, the meaning and effect of convergence is controversial. On the one hand, convergence seems to accelerate the de-centralisation of information in the online news environment. For example, many online news websites co-operate with outside resources - from other news media to bloggers' creative works - and converge various forms of content into one digital platform, which assists the uncontrollable dissemination of information (Boczkowski, 2002; Cohen, 2002; Scott, 2005). On the other hand, some authors also argue that convergence actually encourages another kind of centralisation, which enables news outlets to blend and cross-promote content and brands (Scott, 2005). My analysis in Chapter 4 has indicated that convergence for online journalism is more than a technological integration of content. Media convergence in the online newsroom also represents a new strategy for production

which news organisations employ to align with managerial techniques to increase the productivity, efficiency, and profitability of news businesses.

Use of hypertext and convergence in online news production

In the following analysis, I will examine how hypertext and convergence influence the production practices and news representation in the online news environment. My analysis will also point out how the above topic links to the use of CTN data in *ETtoday.com*. My analysis starts with a credit card report case on *ETtoday.com*.

On 18 November 2005, one of the headline news stories on the front page of *ETtoday.com* was a report on a credit card, carrying the title 'this card lets a person earns 700 thousand NT dollars (approximately equal to 10 thousand pounds)'. The news quoted American Express's (a credit card company) suggestion of teaching customers how to utilize credit card shopping discounts and profit returns to help them to earn more money. The news reported a person who had used an American Express card to pay 50 million NT dollars in tax and 'earned' 700 thousand NT dollars profit in return. From the layout of the front-page (Figure 5.4) we can see that besides the headline and first paragraphs of the news report, there are also several hypertext links to related and unrelated news. The first hypertext (with red colouring to show the importance of the hypertext) titled as: *Use the Platinum Card properly, be a smart consumer*, in fact leads readers to the website of the credit card company. The third hypertext is also related news to credit card news, but is a 'real report' written by the journalist. The second, fourth, fifth and sixth hypertext links are to unrelated stories - including reports on financial market news and foot-and-mouth disease.

Figure 5.4 The credit card news layout on *ETtoday.com*
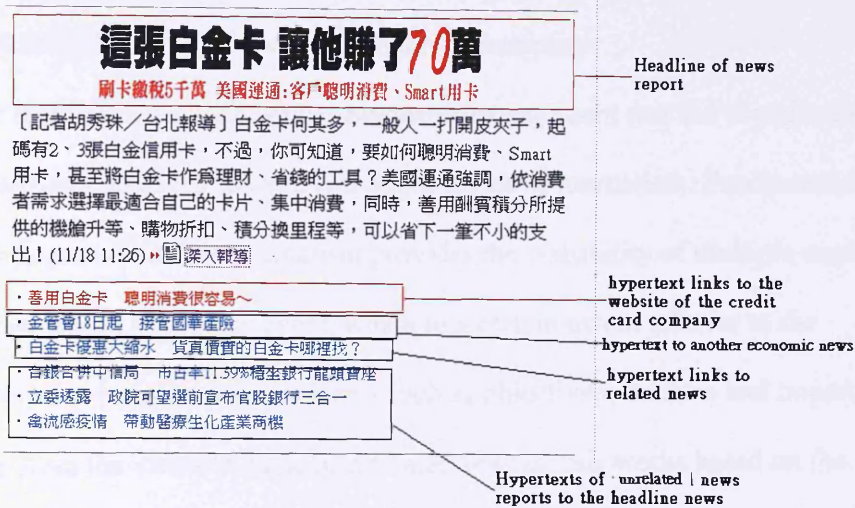
The journalist reported the credit card news because the card company provided the human-interest angle: the person gains money because of 'spending money', but the major purpose of the card company was to promote the credit card. From this case, it can be seen that hypertext and convergence in online journalism are used for two purposes. On the one hand, they are used to enhance the intertextuality of the news reports. That is, through hypertext and convergence, online journalism provides more information related to the main report, which 'frames a story in a series of related links and files embedded within the text' and 'embeds news within news' in online journalism (Cohen, 2002:541). With this characteristic, online journalism resembles an intertextual cultural product (Marshall, 2002). On the other hand, the use of the two digital forms also has commercial purposes. According to the journalist who reported the credit news, the commercial link in this news report was approved by the marketing department at ETtoday.com. The marketing department cooperated with the card company. The news department's role was to assign a journalist to report the

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story and to make the 'package of news'; integrating commercial information with a journalistic narrative and form. The hypertexts of the credit card news lead readers to related news, as well as the credit card company's website. It is a kind of convergence between online news media and a commercial company.

The credit card news illustrates my previous argument that the use of technology in online news practices follows two major logics of journalism. Fundamentally, the use of hypertext in online journalism provides the possibility of multiple angles of reality pertaining to a social event, which to a certain extent adheres to the professional principles of journalism - such as objectivity, balance and impartiality. Judging from the views of some of my interviewees, this works based on the professional role of news-workers. For example, Jia-Hong Chen, editor of leisure page, told me about his use of hypertext; and his practices relate to a certain extent to the principles of objectivity and impartiality of new professionalism, as he indicated:

Sometimes when I report some news, I like to attach different hypertexts to my main report. I think this is a way to display different angles, and readers can find the answer by themselves through these hypertexts. (Chen Jia-Hong, an online news editor, male, 34 years old, 16/02/2006)

However, at *ETtoday.com*, the practices of hypertext are constrained by time and resources. As proposed in Chapter 4, at *ETtoday.com*, journalists and editors can search the database to find information related to the news reports they are writing. Attaching related hyperlinks to news reports is a compulsory part of everyday work requested by the news company. However, providing hypertext seems to be an extra burden on journalists and their workloads. Chen (Tin-Tin), the journalist from the

political sector indicated that:

If necessary, I attach some hypertexts to my news reports. But I do not have enough time to do this for every news report. [...] Besides, selecting a proper hypertext for news is not an easy task. I think hypertext should be used to improve the understanding of news, if the 'material' for a hypertext is not good, I would rather choose no hypertext. (Chen Tin-Tin, an online news journalist, female, 27 years old, 11/08/2005)

Most journalists I interviewed agreed that hypertext 'gives their readers more information', but from the management's perspective, using hypertext apparently aims to encourage readers to stay longer on their website and give the site higher CTN. Chen (Tin-Tin) told me that:

From the company's point of view, hypertext actually aims to increase the total numbers of page-view times. This is its original purpose. For example, if a reader clicks on hypertext to read related news; the whole website gets an extra page-view number. (Chen Tin-Tin, an online news journalist, female, 27 years old, 11/08/2005)

Yu, the editor from the domestic page, also indicated that:

When all the hypertexts link to the internal website, it means that we can get more CTN when readers click these hypertexts. (Yu, an online news editor, female, 34 years old, 05/07/2005)

The two quotes show that the use of hypertext also complies with the market logic. For online journalism, an 'ideal hypertext' is to allow an extension of intertextuality, which offers new ways of accessing various content and gives readers more power to decide their own reading order (Rost, 2002). In *ETtoday.com*, a great number of the hypertexts are internal hypertexts, which means that the hypertext only links to the information within the same website. Seldom do the hypertexts on the web page of *ETtoday.com* lead readers to external sites or web pages. According to my observations, the database which stores the previous news reports of *ETtoday.com* is the main resource for hypertexts, which is also the most convenient source for the news-workers to access and use. These kinds of hypertexts re-use the old articles, which contribute to increase CTN on *ETtoday.com* (when readers click these articles, their page views are still counted in the overall CTN count of *ETtoday.com*'s website). Moreover, the news-workers do not have to consider some relevant issues about using external hypertext – including issues of copyright, or the credibility of the external information they use.

The internal hypertext on *ETtoday.com* is a strategy of controlling the news flow. It sets up different pre-established routes for readers to keep them on the website or lead them to the in-group business websites. The chief editor of *ETtoday.com*, Cai, spoke frankly when I asked him why there were not many external hypertexts: 'Basically, our first thinking about hypertext is that we do not want readers to leave our website' (Cai, online news chief editor, male, 45 years old, 10/02/2006).

The big-platform structure in the online newsroom

The use of hypertext also provides *ETtoday.com* and its parent company with a new strategy of media convergence grounded on a digitalised framework. That is, part

of media convergence in EMG is connected to, and integrated with hypertext. Figure 5.5 shows a basic structure of this media convergence[30]. *ETtoday.com* uses the term 'big-platform' to describe its media convergence, which means all the resources are integrated digitally into an online platform – *ETtoday.com*.

Figure 5.5 The structure of the 'big-platform' of *ETtoday.com*
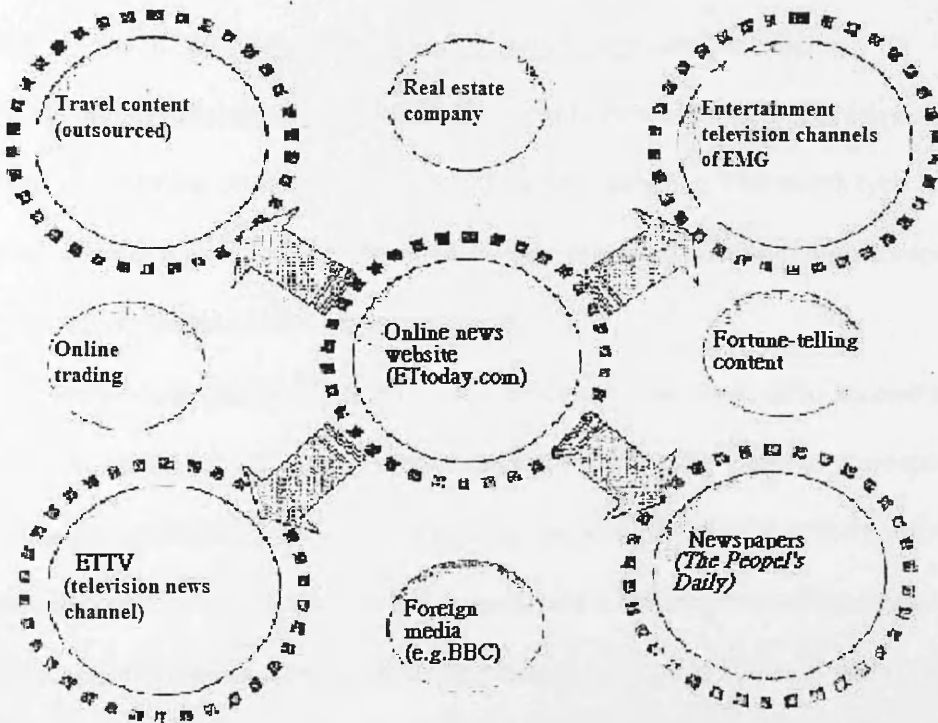
On this big-platform, hypertext is the vital pillar because different websites and media content, in-group or outsourced content, are connected by the new digital integrating technology. Different media content is used directly by *ETtoday.com* or connected through hypertext (see the discussion in Chapter 4). From Figure 5.5, we

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[30] The structure of the big-platform is based on the information provided by *ETtoday.com* and my research. It should be noted that in fact there are many other in-house businesses and outside resources integrated into this platform, but here I only show the important one.

can see four major types of media and resources which are integrated into the big-platform. The first type - which is also the most common one - is the in-group business related to journalism, such as the People's Daily (newspaper) and ETTV (television news). The second type is also the in-house business but related to non-journalistic content, such as entertainment content provided by television channels at EMG. The third type is external resources related to journalism. For example, *ETtoday.com* cooperates with some foreign news media such as *BBC Chinese.com* (http://www.nownews.com/english-news/bbc.html), *Voice of America* (http://www.nownews.com/english-news/voice1.html), *and Asiamoney* (http://www.asiamoney.com/). Readers can read news selected by *ETtoday.com* from these news media, or click on a direct link to their websites. The fourth type is the external resource related to non-journalistic content - the fortune-telling content and some online shaping information are two examples.

Media convergence with different resources has established *ETtoday.com* as the centre of media conglomerate to promote in-group business. This has corresponded with some argument over convergence from the political-economy viewpoint, which criticises media convergence, on the grounds that it has frequently been designed from its inception as the arena to promote the packages of branded content and control information flows across an array of media platforms (Cohen, 2002; Jenkins, 2004; Murray, 2003). The cross-promotion and packages of branded content on *ETtoday.com* has blurred the boundary between journalism and commercial information. For example, news-workers at *ETtoday.com* have been frequently asked to promote the activities of in-group businesses.

An extraordinary case here is the 'fortune-telling content' on *ETtoday.com*. In the opening entrepreneur's case, we have seen that the fortune-telling content is presented

as related information via hypertext link. Strictly, the fortune-telling content can hardly be considered as 'news', but it is a special cultural aspect within the Taiwanese media. Readers can find out this sort of content in many news reports from 'forecasting your luck for the day' to 'which star sign is your Mr. Right'. On the *ETtoday.com* website, readers can also read some news reports related to fortune-telling. For example, news reports on the unemployment rate usually link to other texts with titles such as: 'What kind of person changes their job very often?' or 'What kind of person is easily laid off?' News reports of this kind analyse people and their jobs according to their star sign, physiognomy (fortune-telling according to the look of a person) or Feng-shui. The narrative of the fortune-telling content on *ETtoday.com*, is usually written in a journalistic style, pointing out some real journalistic issues initially (e.g. unemployment-rate increases), before interviewing some professional person (e.g. an astrological fortune-teller).

The fortune-telling information in *ETtoday.com* is in fact one of the consequences of media centralisation which accompanies media convergence. At EMG, fortune-telling information is part of in-group business because there are lots of fortune-telling programmes on ETTV. Some programmes co-operate with fortune-telling business and are usually very popular which creates a lot of revenue both for the media and the fortune-telling businesses. The fortune-tellers who usually appear in the reports of *ETtoday.com* are those who have close relationship with EMG. Therefore, reporting fortune-telling content is a way of promoting in-group business. Moreover, fortune-telling content usually achieves high CTN, which makes *ETtoday.com* willing to include more of this content in its news stories.

The credit card case above provides some aspects of how hypertext and media convergence are used, and how they are related to the production practices and news

representation in online journalism.

Firstly, through the use of hypertext and media convergence, *ETtoday.com* is trying to control readers' reading flow. This control is particularly important for *ETtoday.com* because it is part of the work to keep readers on the website. As mentioned, hypertext enables journalists to present a non-linear form of generating their stories for their readers. This basically violates the wishes of media owners and advertisers, which have dominate roles in the process of news production. As Elisia Cohen (2002:540) indicates: 'Theoretically, such a non-linear pattern of news organisation might transfer to the Web in the form of discontinuous news threads presented by a variety of sources'. Therefore, hypertexts linked to the internal content and convergence of in-group business or out-group partners are essential to keep readers on the site as long as possible.

Secondly, the control of the information flow via the use of hypertext and media convergence in *ETtoday.com* fundamentally links to some commercial purposes. Although the big-platform structure seems to enable the news-workers to use diverse resources; at the same time, it is designed to increase profits. For instance, journalists at *ETtoday.com* might be asked to report a pop concert held in Ju-Dan (Taipei Arena), the venue owned by the same media group, and attach a hypertext link to the websites allowing people to buy tickets. These kinds of reports might increase ticket sales, and benefit the in-group business. Thus, we can say that a part of the big-platform structure is embedded in the market logic and commercial purpose.

Thirdly, in the online news environment, we have seen how digital forms are also used to assist the work of framing social events. For example, in the entrepreneur's case, hypertexts of the fortune-telling content serve to frame the news with a superstitious angle and allude to a non-medical method to solve the problem of

infertility. In the credit card case, hypertext and media convergence here plays the role of leading readers to the card company's website. The card company frames the card spending activity as a way of 'money management' in order to convince consumers to use their card to buy more goods. Besides, we can also see that there are some unrelated hyperlinks 'packaged' in the credit news reports. These hyperlinks are 'real economic news' and are displayed below the main news report. This is another framing work by using hypertexts. These real economic reports were put in this position in order to remind readers that the credit card news is part of economic news, to reduce the commercial aspect of the reports.

To sum up, my analysis above has suggested that CTN, hypertext and media convergence have raised a possibility for new ways of positioning and organising news stories. It could be used, as suggested, to provide multiple angles on news events to enhance readers' understanding. In addition, when different types of information, journalistically or commercially, are all expressed in the same binary code and linked to different locations in cyberspace; online news product thus gradually becomes what Simone Murray calls a 'very liquid asset' (Murray, 2003:9). That is, different information is theoretically expected to flow smoothly within different digital platforms.

Nevertheless, hypertext and convergence also bring another kind of re-centralisation of ownership and commercial information. In my analysis, *ETtoday.com* is not the kind of liquid asset which allows information to flow freely within its big-platform. Apparently, it does not want to construct an open-ended text and a liquid space for readers. On the contrary, through different strategies of using the technology, different sources, ownerships and advertisers are integrated with a new digital way - which forms another centralisation of media and business. Under these

circumstances, the new digital forms are not only used to 'embed news within news', but also to 'embed advertisements within news'. Their practices are embedded with a commercial purpose and the surrounding discourses within journalism, which influence the news representation and interpretation. It should be noted here that this does not means that the market logic is always superior to other values in the process of the production practices in *ETtoday.com*. In my analysis, I also have indicated that to a greater or lesser extent, news professionalism still influences the use of technology on *ETtoday.com* in certain respects. In the next section, I will examine how news professionalism influences production practices in the online news environment.

News professionalism and online news practices

The existing studies of news professionalism have suggested that it is part of a news-worker's occupational identity. It sets up several professional norms in journalistic work. For example, objectivity and impartiality are probably the two most significant norms which influence journalistic work - especially in American journalism, which also has a huge impact on Taiwanese journalism (see Chapter 2 & 3). Studies of how online journalists recognise their professional role compared to journalists in print and broadcast news outlets have revealed that online journalists do not rate the traditional role of the journalists as very important. Instead, they tend to describe themselves as news re-writers (Brill, 2001; Domingo, 2006). Different ranges of technologies have been seen in these studies as the core element for the change of professional identity of online news-workers. A study of online journalists in The Netherlands (Deuze & Dimoudi, 2002) suggests that online journalists tend to focus on maintaining an interactive relationship with a wide audience, with less importance being attributed to traditional media roles such as agenda-setting or advocacy

journalism31. The study claims that this changing occupational identity of the online journalist can be attributed to the increasing interactivities brought about by media technologies which give consumers more opportunities to interact with media producers.

When considering the influence of media technology on the traditional professional news values and online journalism, Cohen (2002) suggests that online technologies appear to 'make tensions between traditional news values of print and broadcast journalism and market values become more apparent' in the online news environment (Cohen, 2002:533).

My observation of *ETtoday.com* finds some results that differ from those of existing studies. Firstly, I found that on *ETtoday.com*, some professional norms and principles based on the professional identity of journalist are still important in shaping news-workers' production practices. Although in my interviews the news-workers at *ETtoday.com* seldom used the term 'profession', some descriptions related to the professional norms and principles can still be identified in their actual practices.

Secondly, on *ETtoday.com*, tension between the market logic and the news professionalism seem unobvious and latent, although the news-workers I interviewed did complain that some important stories that they selected were not valued by their bosses. These situations usually occur when the news stories were unpopular according to CTN but the news-workers held different viewpoints based on their professional judgement. However, most news-workers at *ETtoday.com* broadly accepted the outcome of CTN when it was related to the discourses of the organisation's profit, working performance and consumer demand, as mentioned; and tensions and conflicts are usually glossed over to satisfy these aspects.

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[31] The issue of how interactivity influences the relationship between news producers and consumers and their changing identity due to this online technology will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

To a certain extent, news professionalism encourages the news-workers at *ETtoday.com* to reflect upon their role of social responsibility, which makes them use some high CTN content very carefully. The editor of the leisure page, Chen (Jia-Hong), admitted that:

If we want our website get the highest CTN, we just need to let all our news be selected completely according to CTN. However, no media, including ETtoday.com, has dared to employ this strategy in Taiwan so far. (Chen Jia-Hong, an online news editor, male, 34 years old, 16/02/2006)

An example here is the 'sex page' on *ETtoday.com* (Figure 5.6). The page (*ETtody.com* uses the term 'cyber sex' as the English title of this page) is one of the most popular pages on *ETtoday.com*, and usually receives high CTN.

News on the page is varied. Some are news reports, such as 'Mayor of New York state supports gay marriage'. However, the most popular articles are still sex-related topics such as ridiculing the female body, or some erotic topics. A great many of these articles are submitted by freelancers or readers. Most content on the sex page seem to go against the traditional news professionalism which requires that journalism should be a kind of watchdog, or should stimulate public discussion on issues that are in the public interest.

News-workers at *ETtoday.com* seem to keep a bottom-line for the sexual material. The following conversation during my interview with the Chief Editor, Cai, and the editor of the leisure page, Chen (Jia-Hong), shows that they tend to keep their distance from the sexual topics, considering to their professional roles.

Figure 5.6 The 'sex page' on *ETtoday.com*

(This layout is a typical design of the 'sex page' on *ETtoday.com*. The news is about a new drama. However, the report uses a sex allusion picture, which usually attracts high CTN.)

> *Cai: You mentioned the sex page. The purpose of this page is for us to get*
>
> *more CTN because we cannot publish sexual-related advertisements. If*
>
> *we can have sex advertisements, maybe we can get more profit…*
>
> [Stopped by the editor]
>
> *Chen: Basically, news media cannot carry sexual-related advertisements. It is*
>
> *inappropriate for news-workers to be involved in producing this kind*
>
> *of content. Therefore, at ETtoday.com most of the articles on the sexual*
>
> *page are submitted by readers or freelancers.*
>
> *Cai: But we never pay people for writing these articles.*
>
> *(Cai, an online news chief editor, male, 45 years old and Chen Jia-Hong, an*
>
> *online news editor, male, 34 years old, 10/02/2006)*

From the above conversation, we see that both the news-workers still think, as

professional news-workers, that there are still many topics that they should avoid being directly involved with because these topics are considered inappropriate with reference to professional norms and principles of news. Yet the sex page is still one of the most popular pages on *ETtoday.com* - which the company cannot give up. As their conversation implies, *ETtoday.com* can have sexual-related articles and news, but will never have sexual-related advertisements. Besides, these articles are provided by writers who are not 'professional news-workers' at *ETtoday.com*. Their attitudes towards the sexual-related content can be seen as a way to overcome the conflict between market-value and their occupational identity, which is to keep away from any direct links to the content of this page.

As mentioned, the news-workers at *ETtoday.com* might not point out precisely what news professionalism really is, but they mention many principles that they use in their daily practices which conform the kind 'news professionalism' they have in their minds. For example, they repeatedly stress that 'news should be objective and impartial' and 'journalism should serve the public'. Even when they are sometimes forced to report stories based on the CTN data, they still think it is their duty to serve their readers; and their task is to report the story with 'diverse angles' and 'balanced ways' in accordance with the norms of news professionalism.

One example here is my observation of the work of the front page editor, Tan. He strongly insisted on some norms and principles of news professionalism in his everyday work. When discussing his thoughts on the work of news media, he told me: 'I think that the news media's task is to present the true voices and the diverse voices'. Tan put his perception of news professionalism into practice when he showed me his principle of selecting readers' opinion letters (Letters to the Editor), which is one of his daily tasks. As the editor of both front page and the Letters to the Editor column,

Tan receives an average of five to ten letters a day; and he told me that he changes or deletes hardly any words or phrases in each article, except when there is obvious typing or grammatical errors. So readers can read a three-thousand-word article in the opinion column, or read articles that seem irrelevant to news issues (one reader is re-writing his thesis and sending it to Tan), because Tan thinks that every reader's letter represents one of the opinions (voices) of society. His task is to present diverse opinions, since online media gives him enormous space. For him, to present diverse opinions objectively and impartially on *ETtoday.com* is what a qualified news media worker and news-worker should do.

Observing Tan's work, I also found that the market logic and news professionalism logic had both been taken into account in his daily practice. He seemed to be very aware of what kind of news would generate high CTN. For example, in the entrepreneur's case, Tan was the key person who decided the news should be represented from a human-interest angle, rather than using the original angle. Using the fortune-telling hypertext was also his decision. These decisions imply that Tan is deeply aware of what market-driven journalism needs. However, sometimes he still insists that some news stories should be reported based on his professional judgment, even if these reports attract fewer readers. On one occasion, he made a news item related to the Nazi Holocaust his leading article. I asked why he used this 'hard news' and serious topic as the most important, headline story. Tan told me that he knew this news could not get high CTN, but he thought it was in the interests of the news that 'readers should know about it'. He insisted that news media still have some social responsibility and cannot follow what consumers want every time.

Media technology in some cases is used to solve the possible tension and conflict caused by the different considerations of news professions and market values at

ETtoday.com. These can be seen in many everyday game-like practices in

ETtoday.com. These everyday game-like practices are not a well-planned strategy, but

closer to what Michael de Certeau (1984) calls 'tactic'. It is a concept that de Certeau

proposes to describe one kind of practice in our everyday life. For de Certeau, tactic is

a practice which can be adopted to combat institutional and structural power. He

describes tactic as an 'art of the weak' (de Certeau, 1984:37). For him, a tactic is never

well planed but takes advantage of opportunities. It also does not, as de Certeau

indicates, 'have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a

whole within a district, visible and objectifiable space' (de Certeau, 1984:37). On the

contrary, 'it operates in isolated actions' and 'without any base where it could stockpile

it winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids'. De Certeau sums up the character

of tactical practice as:

> Lacking its own place, lacking a view of the whole, limited by the blindness
>
> (which may lead to perspicacity) resulting from combat at close quarters,
>
> limited by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is determined by the
>
> absence of power (de Certeau, 1984:38).

However, this does not mean that the practice of tactic action cannot have influences.

In his influential article *walking in the city* (de Certeau, 1984:91-110), de Certeau

suggests that walkers in a city can move in a tactical way, such as by take shortcuts or

meandering aimlessly. It is a kind of spatial practices which the practitioners do not

have to follow the routes determined by the authority power (e.g. the instructions of

roads provided by city governors). By making this argument, de Certeau denotes a

possibility that the practitioners have the capability to recombine the rules or products

that has already existed in culture to form different practices to resist the dominate powers. At *ETtoday.com* these tactical practices take place everyday. News-workers use some small skills or the features of online media to maintain their professions or avoid tensions. My observation finds that through these tactical practices, the news-workers at *ETtoday.com can* express their professions but still obey the existing rules set up by the organisation, because these tactics seems to usually be ignored by the management level.

Tzao, told me about her experience of tension between the news professional norms and the market logic caused by her report. From her experience, she also found a tactical way of preventing future tensions. She told me that once she wrote a news report about economic data. The data did not present the Government in a positive light. During that period, these kinds of data were very sensitive because the news media that reported on the economic recession was labelled as anti-government media, which also meant the media would not receive a subsidy from the Government (e.g. for government advertisements or exclusive news). The management of *ETtoday.com* often interferes with the reporting angle on this kind of news. Tzao said that when she uploaded the news, her boss called her in to discuss the report. She said:

> *My boss asked me: 'Why do you write this statistic; is it the only statistic released today?' I replied 'No, there are other data released today, but I think this is the most significant.' (Tzao, an online news journalist, female, 36 year old, 10/07/2005)*

After a short argument, her report was still posted on their website without any changes. Tzao thought her insistence was based on the norms of news professionalism.

She believed that her boss questioned this economic data might because it related to their company's interests - so they tried to control how the economic data was interpreted and represented. However, from this experience, Tzao has learnt how to prevent possible tension in the future. Later, when she deals with some sensitive or arguable stories, she utilizes layout design of the website to hide the sensitive details in the second layer. That is, the news page of *ETtoday.com* only shows the leading paragraph of each news item, and readers have to click the hyperlink to the second layer to read the whole story. So journalists can address sensitive angles in a later paragraph of the news story, rather than in the leading paragraph. Thus, some sensitive news usually escapes checks by management because, as Tzao said, they might not have enough much time to read all the reports.

Another tactic is employed by Tan, the front-page editor. He uses the constant updates to reduce the appearance of commercial information. Tan, told me that many times he was asked to promote some commercial activities, but he usually put these reports on at midnight or at rush hour (these periods are the times that fewer people access the Internet). Since *ETtoday.com* changes its headline news every hour or every two hours; the commercial information will also be changed quickly. 'At least it can make fewer people read the 'fake news' (commercial information), and after an hour, the news will be changed' said Tan.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the relationships between news production practices, news representation, and the technology-in-use in the online news environment. The relationship between each of the three aspects in online journalism is complicated but is embedded within two logics: the market logic of journalism and the logic of news professionalism. In contrast to some authors who predict that the

conflicts and tensions of the two logics in the online news environment will become more apparent (Cohen, 2002). In my case study, I found out that when some media technologies are adapted to construct a new way of control in the online newsroom; this conflict and tension might be unobvious and obscure. My analysis of CTN in this chapter has shown that when the news audience measurement technique has been embedded in the news-worker's everyday practices through a panopticism device, and has been aligned to the discourses of their performance, consumer demand and organisational interests; news-workers gradually begin to recognise CTN as one of the values which is guiding their production practices.

Representation in the online news environment is influenced by the use of technologies. In this chapter, I have mainly examined three significant technologies: CTN, hypertext and media convergence. On the one hand, these technologies provide digital forms for news representation to construct an instant link between news producer and consumer; enable the possibility of covering the story from multiple angles; encourage consumer autonomy of reading selection, and promote de-centralization of the dissemination of information. However, the use of these technologies and digital forms also suggested that a new way of consumer surveillance, a re-structuring of different markets of journalism, and a re-centralisation of media ownership. It seems that different market forces such as media owner and advertisers in the online news environment own more diverse and complicated techniques to amplify their influence in the process of online news production, such that they establish a type of online journalism which McManus (1994) refers to as market-driven journalism.

However, this does not mean that the public service logic of journalism will disappear in online journalism. My investigation has found that some professional

norms of journalism still have some impact on the production practices of news-workers at *ETtoday.com*. Some technologies are appropriated in different ways to display these norms in online news reports by online news-workers, in order to satisfy the requirements of news professionalism.

One issue that came out of my discussion in this chapter is the online news consumers. Many uses of technologies in online journalism relate to online news consumers. For example, CTN is a device to understand online news readers; and hypertext and media convergence are seen as being able to provide consumers with more autonomy to choose their own reading order and ways of representing social events. However, how consumers conduct their online news consumption practices requires further investigation. In the next chapter, I will turn my attention to this issue.

Chapter 6 Consuming the double-articulated news media: online journalism as technological object and textual media

In the previous two chapters, I have analysed the production process of online journalism. In this chapter, I will turn my focus to another critical element of the cultural circuit – the consumption process of online journalism. Consumption from the viewpoint of media study is not only bound with the actions of reading textual content, watching programmes or listening to audio programmes on media; it also involves various processes of creating, reproducing and contributing meanings (Silverstone, 1999, see also discussion in Chapter 2). In this respect, consumption is treated, in addition to buying something, as a practices within which 'we make our own meaning, negotiate our own values, and in so doing we make our world meaningful' (Silverstone, 1999:80).

As I have argued repeatedly in this thesis, in the circuiting process of a cultural product, the work of meaning-making is an ongoing process (see Chapter 1). For online journalism, when it leaves the domain of production and enters into the process of consumption, the meaning of the news product is determined by how it is used and read by the consumers – the online news readers. In other words, online news producers might constitute different meanings of online journalism through the production process; and expect readers to consume their news product following the trajectory they have set up. Nevertheless, how online news is read and the medium is used in the consumption domain is still primarily determined by readers most of the time. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to explore the different consumption practices of online journalism. I argued that part of online news culture is created by online news readers through these consumption practices.

Based on the practice approach which I use in this thesis, I treat online news consumption as a serial of practices around online news media. A similar viewpoint has been discussed by many authors (Ang, 1996; Couldry, 2004b; du Gay et al., 1997) which has been outlined in Chapter 2. This research trend of treating 'media consumption as practices' emphases the media consumer's active role in using media and interpreting media messages. Based on this, my analysis of online news consumption practices will focuses on how online news media is actually used and read by readers. Additionally, many media consumption studies based on the practices approach have suggested that media consumption is not a practice that is separated from other activities. For example, the mundane fact that some media (e.g. television, computers or the Internet), is generally consumed at the consumer's home – in the domestic sphere. Therefore, studying media consumption should not separate media and related practices from everything that is going on around them (Ang, 1996). For instance, watching television at home usually accompanies activities such as the family talking about the programmes or doing housework. This viewpoint resembles the practice theory which argues that practice-based research should not simply be concerned with human actions, but also everything related to the actions. Accordingly, my analysis in this chapter also tries to investigate the connection between online news consumption and other everyday activities around the consumption practice.

One critical aspect in this chapter is that I treat online journalism as both news media and technological media. With this characteristic, online news consumption thus covers two major practices: using media as an object and receiving media content. The two consumption practices of online journalism have been discussed in some existing studies separately (see Chapter 2), but so far, few studies link the two elements together in their analyses. Here, I argue that the two elements are interwoven

together in the online news consumption practices, and we should take both into account when analysing online news consumption.

To this end, I adopt the notion of double articulation which is proposed by Roger Silverstone, David Morley and Eric Hirsch (1992; see also Silverstone, 1994) in their studies of media technologies. The double articulation approach argues that studying the consumption of technological media should take both its material (objective) aspect (e.g. media itself) and the textual aspect (e.g. message or information on the media) into account. For them, it is through this double articulating framework that the meanings of media consumption to consumers can be significantly exhausted. The approach will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Online journalism, from my perspective, is also double articulating media. When online news readers are reading online news, they do not only read a digitised form of news, but also consume the features brought up by online media technologies. For example, hypertext - which enables readers to link to different web pages - is obviously provided by the convergent technology of digital media. When readers read online news by clicking on hypertext to link to other news content, their consumption practices involve both the technological element (the hypertextual technology) and textual element (news) of online journalism.

It should be noted before my analysis that most of the media consumption studies fundamentally recognised the active role of consumers in the process of consumption. That is, they are active consumers; choosing what they want, and making their own decisions about how to consume media and media content. However, this does not mean, as I have stated in Chapter 5, that there is no power relationship between online news consumer and producers. My analysis of the use of the consumer tracking device – CTN, and the controlling of news flow via media convergence in the

mainstream online news media are examples of online news producers trying to control readers' consumption practices.

Yet it is indeed that news consumption in the online environment has certain effects on the production process. For example, the use of some online technologies devices such as CTN (see Chapter 5) or other interactive mechanisms such as e-mail or online discussion boards has provided different opportunities to connect readers' opinions or their reading practices to the process of online news production. In this sense, production and consumption are mutually constitutive of one another in the online news environment. In this chapter, I will discuss some aspects of the relationship between online news production and consumption, including how online news consumption practices influence the production process and vice versa, but a more detailed analysis will be provided in the next chapter.

Based on the above discussion, this chapter is structured with the following main sections. Firstly, I will introduce my data collecting work, including how the respondents used in this chapter were recruited, interviewed and observed. Secondly, I will introduce the key assumption of the double articulation approach and outline related studies. Thirdly, I use two cases of online news consumption experiences from my respondents to depict a general picture of the online news consumption practices. Fourthly, following the two cases, I will analysis five types of online news consumption practices based on the double articulation framework. The five consumption practices identified in this chapter are: habitual consumption, innovative consumption, social interactive consumption, information-searching (a goal-directed reading of online journalism) and information-wandering (a ludic and arbitrary reading of online journalism). The former three types relate to the technological aspect of online news media, and the latter two relate to its textual aspect.

Methods and recruitment of online news readers

To study online news consumption, I use an in-depth interview method to interview 21 respondents (including observation cases) who have experience in reading online journalism (see Appendix 2). Most of them said that they read online journalism every day; some read online news once or twice a week[32]. In addition, I visited 5 respondents at their homes and workplaces in order to observe their real reading practices of online journalism, rather than relying solely data elicited from their self-narratives.

Each interview lasted about 1 to 2 hours according to respondent's answers. Most respondents were interviewed once, some were interviewed twice if some details were unclear or if I thought that the case was worthy of a second interview. For the observation cases, I normally visited them at the places where they used to access the Internet, and my observations often lasted from half a day to a whole day.

All respondents were recruited by carefully considering their backgrounds in order to cover different levels of age, gender, education and social class[33]. Due to the limitations of my research sources (budget and research time), the combination of my research site does not represent the general demographic characteristics of the population in Taiwan. Nevertheless, for a qualitative research study, representation is not what I am concerned with in my research. However, it is worth pointing out some shortcomings of my research site. Firstly, some age groups (e.g. 60 years old or above) are not represented in my studies, due to the fact that older Internet users are currently in the minority in Taiwan. Secondly, lower social class cases are also rare in my studies

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[32] My empirical data do not include those who do not read online news because of two reasons. (1) My research interest focuses mainly on how people consume online journalism; (2) I discovered that most Internet users had different ranges of online news reading experience; and the proportion of non-online news readers is very low.

[33] The respondents were recruited via the following sources: (1) through my personal social network, including friends, former colleagues and so forth; (2) through the respondents of the first sources recommending other respondents. This is the so-called snowballing method which is common in qualitative research.

because the general Internet users in Taiwan are still those of a higher social class.

To collect data from the respondents' everyday online news reading experiences, I adopted a set of semi-structured questions which I mentioned in no particular order according to the real situation of each interview. I encouraged the respondents to recall their online news reading experiences and expressed their views about online journalism, such as what news they had read from online media recently, how they felt about the news, why they read news from online media, and so forth. A part of my questions focuses on the respondents' actual uses of online journalism. In this part, I focused in particular on how some online media technologies and new digital forms were used during online news reading (e.g. using hypertext or web search engines), and in what context they read online journalism (e.g. while working or during leisure time). The semi-structured questions enabled me to obtain respondents' self-narratives and discourses on online journalism that were more detailed and substantial than a pre-established closed-end questionnaire would have yielded.

For the observation cases, I started by asking the respondents to turn on their computers and allow me to 'read online news with them', so that I could observe their real practices of online news reading. All the respondents that I observed also followed in-depth interviews with similar semi-structured questions. However, I also added some questions which were generated from my observations. The family members of the observation participants were also invited to my follow-up interviews, however, some refused to be interviewed on the grounds of privacy, or they just had no time. The backgrounds and detailed information of the respondents I interviewed and observed can be seen in Appendix 2.

Online journalism as double-articulated media

To investigate how online journalism is consumed by readers, I should firstly clarify

the characteristics of the news media. One of my central arguments of this thesis is that online journalism cannot only be seen as a means of conveying news information via online media. Moreover, online journalism involves the use of different digital forms in news production. Therefore, for online news readers, online journalism cannot be only treated as an alternative way of accessing news information, either. As mentioned earlier, I argue that when readers read news online, they are both consuming news information and new forms of a cultural product.

In this respect, the double articulation approach proposed by Silverstone, Morley & Hirsch (1992) is a useful theoretical framework for us to understand online news consumption. The term was originally proposed by Andre Martinet in his analysis of natural language use[34]. However, Silverstone et al. apply Martinet's notion without any relation to language practice. For Silverstone et al., the conception of double articulation states that media consumption in general comprises two independent levels; and meaning creation in relation to media consumption similarly takes place on the two levels.

One level in the double articulation approach, called the first articulation, is the technological dimensions of media. It emphasizes that media itself is a commodity or a technological object in the process of media consumption. The other articulation, the second articulation, refers to the textual elements (messages or information) on media (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). For Silverstone et al., when individuals consume media or a technological product which is involved with information transformation, both the first articulation (the media or the technological object) and the second articulation (the

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[34] Martinet shows that human language includes two aspects - the morphological (semantic) and phonetic (distinctive). The two aspects are important for meaning creation. With these two interdependent structural levels of language, people can convey complex meaning with the pre-given resources. Thus when Martinet speaks of double articulation, he is actually referring to structure. The first articulation for him refers to linguistic signs that convey meaning; while second articulation concerns the phoneme (sound). The two articulations together form the specificity of different words which make up our language (Hartmann, 2006).

text, information or message) are the subjects to be consumed. In this thesis, I will use the technological articulation to refer the material, objective and technological levels of online media; and the textual articulation to refer to the textual, information or message level.

Television is the technological media (television is indeed a technological product in one of the generations, although almost no-one views television in this way) which is used by Silverstone et al. to explain the concept of double articulation. They explain how television is consumed in household according the domestic culture – the way every family consume cultural product with their own ways in their study of ICTs use. They argue that television is the medium that provides information in the household, but television itself is also an object – a technological object – which can be 'used' other than its information function (the example of this aspect will be discussed in follow). Therefore, they demonstrate that 'both the television and television programme are objects to be consumed and to be consumed in ways dependent on the particular cultures of the household' in the process of television consumption (Silverstone et al., 1992:21). The television programme as the object to be consumed has been seen in many reception analyses (e.g. Ang, 1986; Hobson, 1980).Consuming television programmes or other media content, as these studies have shown, involves the reader's interpretation of the media content and their uses of the content for other social and cultural purposes (see Chapter 2).

However, the double articulation approach extends the scope of the reception theory of media from being concerned with the interpretations and uses of media content to the realm of the material, hardware and object aspects (Ang, 1996). As Silverstone suggests, television is meaningful to consumers both in terms of how it is used or placed in the domestic area, or is associated with what other furniture or machines; and is articulated

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to various kinds of discourses (Silverstone, 1990, cited in Ang, 1996:69). For example, in a study of how television is used in Brazilian homes, Ohdina Fachel Leal's (1990) study suggests that television is put in domestic area in coordination with other objects. Leal concludes that this kind of arrangement in a household is a 'display' for the working class to show their imaginations of modernity. Television here is consumed as an object to perform certain symbolic meanings.

Several studies have analysed the consumption of technological media based on the double articulation approach. A study conducted by Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley (1992) developed the concept of double articulation through broader empirical investigations. The study tries to investigate how information communication technologies (ICTs) are appropriated by users' special purposes and incorporated into the existing family structure. Some studies of ICTs use, although they do not emphasize they are based on the double articulation approach, have also investigated the 'technological used' of different ICTs. For example, Leslie Haddon's (1992) study of home computers found that young boys tended to form some competition activities and collective interests (e.g. exchanging experiences of playing computer games and software) through playing computer games; while young girls concentrated less on these aspects. Jane Wheelock (1992) compared the public meaning of buying a personal computer (PC) and its actual usage in a domestic situation. Her study implied that British manufactures in 1980 emphasized the educational aspects of PC in their advertising campaigns. However, when a PC is brought, family members show a range of different perception of using it, from increasing working skills to playing computer games. A more recent study based on the double articulation approach is Silverstone and Haddon's three-year study (1996), which focuses on the consumption of ICTs within different social groups. The three-year serial study provides many interesting

and fruitful accounts of the adoption of media technologies in the everyday lives of different social groups.

One problem for the above double articulation based studies is that most studies seem to face the difficulty of integrating the two levels of articulation in their studies at the same time. Sonia Livingstone indicates that 'doubly-articulated research has proved surprisingly difficulty' (Livingstone, 2007:17). So far, there is little subtle analysis of the combination of the two levels of articulation in investigating of the consumption of technological media (Hartmann, 2006).

The situation is similar in the studies of online media. Livingstone (2007) points out that for studies into digital media study, one must be mindful of the challenge of integrating the two levels of articulation. For Livingstone, these challenges include an analysis of both 'the domestic context of use and the semiotic richness of the online world that people engage in' (Livingstone, 2007:18). Based on the double articulation framework, Livingstone divides the studies of online media into several broader stages. She indicates that the first generation of online media studies prioritises the online world, and explores the playful construction of user's identity online (e.g. Turkle's (1995) study in her book *Life on the Screen*). These studies, in her view, fail to treat the Internet as a medium (or as a technological product) or examine how it is used in the offline world.

Nevertheless, Livingstone (2007) points out that more recently we have seen some more successful analysis that combines the online and off-line worlds, and concentrates more on the use of the Internet in the everyday context. Some also offer an account of the use of the textual content of online media (e.g. Miller and Slater's (2000) ethnographic study of the Internet, and Bakardjieva's (2005) study of Internet use in everyday life). But in these studies, she argues that something such as the richness of

semiotic and discursive account as developed earlier in reception analysis is still missing. In other words, these studies have started to focus on the use of the technological aspect of online media, but have not included discussions on the textual articulation in their studies.

However, the double articulation approach still has certain relevance to our studies of online media consumption. For example, with the emphasis on both the technological and textual aspects of media consumption, the double articulation approach provides us with a more complete framework to exhaust the significance of media consumption (Livingstone, 2007).

Besides, to a certain extent, the approach addresses my concern of media consumption practice, as well. One of the central arguments of the approach seeks to emphasize the context of media consumption; particularly how a medium is used in household – the domestic sphere. Ang (1996) refers to this research trend as the radical contextualisation of media studies. For Silverstone et al., the use of media in the household represents how a cultural artefact or a technological product is consumed according to the private culture which the consumers themselves create in the domestic sphere. This process of media consumption in the domestic sphere means that the public discourse of the media - the meaning of media which is usually created by its producers - is transformed in households (Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992). It is a negotiated process between the private and public definitions of media.

The perspective mentioned above resembles my concern of media consumption practice in this thesis. Ang (1996) points out that the double articulation approach draws our attention of media consumption to a meaning-production cultural practice on two interdependent levels: one is the information reading/reception from reception analysis; the other is the media usage/practice level (Ang, 1996). Hartman (2006:86) also

indicates that the double articulation approach shifts our focus of media studies from the 'textual and semiology analysis to the sociology of media use'. Silverstone himself suggests that the concept of double articulation is driven by the tendency to explore the 'actual practices of media and information technologies use' (Silverstone, Hirsch, & Morley, 1991:208).

In this section, I have briefly introduced the main argument and related research of the double articulation approach. In the following sections, I will examine how online journalism is consumed in relation to the technological and textual articulations. My analysis will begin with two cases of my respondents and their online news consumption practices in the workplace and at home.

Reading online news in the workplace

The world of Internet and online journalism is like Da-Guan-Yuan, and we are like grandmother Lu, who entered Da-Guan-Yuan. Everything is novel and exciting. (Nai-Jing, an insurance agent, male, 35 years old, 13/07/2005)

The above quote is from one of my respondents, Nai-Jing, an office employee. Da-Guan-Yuan was a big garden from the famous Chinese novel *Red Chamber.* In the novel, the garden was owned by a rich family in China in the Manchu Dynasty. In one of the chapters of the novel, a poor farmer, grandmother Lu, was invited to visit the garden. It was the first time in her life that the 70-year-old grandmother had a chance to visit such a big, gorgeous and splendid garden. Everything was so exciting and it astonished her. I start my analysis in this section with Nai-Jing's description of online journalism, in order to show how online news readers recognised the new news media. Nai-jing's view of online journalism represents a general perspective regarding online

journalism, which is usually described as a novel place which is full of new and exciting things and information like the Da-Guan-Yuan garden.

Nai-Jing is the case that I observed at his office. For online news consumption, the workplace seems to be a significant place for our investigation[35]. I visited Nai-Jing in an afternoon when he said he was not very busy. His office is located in Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan. It just looks like a normal office; with staff separated from each other by partitions. At the office, each worker's 'personal space' includes one personal computer with a broadband Internet connection (see Figure 6.1).

Every day, the first thing Nai-Jing does when he gets into his 'personal space' is to switch on the computer and surf the Internet. He normally browses very quickly through the headline news on the major online news websites because he does not have much time in the morning to read all the reports. This quick surfing practice usually takes 10 to 15 minutes and enables Nai-Jing to catch the big news of that day before he starts work. According to Nai-Jing, the 10 to 15 minutes news browsing gives him 'a picture of what is happening that day, and some topics to talk about at lunchtime'.

Although Nai-Jing's company does not officially ban the reading of online news during working hours, the activity is still inappropriate when working. I notice that Nai-Jing did not close the online news website when doing his office work. Conversely, he had several screen windows open while he was working. In his words, to open multiple windows at the same time 'let him catch different content quickly'. Thus, I saw overlapped web pages on Nai-Jing's computer screen. One window was about the work he was doing, one was for checking emails, one for Yahoo messenger (online chat), and another window 'stuck' to stock market news on a news website. The practice of using

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[35] The workplace is significant for this online news consumption study. According to a survey examining American readers' use of online newspapers, most readers read online news from 8am to 4pm within a day, and the average visitors to a news website are higher from Monday to Friday than Saturday and Sunday - which means that working time is a significant period for online news consumption (Aikat, 1998).

multiple windows appears to be one of the features of online news reading.

Figure 6.1 A corner in an online news reader's office

(The picture is taken from the corner of the cubicle of one of my respondents, Nai-Jing. In his office, working space is divided into a small individual units, no one can see the entire office at a glance. Computers and the Internet are the centre of this small space, which also provides a semi-private space for office employees to read online journalism during working hours.)

Nia-Jing told me that he was used to read newspapers every morning, but now online journalism was his major resource of news information because he spent a lot of time (nearly from 9am to 7 pm, sometimes even later) at the office and online journalism is convenient as he can read the news at any time. As he said:

You cannot read a newspaper or watch television news during working

hours because they occupy a space. It is ridiculous to hold a big piece of

newspaper and read at the office while working. However, online

journalism does not have this problem. It does not occupy any space, so I

can read online news any time when I am in my office. (Nai-Jing, an

insurance agent, male, 35 years old, 13/07/2005)

For people who stay nearly the entire day in workplace, online journalism is apparently the ideal media for them to get information and connect to the outside world during their hours of duty. An Nguyen's (2003) study suggested that most offices now include what he calls 'the structural factors' for online news consumption, such as computers, broadband, and free Internet access; which consequently makes office workers spend a significant amount of time doing their personal business, like reading news or checking e-mails. In Nai-Jing's case, the semi-private space provides an environment of presenting different cultural content, such as journalism. This is a common cultural phenomenon in the network society, such that computers and the Internet now have become part of everyday life from the work to leisure spheres (Van Dijk, 1996/2006), and the consumption of information product or other cultural content in the network society is thus largely mediated by related information communication technologies installed at these places. In other words, different technological mechanisms are embedded into the consumer's everyday life, which enable consumers, like Nai-Jing, to access information with almost no limitations on time and space. Nia-Jing can read updated news of the stock market, or check the real-time news report on the Major League Baseball (MLB) game held in U.S.A, his favourite sport - although he cannot watch it because of the time difference between Taiwan and the U.S.A. Now Nai-Jing, through online media, can find out the real-time performance of Jian-Ming Wang, a famous Taiwanese player who is playing baseball in the MLB.

Looking for related news information is the most important part for Nai-Jing's online news reading. He said that scanning online news websites every morning enables him to know about the critical issues of the day. Sometimes the news he reads in the morning is the important issues he talks with his colleagues on his lunch break. As I have indicated, Nai-Jing describes the world of online journalism as a place that is full of information he needs. This kind of consumption can be seen in most online news studies; which suggests that news information reading is one of the frequent actions of people using the online news websites (Salwen, & Abdulla, 2005).

However, we can also see from Nai-Jing's case that online news reading is more than the practice of news information-seeking. For instance, online journalism enables him to 'rearrange' the news reception schedule and get the real-time messages on what he wants to read, so that he does not miss the updated news on his favourite sport or other important issues. This ability to rearrange his news reading schedule and get real-time news involves consuming the technological articulation of online journalism. To sum up, Nai-Jing's case gives us an initial picture of how online news reading combines with the two types of articulation I mentioned earlier. On the one hand, news information - the textual articulation - is the main element of online consumption; and on the other hand, news consumption is interwoven with the use of the technological articulation of online media. The following case from a camera studio host, Sue-Fan, and her online news reading experience, gives us another example, in this respect.

Online news reading and everyday routines

In my observations and interviews with online news readers, Sue-Fan is another interesting case. Her online news consumption practice shows that news information is not the main aspect for her as an online news reader. Furthermore, her online news consumption is integrated into other activities in everyday life.

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Sue-Fan runs a camera studio with her husband. The studio is on the ground floor of her house which is located in southern Taiwan. Although the studio is owned by Sue-Fan and her husband, in fact she covers most of the studio duties. Her husband rarely spends a great deal of time at the studio because he has to take photos for customers outside. Therefore, Sue-Fan stays longer in their 'domestic workplace' longer than her husband. Sue-Fan's daily duty is to develop photos for customers. However, the camera studio is located in a small town, so it is not a very busy business because there are not many customers. Therefore, Sue-Fan has a certain amount of 'free time' to do the things she likes. Surfing different websites is one such activity. The computer that Sue-Fan uses for connecting to the Internet was placed in a slightly dark corner of the studio, so that customers could not see her from outside. It has become a small space for Sue-Fan to enjoy the online world.

Sue-Fan was introduced by one of her customers to me because the customer said that she finds that Sue-Fan accesses the Internet very often - every time she goes to the studio; and the customer wondered what Sue-Fan was doing. When I visited Sue-Fan, she told me that she started to use computer and the Internet because her husband told her that 'people who live in the information society need to know how to use these technologies'. In order to 'live in the era of the information age', she started to learn how to use computer and the Internet. Several years ago, Sue-Fan took some free lessons held by the local government to learn how to use the Internet. She said:

At first, I thought these things were boring but my husband kept warning

me that 'if you do not learn now, you will be left behind'. (Sue-Fan, a

camera studio host, female, 41 years old, 26/08/2005)

After Sue-Fan learnt how to access the Internet, reading online news and other information became one the important activities in her everyday life. Her husband set up MSN.com (http://tw.msn.com/) as the front page on her web browser, so she can link and read different news reports through this portal website. As she indicated:

There are many news reports on MSN.com, for example, a news media called Don-Sen (the Chinese name for ETtoday.com) is the media I use to read. I can watch TV news on Don-Sen also, so I just treat online news as newspapers and television. (Sue-Fan, a camera studio host, female, 41 years old, 26/08/2005)

Sue-Fan said that news information is her favourite topic and 'must read' topic. My observation found that Sue-Fan's online news reading was also associated with various online activities. When surfing online news websites, she checked updated news very often, watched movie trailers on the online news websites; she also read the online fortune-telling on *ETtoday.com*, although she said that she hated this information because the website charges a fee for reading further fortune-telling content.

Sue-Fan likes to send news articles to her husband and friends. She indicated that sometimes she sends news comments to her husband because she thinks the articles are useful to them. She likes to e-mail news reports to her friends because she thinks they might miss the messages. For example, she told me that recently she read a news report about a kind of flu, and she immediately e-mailed the news to her friends who have kids because she thought this was important information for them.

From my observation of Sue-Fan's online news consumption, online news reading is also associated with other offline activities. One aspect is that she incorporates her

online news reading into her everyday life circle. This is a significant practice which I will explain later in this chapter. For Sue-Fan, reading online news and surfing in cyberspace is part of her everyday routine. For example, I asked Sue-Fan: 'Why do you always read online news when you are working, but not read it during breaks?' She replied: 'I think I am taking a break when I read online news.' Obviously the dark, small and Internet-centred corner has become the space that fills Sue-Fan's spare time between work duties. However, she seems to try to hide the computer in a place that her customers cannot see her directly when she reads online news. This action, to me, seems to be an intention to keep the place private, and to discriminate between the online and offline world.

Online journalism reading practices is also serves as a form of social interaction for Sue-Fan, insofar as she sends online news articles to her friends. Specifically, we should say that online news information has become a means for Sue-Fan to maintain social relations with others. It is a way for her to show her concern for her friends.

Moreover, online news reading activity seems to be a practice which enables Sue-Fan to experience modern living. As we have seen, Sue-Fan and her husband define the ability of using online media as a sort of 'living ability' in the information age. Accordingly, using the Internet and reading news information online, for Sue-Fan and her husband, is a kind of practices through which the couple express or perform the idea of living in modern society.

From Sue-Fan's case, again, we see clearly that news information appears not very important, or we should say not the first priority in her online news reading. In my interview with her, she said that she still read newspapers and watched television news as her main source of news. Online journalism provided her with some news, but she only treated online news as a supplement - especially where new updates were

concerned. On a contrary, other online and offline activities play an important part in Sue-Fan's online news consumption. Online news has been consumed by Sue-Fan as the way of marking her rest time from work, an object sent to friends to show her concerns, as well as a symbolic object to express her ability. These online and offline activities link to the use of online journalism as a technological product. For example, it is the technique of digitising news information that enables readers to send and share news information, as an object, to their friends via e-mail. It is obvious that these kinds of online news consumptions are concerned with the technological articulation of online journalism.

The practices of appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion of online journalism

Starting from two cases of people I observed and interviewed, I have indicated some features of online news consumption. The two cases show that online news consumption involves both the technological and textual articulation of the new news media. Following this, I will identify five types of online news consumption in relation to the double articulating features. However, we should firstly ask the question: With what kinds of practices, online journalism, the double-articulated medium, is consumed by online news readers?

Some of these practices are mentioned in my analysis of the prior two cases. I would now like to discuss these in more detail. Four theoretical metaphors – appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion proposed in Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley's (1992) discussion on the use of media technologies in domestic sphere are helpful here to explain how the double-articulated media, such as online journalism, are consumed. The four metaphors represent four moments in the process of online news consumption, which can also be seen as different kinds of practices relating to the

consumption of cultural products. In fact, authors in different articles propose various similar processes of consuming cultural artefacts and media (Silverstone, 1994; Silverstone et al., 1992; Miller, 1991). Here I would like to briefly introduce each metaphor and related studies.

Firstly, 'appropriation' can be simply defined as taking something for one's use. When a cultural artefact or a technological product is sold or leaves the process of production and enters into the domain of consumption, it has been appropriated and becomes the possession of an individual or a household (Silverstone et al., 1992) Appropriation, from some authors' perspectives (Silverstone, 1994; Miller, 1991), has an important role in the whole process of consumption. Through appropriation, consumers transfer the pre-defined production meaning (usually set up by producers) of a product or an object, and consume it according to their own culture and purpose. For example, Daniel Miller (1991) indicates that commerce usually attempts to pre-empt the meaning of a product (or an object) through practices such as advertising; and often relates to the product in terms of general lifestyle, but this does not mean that consumers should always follow the specific meaning of cultural artefacts that advertising or producers have created for them. Conversely, 'it is through consumers' appropriations that artefacts become authentic (commodities become objects) and achieve significance' (Silverstone et al., 1992:21).

The second process of consumption practices is 'objectification'. It is the process through which consumers assign certain values to a cultural artefact or a technological product and use it to display within their own aesthetic or discourse (Silverstone et al., 1992). Through the process, a cultural artefact, a technological product, or even a medium can be a symbolic object of household furnishing; a choice which expresses something about its owner's taste, and communicates that choice, as displayed by its

position (Gell, 1986). Leal's study (1990) of television's displaying function in Brazilian families, which is mentioned in prior discussion, is one of the examples of objectification. Brunsdon's (1991) study of the use of the satellite dish in Britain also provides a fascinating commentary on the symbolic dimension of satellite dish use. She indicates that satellite dish consumption has been treated as low taste when satellite dishes were first erected in Britain (Brunsdon, 1991:33); such that the satellite dish became a symbol signifying the conspicuous consumption of a certain kind of poverty. In the above studies, it is clear that the use of media technologies is attached to some values or symbolic meanings in the process of consumption.

In addition to the symbolic meaning, some media and technologies are consumed as a functional object to support or reinforce the existing structure of routine life. This process is labelled as 'incorporation'. Through this process, a medium or a technological product could be brought with some features, but which is subsequently used to support family activities or other purposes related to the consumer's routine activities. Scholars have offered fruitful studies of how media technologies are used, in this respect (Morley, 1986; Lull, 1990). For example, a television might be bought for the purposes of information or entertainment in some families, but is used as a background sound while family activities are taking place and the television set is on at the same time (Lull, 1990). Under these circumstances, television is not consumed according to its original purpose, but is used to incorporate the family activities and to mark the special 'family time'. Certain studies also show that the use of technologies is incorporated into the existing power relationships between family members. Morley's (1986) study of television viewing in household suggests that the control of the TV remote control usually reflects the family member's status.

The final concept is 'conversion', which refers to the use of media and

technological objects to bridge and maintain the relationship between the consumers'

interpersonal relationships in society at large. Silverstone et al. (1992) argue that

through conversion, the meaning of media or a technological product moves from the

private arena (e.g. household) to the public realm. Television is an example that is often

used to explain the process. For some consumers, watching television programmes and

news enables them to get to the source of everyday conversation and gossip with people

in their peer group (Silverstone, 1994). Some computer programs or technological

products can also be consumed in this way. For instance, some consumers use their

music collections, software programs or other technological artefacts as a 'ticket' giving

them entry into peer-group culture, where they can share resources and exchange ideas

(see Figure 6.2 the iMac computer group at the office). A similar outcome can also be

seen in some news consumption studies (see the discussion in Chapter 2). These studies

show that one of the meanings of journalism to audiences - as many existing studies

have shown - is that people use it as the topic for everyday conversation - which gathers

people together through the discussion of related news issues (Berelson, 1948; Bird,

2003).

I have briefly introduced the four processes of practices related to the consumption

of media and technological products. The double articulation features of online news

consumption are displayed through these different processes of practices. To a certain

extent, these consumption practices imply one of my arguments in this thesis, such that

in the process of cultural circuit, meaning-making is an ongoing process. I have

indicated that through appropriation, incorporation, objectification and conversion,

people consume media or technological products in their own ways. Likewise, for

online journalism, its meaning does not end at the production side, but extends into the

consumption domain. Through different consumption practices, online news readers

make online journalism construct their personal meanings according to their own culture.

Figure 6.2 The iMac group at the office

(The photo is from the website of my respondent which shows a group of iMac computers at the office. In this office, people who use Macintosh computers put their machines together to show that they all belong to the 'Macintosh family')

In my analysis below, I will outline five types of online news consumption, as follows: (1) habitual consumption; (2) innovative consumption; (3) social interactive consumption; (4) information-searching (a goal-directed online news reading); and (5) information-wandering (a ludic and arbitrary online news reading). The first three types are related to the technological articulation of online news and the latter two practices are related to the textual articulation. It is worth noting that my categorisation here does not mean that all types of online news reading are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, we can find different types of online news consumption in one reader simultaneously. As practices theory suggests, a social practices usually organises other practice (see Chapter 1). The five types of online news consumption also organise different practices. These types of online news consumption do not only organise the practices of

appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion of online news media, they also connect to other routinely activities in online news readers' everyday lives. I will discuss these practices in follow.

Habitual consumption of online journalism

From my empirical investigation, I found that online news consumption is often embedded in a reader's everyday routine and becomes a 'must do' activity. Reading online journalism is considered as one of the many repetitious tasks consumers carry out, consciously or unconsciously, in their everyday lives. I call this the habitual consumption of online journalism.

For habitual consumption, online news media is usually appropriated to be incorporated in a 'special moment' within reader's everyday routines. A full-time mother, Mai-Yue, said that reading online news was her 'private time' after she had finished all household chores. The mother has a five-year-old boy who has an unusual blood disease, so she quit her job to take care of her son. She told me that she can only read online news when her son is sleeping:

I do not have a fixed schedule for online news reading, because I have a kid. I spend most of my time taking care of him, and I can only have my own time when my kid is sleeping [...] and this is the time when I can do what I like [...] so I can only have a short time to read online news. (Mai-Yue, a full-time mother, female, 35 years old, 25/07/2005)

For Mai-Yue, the significant meaning of online news reading does not only rest in the textual articulation, but also in the technological articulation. Online news reading is a routine activity to sustain the rhythm of her everyday living and appropriated to mark

her 'private moment' – the moment without her kind around her. This use of online journalism seems to confirm findings from some existing news consumption studies. Bausinger's (1984) influential article *Media, technology and daily life* proposes an illustrative example, in this respect. He indicates that readers usually complain if their morning newspaper is not delivered. This kind of complaint is not because of missing news content, but also because that missing newspaper affects reader's order of life when reading newspaper every morning has become a ritual; proving that breakfast time is still in order (see also the discussion in Chapter 2). Hermes (1995) indicates that Bausinger's study implies one of the functions of news consumption - which is that news reading practices are a 'mark of confirmation' . To readers, the meaning of a missing newspaper is because that the missing newspaper might disrupt the routine activities of readers' everyday lives.

Unlike other news media, online journalism provides a more flexible and simple way to reorganise the schedule of online news reading, which fits with consumers' everyday routines. Readers would not complain about their missing morning newspaper or a programme broadcasted at a specific time, because they can create their own special moments through reading online journalism. The insurance agent, Nai-Jing, mentioned earlier in this chapter, is one such example. In Nai-Jing's case, we have seen that he usually read online news during working hours. However, in contrast to leisure time, work time at the office has a more organised structure. There is precise timetable for starting work, taking lunch breaks and getting off from work. Online journalism helps Nai-Jing to organise his news reading during office time. He gave me an example of how online news enables him to get the real-time results of his favourite sport, - Major League Baseball (MLB):

It is hard for me to get the news of the result of MLB, because it is held in

U.S. The game might start from 7am to 10am. I can neither know the

outcome of the game from the morning paper of that day, nor from

television because I might be at my office at the time. However, through

online journalism, I can see the photos of the game and know the real-time

outcome. (Nai-Jing, an insurance agent, male, 35 years old, 30/03/2006)

Another example is a student, Li-Ying, who studies in the U.K. when I interviewed her (on 20//00/2007). She said that she prefers to read Taiwanese news via the Internet before going to bed because it is morning in Taiwan at that time and most of the online news websites in Taiwan have just updated the news[36]. Therefore, reading Taiwanese news via the Internet has become an 'end of the day' activity for her. By doing this, Li-Ying knows if there are any important stories in their home town, and then she can go to sleep without concerns.

The two cases I used above reveal that from readers' perspectives, online journalism offers flexibility in terms of the time of reading. It helps readers to transform and overcome the limitations of space and time, which is what John Thompson refers to as the capability of 'space-time reordering' (J. B. Thompson, 1995:31). Through this capability, readers can read online news according to their own schedule; and this makes online news reading easier to be incorporated into their respective everyday structures. Additionally, online journalism is a kind of cultural product which breaks down spatial barriers; allowing people in different geographical regions to read same news at the same time.

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[36] The reason that most Taiwanese online news websites release their new reports in early morning between 4 am and 6 am is because these news websites usually share news reports with their print counterparts (usually morning newspapers) and early morning is the time that the morning paper is printed and distributed.

The habitual consumption has effects on online news production. In Chapter 4, I have indicated that news flow on online news websites is sometimes arranged intentionally to fit consumers' everyday living rhythms. Through the observation of web traffic, online news producers get information on readers' online news reading habits. For instance, office hours or lunch hours are apparently two important times when most people read online news. Thus, news updates are more frequent at these times. Other conventional news media have clear intervals in their news coverage - such as morning newspapers or evening television news, and so forth. Online journalism breaks down the conventional timeframe of news and tries to create a dynamic news flow on news websites. That is, online news producers try to use different symbolic clues to remind readers that news stories are continuously updated on their websites.

These features aim to satisfy those readers who like to check news updates on news websites. Many respondents in my study said that they checked news updates in order to follow the progress of a story - particularly when important news happens. Kuo-Shing, an information technology manager, said that he accessed online news websites regularly when there was a big disaster such as typhoon approaching. In my interview with online news producers (see Chapters 4 & 5), they know, by checking the web traffic and CTN, at some 'special times' people are eager to get news from online journalism sources. At this time, online news producers tend to 'produce' more related news reports or continue using breaking news on their websites.

Innovative consumption of online journalism

For many respondents, the Internet and online journalism are given certain 'symbolic values', which represents advancement and modernity. This is achieved through the objectified process of online news media. In my observations and interviews, I notice that both online news media and its content are aligned to readers'

perspectives of the information age. Reading online news is treated as a kind of practice in modern society for some readers. Online media itself is also a technological product for the information age for them. I call them the 'innovative consumers of online journalism'. That is, for some readers, using and reading online news media is actually constitutes a form of self-expression as advanced and fashion people. For instance, the camera studio owner, Sue-Fan, asserted that knowing how to use online media was the basic living capability in the information age.

The symbolic meaning of online news reading can be traced back to particular social and cultural backgrounds in Taiwan. The term 'technology' in Taiwan is linked to advancement and progress in the government's discourse. In Chapter 3, I have analysed how the government adopts different projects and plans to encourage computer use and the Internet, which in the meantime was linked to the penetration of computer usage and Internet access in the nation's development. To a certain extent, the government's policy of technology gives technological objects a special social status in the whole of Taiwanese society.

It is very interesting that although many respondents in my study complained that online new information was too shallow, too simple and full of mistakes; some of them still valued online news for its speed, fashion and abundance of information. The activity of reading online news has been symbolised to a kind of expression of their ability to control news information ahead of others; and is also used to discriminated themselves to others. In other words, online news media and related reading practices have been attached to some values here.

A senior high school student, Shi-Xuan, said that online journalism enabled him to get more real-time international news because he could go to some foreign websites directly. Interestingly, he attributed his foreign news reading practices to the perspective

of modern life, as he stated:

I think it is necessary for citizens in modern society to be concerned with what happens all over the world [...] I do not want the information I get to be limited to Taiwan, and I do not want delayed information. Online news helps me to get plenty of foreign information and extend my view. (Shi-Xuan, a high school student, male, 18 years old, 29/07/2005)

Reading foreign news websites directly is also an expression of language ability. When I interviewed Shi-Xuan, he appeared to very proud of his English ability which enables him to read foreign news without any difficulty. English in Taiwan in has been seen as the most important second language a student has to learn from primary school to college. People who can speak English fluently will usually be linked to internationalism - a value which is praised by the whole society. Here we can see, again, that online news reading incorporates some values which comply with some expectations of Taiwanese society. Online journalism provides readers with the environment to express these social expectations - such as language ability and international vision.

For some respondents, online journalism itself possesses a higher 'social value' than broadcasting news media. This is because a great proportion of online news content is still text-based and most people in Taiwan think that reading the written word is superior to watching images. As a result, television news thereby is often described as superficial and noisy by some respondents. A former school teacher, Qiao-Lun, pointed out that she thought television news in Taiwan was too noisy and that she could not even watch it for five minutes. Qiao-Lun described television news as a 'violent medium',

thus:

You are forced to accept the news information from television, for example

last time I went outside and there was a television in a public place that

was reporting news about a marriage abuse of a movie star, and I was

forced to hear that news even though I was not interested in the news at all.

(Qiao-Lun, a junior high school teacher, female, 27 years old, 23/07/2005)

In contrast, newspapers, based largely on written content, have been seen as being of higher quality than television news, according to some respondents. Many respondents said that they could read newspapers quietly and without pressure. The only problem with newspapers is that the information on it is late and is not updated as often. Online journalism seems to fill the gap between broadcasting media and print media. It enables readers to get updated news and to read news according to their own daily rhythm.

In my interview, several respondents - especially those younger respondents of my study - used the term 'heavy addict to the Internet' to describe their online news consumption. Normally, the term is used negatively to describe an Internet user. The term 'Internet addict' could refer to a psychological problem. However, when my respondents confessed to being heavy Internet addicts, they showed no guilt at all. On the contrary, they appeared to be very proud of this. It is quite clear that using the Internet and reading online news is a practice through which they discriminate themselves from others. For them, getting news from the Internet is the activity for advanced people in the information society and watching television news or reading newspaper, on the contrary, represents 'old-fashioned' or 'outdated'.

Social interactive consumption of online news

Many studies have suggested that news information in some respects is consumed for the purpose of social interaction. In my interviews and observations, I found that some respondents treated online news reading as a means of social connection. The following quote from one of my respondents, Xin-Ru, a female sales clerk, provides us an example of this kind of consumption:

I read online news because I feel life sometimes is too boring. Everyone just lives in a very narrow space. Through online journalism, I can read news that is happening far away from my home town. It likes a 'hand' that helps you to connect to the outside world and the world that you cannot reach physically. (Xin-Ru, a sales clerk, female, 25 years old, 02/08/2005)

Xin-Ru lived in a small rented room during the period I interviewed her. For her, reading online journalism is a way, perhaps the most important way, to 'connect' to the outside world. Her case shows that consuming online journalism can be an alternative form of social interaction. Similar to Xin-Ru, many respondents in my study used online news media as a means of social interaction. One significant online technology related to this is the different range of interactivity on online news websites. In many online news studies, interactivity has been treated as an important feature of online journalism; providing opportunities for online news readers to establish contact with producers (see the discussion in Chapter 2). However, my study found that the interactivity of online journalism, to a certain extent, is appropriated and extends to other social uses.

Xin-Ru's experience shows that online journalism, like other news, possesses the

function of reassurance and surveillance (Silverstone, 1994). That is, by reading and watching news reports, people get certain safe feelings and confirmations. This is similar to some journalism studies based on the uses and gratifications approach (see Chapter 2). For example, the readers I interviewed usually asserted that reading online news after a busy working day was the time for them to get to know 'what other people do in Taiwan on the same day'. A male graduate student, Chi-Kuo, said that he read online news every day, because this made him feel safe. As he indicated:

After taking a shower every morning, I read online news no matter what I am going to do that day [...] I get a feeling of safety after I've read the news. (Chi-Kuo, a MA student, male, 26 years old, 08/08/2005)

As I have stated, the different functions of interactivity of online journalism seems to be a significant reason that the news media is adopted a means of social connection and reassurance by readers. Here, we can use the classification of interactivity proposed by Deuze (2001) in his analysis of online news websites as an analytical framework. Deuze outlines three common types of interactivity on news websites: (1) navigational interactivity, such as the 'next page' and 'back to top' button or scrolling menu-bars on news website; (2) functional interactivity, such as hypertext, web search engines and one-way e-mail to news producers; (3) adaptive interactivity, such as online chartrooms, online forums and customized news content.

These different ranges of interactivity discriminates the social use of online journalism from other conventional news media. Most of my respondents indicated that by using different types of interactivity on a news website, they found alternative forms of social interaction. Let us go back to the opening case in this section, Xin-Ru. She

asserted that surfing the Internet and reading online news did not only constitute an 'extension of her hand', but also made her feel that she was 'living with other people'. She told me that by selecting different links and searching (the functional interactivity), and she could find many news reports which might not see in newspapers or on television news. Chi-Kuo, a graduate student, also told me that he preferred online journalism because he could find out the latest news he wanted to read through a search engine.

The adaptive interactivity on news websites is used to maintain the reader's offline relationship and keep them interactive with other online news readers. One example in my study is Shove-Fong, a middle-aged female who was used be a secretary at an insurance company. She told me that she liked to send the news she read on news websites to her friends via e-mail:

When I was still a secretary, the first thing I did every morning after I arrived at my office was read online news. If I found any news stories that I thought my colleagues should know, I sent them to them immediately by e-mail. My colleagues were pleased to receive my e-mail. Once a colleague told me that my 'news email' did him a big favour, because his boss asked him about the news just after I sent the same story to him. My colleague said that if he hadn't received my e-mail, he wouldn't have understood what his boss was talking about. (Shove-Fong, a former secretary of an insurance company, female, 42 years old, 10/03/2006)

The use of online news information to maintain the offline relationship in fact involves a different process of the consumption practices I have identified earlier in this

chapter. Firstly, online news information, as my prior analysis showed, represents updated and advanced information for readers. It makes online news information easier to be appropriated as an ideal talking topic for daily conversation because of its efficiency, where getting the news first-hand is concerned. A former teacher, Qiao-Lun, informed me that she was always able to find the latest and most important information on news websites – and that this information usually informed the topics that her friends discussed in their everyday leisure conversations (Qiao-Lun, a junior high school teacher, female, 27 years old, 23/07/2005).

Secondly, the use of a different range of interactivity for maintaining offline relations is also related to the objective process of online news information. My cases reveal that sending news information to friends via e-mail does not only have the aim of sharing information, but it also includes social meanings - such as caring and exchanging opinions. This kind of consumption practice shifts the innate character of news information to that of an object that can be used socially. It is rare for conventional news media to be used in this way. Newspaper or television news might provide people with topics for daily conversation, but it is hard for people to cut a newspaper or record a news programme and send it to their friends on a daily basis.

Thirdly, the use of adaptive interactivity on news websites is sometimes linked to the process of conversion. This can be seen in some online discussion boards, whereby discussion groups are formed temporarily, in response to many news topics. These news groups are grounded in news issues which can last a very long time. Through this consumption, online news readers gradually establish or re-confirm an identity of belonging to a special online community. For example, Nai-Jing, the insurance agent, said that he joined an online news group that discusses about Jang-Ming Wang, a famous Taiwanese baseball player in MLB. Wang is one of the few Taiwanese players

in MLB, and has a lot of fans in Taiwan. Nai-Jing said that he joined the news group

when he read some online news reports about Wang; and found that many of Wang's

fans left messages and comments. Nai-Jing expressed that:

I think that Wang is the 'glory of Taiwan', and all Taiwanese should give

him their support. As a Taiwanese and fan of Wang, I also want to show

Wang my support. (Nai-Jing, an insurance agent, male, 25 years old,

13/07/2005)

In my previous analysis, I proposed three different types of online news

consumption. These types of consumption are mostly associated with the technological

articulation of online journalism, such as using hypertext, web search engines and a

different range of interactivity. In my following analysis, I will analyse online news

consumption ascribed to another articulation – the textual articulation. Seeking out

news information is still the major practice for readers, although my analysis has shown

that online news consumption includes many non-informational uses and purposes. I

put this major consumption practices after the consumption of technological aspect

because using online technologies has a profound impact on the reception and

interpretation of online news information. This aspect will be examined in my

following analysis.

The information-searcher's goal-directed online news reading

In many online news reading studies, online news readers are usually described as

'reading shallow but wide, while at the same time pursuing selected topics in depth'

(Aikat, 1998:94). A study based on the uses and gratifications approach finds that online

news readers conduct two conflicting reading practices – information-scanning (taking

an overview of the news website and learning about the major news stories of the day) and information-skimming (going directly to important news stories and seeking out important news) (Salwen & Abdulla, 2005). However, the results of these studies are contradictory. Michael Salwen & Rasha Abdulla (2005) find that information-scanning consumption is more strongly identified with online news reading; whereas the information-skimming consumption is more strongly associated with offline news media (e.g. newspapers).

In my study, I found that scanning and skim-reading in an online news environment are not contradictory practices. One reader may conduct both kinds of reading in his online news reading. Here I prefer to use the terms 'information-searcher' and 'information-wanderer' to describe the two types of online news reading. The information searchers in my study are those who read online news with specific purposes. In other words, their online news reading is usually goal-directed and seeks out special topics in the online news environment. Conversely, the information-wanderer reads online news with more arbitrary attitude. This kind of reading is often described as 'surfing or browsing' news, rather than actually 'reading' it. I will firstly discuss the information-searcher in this section and then the information-wanderer in the next section.

With a special topic in mind, the information-searcher commonly admitted to reading online journalism in order to search for special issues or get detailed news which they were unable to find via other news media. Therefore, the information searchers often described themselves as 'active readers'. For example, a manager from a public relations company, Hui-Ying, told me that she only read online news when she needed to. As soon as she got what she wanted, she would leave the computer screen immediately. Hui-Ying agreed that online news was faster, information-rich and

convenient though she thought she did not have time to 'hang out' on the Internet for longer. She is curious as to why some people can surf the Internet for such a long time every day.

Researchers have suggested that the information-searcher's goal-directed reading is related to some special forms of online journalism. For example, authors have indicated that it is easier to find information on news websites (Lin & Jeffers, 2001; Salwen & Abdulla, 200) because 'online news content is usually presented in an organised fashion, where a number of news categories typically provides an intuitive lead for readers to seek news content spanning different interests' (Salwen & Abdulla, 2005:231). This aspect is confirmed in my studies. A former school teacher, Qiao-Lun, described online journalism as being like a 'Yellow Pages' which enables her to find what she wants quickly and easily:

I feel that online journalism is like a Yellow Pages, it allows you to find out everything you want to read...you can find in-depth things and if you do not have time, you can just surf it... you can also decide very quickly what you need and what you do not. (Qiao-Lun, a junior high school teacher, female, 27 years old, 23/07/2005)

Using different online media technologies to fulfil one's information needs is common in the information-searcher's online news reading. These practices prove that textual articulation is linked to the technological articulation in the process of online news reading. The following description from a high school student, Shi-Xuan, about his habit of reading online journalism, gives us a vivid picture of how different online media technologies are interwoven in the information-searcher's online news reading:

*I like to read foreign news on online news websites, because other news
media do not provide sufficient international news. Usually I access the
online news websites or some portal websites like Taiwan Yahoo and link
directly [through hypertext] to the foreign news pages. If I find that the
foreign news on the Taiwanese websites does not satisfy me, I link to some
foreign news websites such as the BBC or CNN, where I can read more
updated news [....] I also subscribe to some special electronic newspapers.
These newspapers are sent via e-mail and I only have to focus on what I am
interested in [...]. The web searching function is also convenient in online
journalism. For example, recently I was interested in the some political
issues, such as the argument over the rights of the sovereignty of the Fish
Islands[37], but I found that the mainstream news media in Taiwan hardly
reported this issue at all. However, through a web search engine, I could
find a lot of articles on some smaller news websites. (Shi-Xuan, a high
school student, male, 18 years old, 29/07/2005)*

The above quote reveals that the information-searcher's online news consumption is
associated with a series of online media technologies uses. As we have seen from
Shi-Xuan's online news reading experience, hypertext enables him to break through the
geographical barriers and access foreign news websites immediately. Besides, the web
search engines and the customised electronic newspaper also help him to find the
special topics he prefers to read; and allow him to filter out the information he does not

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[37] The Fish Islands are located in the ocean near Taiwan, China, and Okinawa (Japan). The three
governments all proclaim their sovereignty of the islands. Disputes and debates have been ongoing
since the Second World War.

want. Shi-Xuan said to me: 'I do not have to read news that is controlled by the mainstream news media on the Internet, I can find the news I want'.

To sum up, the use of online media technologies in reading helps the information-searcher to break down some limitations of the printed and broadcast media - such as time, space and news flow. The information-searchers in the online news environment do not have to obey any timetable of publishing or broadcasting news which is set up by the news producers. They can read news information at a time of their choosing and do not have to wait for the morning newspaper or the next round of television news. They can overcome the limitation of space and search for news information on different news websites. Nai-Jing, the insurance agent, described himself as an 'active receiver', thus:

Reading online journalism makes me become an active receiver. I can read only the content that I am interested in. For news that I do not have any interest in, I can just pass over it. But for other news media, such as television news, if you miss some news, you might have to wait for the next time they broadcast it. (Nai-Jing, an insurance agent, male, 35 years old, 13/07/2005)

The information-wanderer's ludic and arbitrary online news reading

The information-wanderer's online news reading can be described as 'ludic and arbitrary'. By ludic, I mean a playful practice in a random way. The term 'arbitrary' means a capricious, unreasonable practice, such that the practices are determined by chance and do not follow any special rules or laws. Thus, for the information-wanderer, reading online news usually does not have any specific purpose related to what they really want to read. They just link and surf, website by website and story by story.

Some studies have addressed the information-wanderers' reading behaviour in the online news environment. Wilson, Hamzah, and Khattab's study (2003) asserted that online news reading tends to produce non-serious, easy-going, and pleasure-seeking consumers. Mireille Rosello (1994) uses the term 'wanderer' to describe the reader's reading practices in a hypertextual space. He analogises the hypertextual space on the Internet as an 'electronic map' which comprises different routes and directions designed for travellers. However, readers in this hypertextual space do not act with any plan in advance, nor do they follow the pre-established routes or directions set up by the map's producers.

Rosello's discussion on readers and the hypertextual space can be also used to describe the information-wanderers' practice in the online news environment. Online journalism is fundamentally founded on a hypertextual structure. Although online news producers try to set up the reading trajectories on their websites (see Chapter 4 & 5), readers can still read news ludicly and arbitrarily with their own routes with the association of different online media technologies and forms. The sales clerk, Xin-Ru, said that normally she did not have a particular topic in mind when surfing a news website. Conversely, she preferred to try different links and used a web search engine to surf the Internet. The following description from Xin-Ru reflects a typical information-wanderer's online news reading practices:

I usually start from some special headline news that I am interested in, and then I may click the hypertext to link to some related information. In so doing, I can link to more information [...] if I remember something I heard that day I might stop the news I am reading for a while and search the topic. For example, yesterday when I was surfing on a news website, I

remembered my friend told me there was a kind of strange germ that eats

people's feet in Taiwan, so I stopped what I was reading and searched on

the news site. Later, I discovered that it was just a rumour and I stopped

reading the report and started to browse other news websites again.

(Xin-Ru, a sales clerk, female, 25 years old, 02/08/2005)

From Xin-Ru's online reading practices, we can see that there is no rule for the reading practices of the information-wanderers. They just select what they want to read randomly. There is also, theoretically, no boundary for them on the 'electronic map'. That is, their reading practices shuttle between different websites, genres (journalistic or non-journalistic) and texts.

The information-wanderer's reading is also embedded with a special 'multiple-window (screen) culture' of computer-based media. This multiple-window culture is common when observing online news reader's reading practices. Figure 6.3 is a picture of one of my respondents, Shu-Yuan. The picture was taken when Shu-Yuan, a newspaper journalist, was working at her home. In this picture, we see that while working with her laptop, Shu-Yuan had switched on another computer to search and read online news. My observation of some respondents' found that their readings were often accompanied by multiple windows. One open window represented one of their online activities. An example is a young journalist, Jing-Zi, who liked to read online news together with other online 'fun activities', according to her:

I am very busy when I read online journalism. I usually open many

windows on my computer screen. Perhaps one for online news site, one for

downloading music, and one for chatting online with my friends [...] my

highest record is having 7 to 8 windows open at the same time. When

opening one window, I switch to open another window because this can

save downloading time [...]. I can also read different online newspapers at

the same time. (Jing-Zi, a newspaper journalist, female, 28 years old,

05/08/2005)

Jing-Zi's reading habits suggests that for the information-wanderer, online news reading combined with news reading, entertainment (download music) and social interactions (online chatting) on the same computer screen. Every screen window she opened represented one task or activity she was doing. It is through this multiple-window culture, Jing-Zi can do different practices at the same time when reading online news. This aspect, again, provides further evidence that online news reading involves textual articulation (reading news) and technological articulation (appropriating and interoperating online news media with other purposes and activities).

Figure 6.3 Multiple screens of online news reading
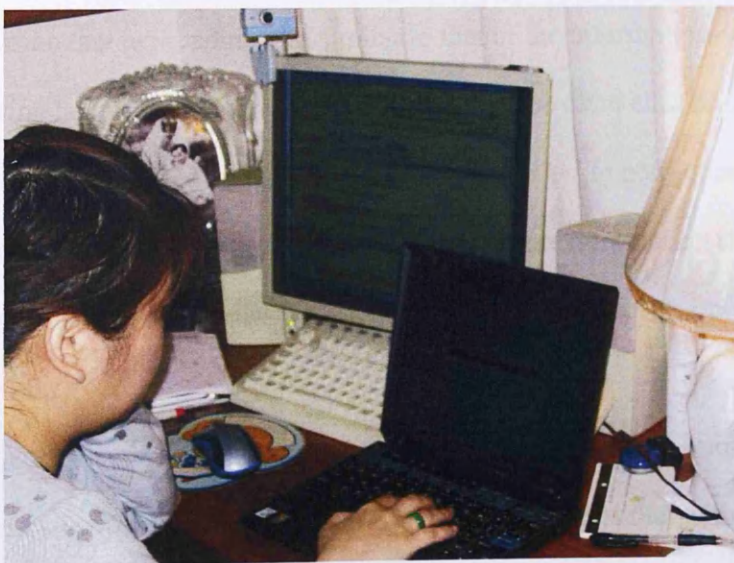
Both the information-searcher and the information-wanderer's reading practices have a profound influence on online news production. As I have noted in Chapter 5, a reader's reading tracks in the online news environment can now be monitored by some technological mechanisms. My interviews with online news producers in Chapter 5 have revealed that a news website's hypertextual structure stands in opposition to the commercial interests of the investors in news websites. When readers or media scholars such as Dan Gillmor (2004a; 2004b) celebrate that online media has liberalised and empowered news readers, online news producers have made a concerted effort to encourage online news readers to stay longer on their news websites. Therefore, as I have shown in Chapter 5, online news producers adopt different strategies in order to make online news readers following the reading order they have set up for them.

In my observations, I noticed that some online news readers seemed to rely on these pre-established reading orders. For example, Mai-June, a female bank employee, was attracted by different 'clues' on news websites when surfing online news. These clues included some text with vivid colours, images, or hypertext with exaggerated wording. She told me that her online news reading was usually aimless - which gave me the impression that her reading was similar to that of the information-wanderer. By observing her online news reading, I noticed that she often clicked on those information clues but later realised that some of these clues led her to non-journalistic information. However, Mai-June told me that she knew that some information she read was 'fake', but she did not mind because for her reading online news was merely a way to spend her spare time.

The implication of Mai-June's case is that online news does not guarantee that readers can really be liberalised and empowered. It seems that in the online news

environment, online news consumption and production can be more accurately described as a negotiated process. My cases have suggested online news readers' active consumption practices are conducted in a highly complicated hypertextual space. Thus, at many times, their active consumption is constrained in an elaborated design environment which is embedded in a system of market values (see Chapter 5). However, the issue of the relationship between consumption and production is diverse and is one of the critical issues of this thesis, so I will dedicate more discussion to it in the next chapter.

Interpretation and online news reading

I have introduced the different uses and reading practices of online journalism in the previous sections. These different types of usages and readings show a diverse picture of online news consumption practices. I separate the different types of online news consumption practices in this chapter for analytical purposes. In fact, these different practices in the process of online news consumption might show up in turns. For example, studies have shown that in-depth news reading (information-searching) and news-scanning (information-wandering) in online newspapers takes place at the same time when readers read different stories and web pages (Holmqvist, Holsanova, Barthelson, & Lundqvist, 2003).

One important question raised here is: How do these different types of consumption practices relate to online news interpretation and the reader's understanding of a news event? We should ask, as Livingstone (2007) suggests, how readers interpret news media genres - like online journalism - through their selecting, clicking, scrolling and typing in the online environment. In this respect, in my following analysis, I will focus on the relationship between online news consumption practices and the reader's interpretation of online news content. In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature related to this

work (e.g. for example, Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model and Morley's (1980) study of the BBC news programme *Nationwide*). It should be noted here that I adopt a focus in my analysis of reader's interpreting practices that differs from the approaches of existing studies. In most existing studies of the reader's interpretation of media content, authors tend to focus on the relationship between media audience's social and cultural background and their different interpretations of media content (S. Hall, 1973; Morley, 1980). However, my aim here is to show an overall scenario of the reader's interpreting activities in online journalism; as well as how these interpreting activities related to the use of online media.

From my interviews, I found that both the reading practices from the information-searchers and the information-wanderers displayed a different range of interpreting activities. The following example is from one of my observation cases, a middle-aged couple, Yue-Long (the husband) and Hui-Ying (the wife). It gives us a picture of the relationship between online news reading practices and news interpretation activities.

When I visited the couple's house, I asked them to turn on their computers and showed me their favourite online news websites. Yue-Long bookmarked the websites he visited most frequently in his 'My Favourites' folder. The folder contained the web addresses of many journalistic and non-journalistic websites, which enabled Yue-Long to connect to these websites quickly. One practice from Yue-Long's online news reading interested me when I observed him, which was that very often he seemed to check the same news topic on different news websites. I asked him: Why do you read the same news topic but different reports in different website? He replied:

I want to check out if there are any 'inside stories' in the other newspapers

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because I find out that different news media usually have different angles when they report on the same news events. By reading different online newspapers, I can get a more complete picture of the news. (Yu-Long, a TV programme, male, 37 years old, 21/08/2005)

Hui-Ying also asserted that online journalism was convenient because readers were able to scan quickly different news websites, which enables her to compare different news reports. She said:

Sometimes when I read a story from one website, I am interested in how other media report the same news. It is very funny that many times I find out that different websites might report a news event with total different angles and headlines. I do not know which one is truth. However, online journalism is easier for me to compare different news reports, and I can 'fit all the pieces of the jigsaw together. (Hui-Ying, a chief director of a public relation company, 35 years old, 21/08/2005)

The couple's reading practices imply that the online news reader's searching, linking and surfing practices appear to be an interpreting process, as well. Yue-Long and Hui-Ying's online news reading seems to represent the two different readings I have stated in my previous analysis. Yue-Long's reading is more like the practice of the information-wanderer when I observed him; whereas Hui-Ying's quote above indicates that her approach is similar to the practices of the information-searcher. However, both their reading practices included the interpreting processes of online news content. Their reading experience revealed that online journalism provides an intertextual

environment for them to compare, judge, accept or reject the meaning produced by news producers; and bring their own understandings and meanings to a news story. This is similar to Hall's (1973) negotiated interpretation model, which argues that in the receiving process of media content, readers tend to partly accept and partly refuse the content, and in the meantime yield their own interpretations of it. Additionally, the couple's case has suggested that the information-wanderer's online news surfing might not be completely meaningless. On the contrary, their browsing on an Internet space, as Rosello (1994:137) suggests, 'is a work of creating and composing their own text'.

In the online news environment, the work of creating and composing text can be a process whereby readers look for their own version of the truth of a given news story. This interpretation is supported by the couple's quotes, which imply that the purpose of their comparing the different versions of news reports is to check the different angles of a news story, and get the complete picture.

To make my viewpoint clearer, here I use another case –that of a journalist, Jin-Zi, to present how the intertextual environment influences an online news reader's interpretation of a news story. Jin-Zi is a journalist working for a financial online newspaper. She told me an example about how she collected reporting angles on different online news websites and generated her own understanding of the news. The news story was of a Taiwanese supermodel, Lin, who had an accident when she was filming a commercial in China. The news was classified as an entertainment item at first, but it soon became a 'political issue' when the supermodel refused to be treated in China due to her distrust in the local medical standards of quality. The supermodel's family demanded a charter flight from Taiwan on the grounds that it was an emergency. The family's decision to cause a dispute in China encouraged many Chinese people to attribute the supermodel's decision to her political stance – which was in opposition to

that of the Chinese government (the supermodel had never revealed her political persuasion in public but her family is close to the DPP (the political party) in Taiwan, the party that confronts the Chinese government).

Jing-Zi said that she read the news at first on the *ETtoday.com* website, which had been categorised by the website as news about entertainment. However, after she read more reports from other websites, she found that some reports mentioned the supermodel's political position and her family's relationship with the DPP. By browsing all the reports about the supermodel on the online news websites, Jing-Zi said that she knew more about the news, insofar as the news was not just an entertainment story but was also related to some political issues. For example, she pointed out that some news websites mentioned that the 'charter flight' was a big problem because as yet, there are no direct flights between Taiwan and China because of the political conflict between them.

The cases of the couple and Jin-Zi discussed above addresses the relationship between online news media and readers' interpretation of the news; such that different forms of online media and technologies (e.g. hypertext and web search engines), to a certain extent, facilitate the reader's intertextual interpretation of news. This seems to be significant to the news consumption practices in the Taiwanese context. In Chapter 3, I analysed Taiwanese people's low level of trust in news media. The reason for this distrust in news media is caused by the close relationship between the media and the ruling political party, as well as the commercialisation of news media. Under these circumstances, comparing different versions of the same news story seems to be important for news consumers.

This intertextual interpretation which is associated with the use of online news media has also been recognised by some respondents, as an important way to confront

the domination of the mainstream news media. One of my respondents, Shove-Fong, said that there were many different newspapers at her office that the company subscribed to, but that in the past, she had not had the motivation to read and compare reports from different newspapers. In the online news environment, she is now able to browse different news websites easily and quickly. This helps her to get to the 'truth' behind the news reports, as she explains, below:

I have read the United Daily (one of the popular newspapers in Taiwan) for almost 10 years. I found I was 'poisoned' by the newspaper very seriously. I mean my mind and thoughts were influenced by the newspaper. But when I started to read online journalism, suddenly I found there can be so many different viewpoints on one thing. I never thought about this when I only read one newspaper a day before [...]. Now I will think about different viewpoints when I read certain news[...]I will make a judgement[...]in the past when I only read one newspaper, I didn't make any comparisons, but now I can read different versions of news online, and then I can have a much clearer understanding of what the truth is. (Shove-Fong, a former secretary of an insurance company, female, 42 years old, 10/03/2006)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified five consumption practices of online journalism based on its double articulation feature - including habitual consumption; innovative consumption, socially interactive consumption, information-searching and information-wandering. My analysis has demonstrated that online news consumers have the ability to use and read online news in their own ways. This ability to make online news meaningful to them includes both an understanding of how online news

media is used and how its content is read. My analysis has suggested that the practices of online journalism, as I have argued, signify an ongoing process which is extends from the production process to the consumption domain.

Readers' different uses and readings of online journalism are related to the use of online media technologies. My analysis has suggested that online news readers can break the limitations of time and space; and consume online journalism according to their own preferences via different processes of appropriation, objectification, incorporation, and conversion. Additionally, a reader's news interpretation practices are associated with the use of a different range of online media technologies. As I have shown, online news readers would compare different news reports intertextually by using hypertext or web search engines in order to check the details of news stories and make judgements. These reading practices might appear meaningless on the surface, but it is in fact a process by which readers look for their own version of truth about the news.

My discussion of different types of consumption of online journalism relates a critical question within the news media: How does online news consumption influence the production process? This is an issue that is at the same time related to the following question: How does the relationship between news producers and consumers change in the online news environment? In this chapter and the previous chapter, I have stated that the consumer's consumption practices do have certain effects on the production process - especially when different online media technologies (e.g. CTN) have been used to accumulate online news readers' consumption data. In the following chapter, I will focus on the relationship between online news producers and consumers; and will examine how this relationship is transformed in the online news environment.

Chapter 7 Online participatory journalism: the citizen's practices of producing alternative online news culture and inducing public debates

Online journalism and related media technologies have encouraged what Henry Jenkins calls the 'new participatory culture' (Jenkins, 2002: 157) in the online news environment. That is, online journalism and related technologies now engage more people in the practices of online media participation and also yielded different online forms of journalism for which I use the term 'online participatory journalism' in this thesis. In this chapter, I will adopt two types of online participatory journalism –user-generated journalism (content) and blog journalism[38] – to analyse its impacts on online news culture and the public sphere.

My analysis of online participatory journalism in this chapter will focus on two general issues. Firstly, it relates to the relationship between news production and consumption, and practitioners in the two domains, who have been acknowledged as news producers and consumers. The two aspects are at the heart of the culture circuit model which is used as the analytical framework in this thesis, and has been discussed in the previous chapters. In this chapter, I will focus on how participatory journalism influences the news producer/consumer relationship in the online news environment.

As I have discussed in Chapter 2, many writers proclaim that individuals' media participation will sway the relationship between news producer and consumer. Participatory journalism – a kind of journalism, which mainly takes its initiative from the general public's participation in journalism, has been seen as a 'grassroots power'

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[38] The definition of blog and blog journalism has been introduced in Chapters 1 & 2. In this chapter, the term 'blogger' refers to people engaging in blog-related practices. 'Journalism blog' (J-blog) refer those blogs in which the overall content is journalism-related. 'Journalism bloggers' (J-blogger) refer to bloggers who usually write journalism-related articles and reports on their j-blogs.

(Gillmor, 2004a) to challenge the status of the mainstream journalism and re-shape news culture. On the one hand, this grassroots power makes professional news-workers re-think their roles and positions in the process of news production (Deuze & Dimoudi, 2002); and on the other hand, it creates diverse relationships between news producers and consumers. In this chapter, I will use the two different types of media participation in the online news environment to examine the transformation of the producer/consumer relationship in journalism.

The second issue raised by participatory journalism is the question of the public sphere. The Internet – the platform which enables the public to publish and distribute the content of participatory journalism - has been treated as a new emergent public sphere in contemporary society. However, whether the online media can be an ideal public sphere is still an ambiguous and controversial issue. In this chapter, I will use the blog sphere – the sphere constituted on the blog forums – as well as the practices around the forums, to examine how it is used by the public for their public discussions and express their voices as citizens. Therefore, my concern in this chapter is not whether or not the blog sphere can be confirmed with what Habermas calls the 'ideal public sphere' (see Chapter 2) because 'ideal' itself seems to hard to achieve practically. The question I would like to ask is how the blog sphere is used in practice by the public to mediate citizenship and to connect to public affairs.

I argue that online participatory journalism influences both news culture and democracy. For the journalism part, participatory journalism represents readers' intentions to interact with news producers, as well as a bottom-up power structure enabling citizens to express their disappointment with the performance of the mainstream news media. The practices from these grassroots powers thus re-shape and diversify the producer/consumer relationship in journalism. On the one hand,

mainstream online news try to integrate reader contributions into their production process based on market strategy, which forms a co-operative relation between the two sides. And on the other hand, other grassroots practitioners (e.g. bloggers) directly challenge the status of the mainstream media by providing alternative viewpoints and different versions of news, which creates a contested relationship. In participatory journalism, the traditional producer/consumer and consumer/citizen distinctions are blurred and re-defined. Regarding democracy, participatory journalism in Taiwan involves what has been referred to as 'cultural politics', that is, the purpose of the practices focuses more on changing the public's perspectives or knowledge on special issues and arousing public debate in the public sphere.

I will show, through my analysis, that mainstream online journalism and participatory journalism in the online environment are gradually becoming forms of what I call the 'convergence culture' of online journalism. Through the market strategy of mainstream news websites, readers' consumption practices of surfing in different forms of journalism, and j-bloggers practice to connect their blogs with the mainstream news, and vice versa; all forms of online journalism have fused together in the online news environment.

Based on the above discussion, this chapter includes the following parts.

Firstly, I will use my empirical case to analyse the user-generated content in mainstream news media - including how reader contributions are integrated into the market strategy of the mainstream journalism, its influence on the professional news-workers' role as a gate-keepers, and the changes in the role of readers from that of information recipients to productive consumers. Secondly, I will use blog journalism to analyse the influence of those grassroots journalism - which aims to challenge the current status of mainstream journalism. I will point out that blog journalism provides

different versions of news stories, as well as viewpoints that differ from those offered by the mainstream news media; which provide a possibility for the public to debate alternative knowledge and perspectives. Thirdly, I will also analyse the efforts of j-bloggers to make their blogs interactive and networked forums; and how the mainstream news and blog journalism integrate in the online news environment to form the convergence culture. The last part of this chapter will investigate how professional news-workers respond to the increasing participatory culture in the online news environment.

Method: the recruitment of j-bloggers

The first type of online participatory journalism I will analyse is called 'user-generated content', which means that readers are allowed to participate in the process of news production in mainstream online journalism. In so doing, online news readers play a significant role of cooperating the process of online news production; including providing sources of news stories, contributing their own 'knowledge' to producers, or writing and sending their own 'reports' directly to news websites, and so forth. I adopt the rumour page (http://examine.nownews.com/) on *ETtoday.com* (see Chapter 4 & 5) as the case study for my analysis.

The second type of online participatory journalism I will analyse in this chapter is blog journalism (also called 'grassroots journalism' or 'citizen journalism', see Chapter 2). The definition of these terms has been given in chapter 2. In this chapter, all the cases I used for analysis are those of non-professional writers - bloggers or j-bloggers - who write or distribute journalism-related content (e.g. news reports or comments on news issues) on their j-blogs.

I interviewed six j-bloggers to understand their practices. They were, respectively, a retired magazine freelancer, PhD student, skilled worker, software engineer, college

student and mainstream journalist. One purpose of this chapter is to examine how mainstream news-workers respond to participatory journalism. To this end, I interviewed three professional news-workers in order to record their reaction to this new participatory culture. For basic information about all the respondents discussed in this chapter, please see Appendix 3.

The rumour page and user-generated online journalism

User-generated journalism has been present in many news media for some time. As Steve Paulussen and Pieter Ugille (2008:24) indicate: 'traditional news media, like newspapers, tend to show increasing interest in the ways in which user-generated content can be integrated into the professional news-making process'. The key element of this type of journalism is that mainstream news media incorporate consumers' creative works into the journalistic product itself (Deuze, 2007b). That is, by utilizing the content generated by consumers - including letters to editors, consumers' discussions in online forum, and so forth - online news websites can integrate consumers' practices into their news production.

The rumour page of *ETtoday.com* is an example of user-generated journalism. Although it is called the rumour page, the reports on this page are in fact written in a journalistic form and style. The difference is that the page seldom reports 'hard issues'; concentrating instead on soft news. The sources of news usually come from unconfirmed gossip, rather than official resources. The page was launched in order to promote a weekly TV news programme, the main content of which was to report various 'rumours' on the Internet. It published part of the content of the programme prior to broadcast in order to attract readers' attention and encourage them to watch. Thus, the page was originally a 'by-product' of the TV programme. Later, the TV programme was axed, though the rumour page was popular on the *ETtoday.com* website,

so it continues to publish new, up-to-date content regularly.

The page got its name because of the initial purpose was to report different kinds of 'rumours' that people heard or read on the Internet. Topics such as 'does eating too many instant noodles cause cancer' or 'is it true that Taiwan has earthquake every hundred years' (this kind of rumour can be heard often after a big earthquake occurs) are the common topics on the page. Figure 7.1 is the front page layout of the page. As can be seen, the major part of the page is the headline news (see (I) on the page). Most news reports on the page are generated by readers' contributions. Readers can use the e-mail address (II) provided by the editors of the page to send 'news clues' (usually rumours or gossip) to the editors. All the e-mails are listed on the front page (III) as the 'suspected cases' - which means that the journalists will check these rumours and report on them in turn. From the list of suspected cases, readers can read information including the titles and outlines of the rumour cases, the date that the cases were received, and how many people are interested in the cases (this information is based on CTN).

News producers and consumers of the rumour page develop a cooperative relationship; such that readers decide what they want to know, and the journalist's work is to satisfy readers' interest with specialist knowledge in their reports. This cooperative relation in the rumour page did not take shape as the result of any predetermined plan but was the outcome of several attempts and interactions between the producers and the consumers. At first, reports of the page were not treated as 'news' because in the early stages the journalists only reported rumours they had found on the Internet (e.g. via online bulletins or e-mails) and tried to tell readers whether the rumours were true or false. They searched reporting topics by themselves as part of their daily routine as journalists, and these works had nothing to do with the producer/consumer interaction or cooperation. After the page was launched for a while, the editor of *ETtoday.com*

often received readers' e-mails asking them to report on certain stories. When the first user-generated content was published, surprisingly, the editors got more e-mails each day than they had expected. The editor of the rumour page, Jia-Hong Chen indicated that at first *ETtoday.com* did not have any idea about how to run the page as a project that was independent from the TV programme. The present form and the narrative style are the result of interaction with their readers. As Chen (Jia-Hong) said:

When we initially tried to ask our readers to send us more information, we were not sure that this strategy could last a long time. Surprisingly, we got a lot of feedback from readers [...] I think now the interaction with readers is the most important part of our page. (Chen Jia-Hong, an online news editor, 34 years old, 16/02/2006)

Due to more and more readers write e-mails to 'request' the journalists to report the rumour they are interested, the page's editor decide to released an e-mail address –rumor@ettoday.com – as the exclusive e-mail address for readers to interact with them. Readers' e-mails also made the issues of the rumour page become diverse, and included more journalism-related issues. That is, most 'news' on the rumour page in the early stages were related to leisure topics, which were far removed from the conventional news agenda. Later, as the page became more and more popular, readers' e-mails began to cover a diverse range of topics - from consumption questions to political issues - which saw the page move closer to news issues from the viewpoint of mainstream journalism.

Figure 7.1 The front page layout of the rumour
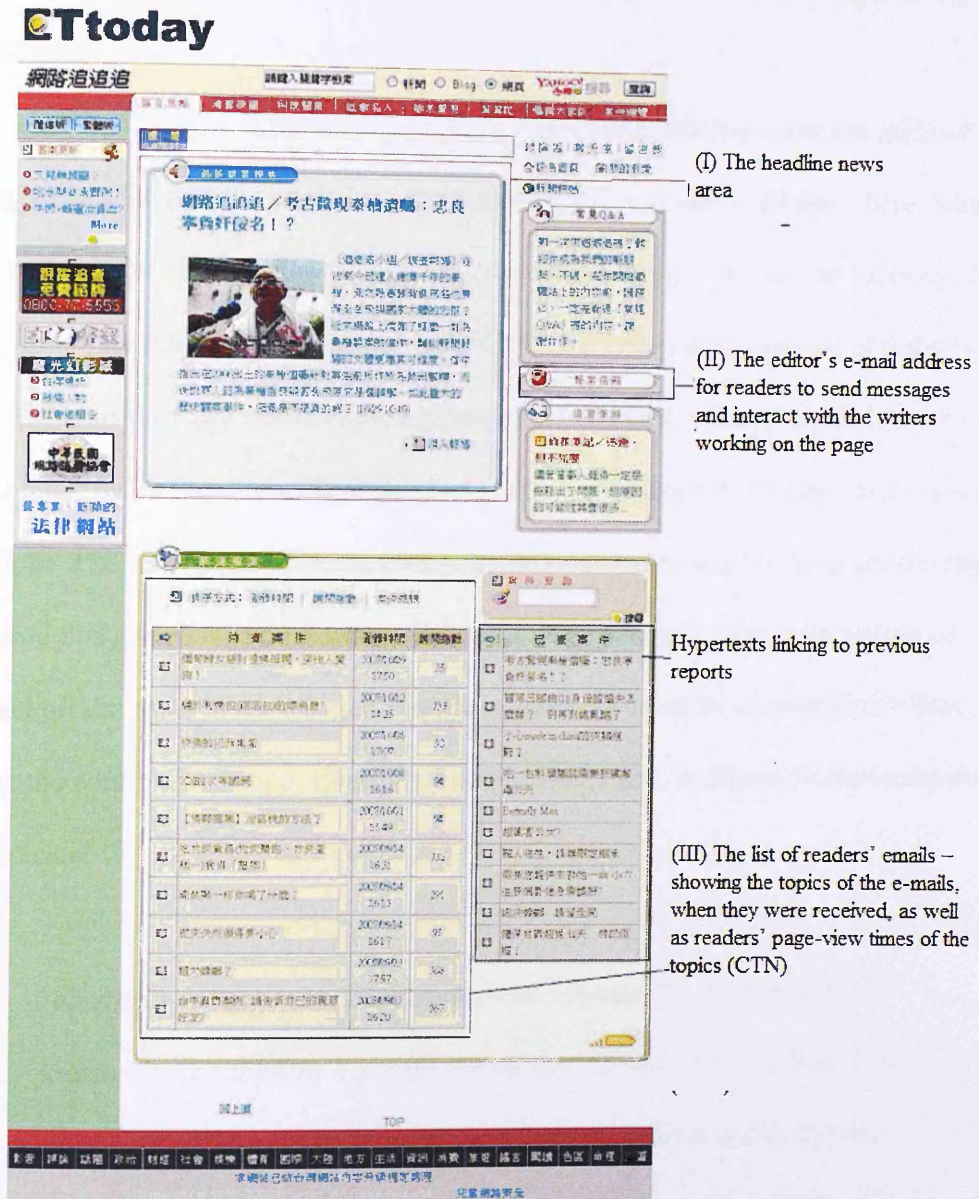
To a certain extent, we can say that the rumour page was created on the basis of the interactivity of online journalism. We can see how this interactivity is embedded in the page from its layout design and the narrative style of its reports. The key concept of the layout design of the page is to allow readers to have more opportunities to interact with the news producers. As mentioned earlier, the content of readers' e-mails is listed on the

front page of the page in order to clearly show that the page is based on readers' contributions. Editors of the page also write working diaries regularly - which aim to exhibit some background information to let readers know how some rumour reports are generated.

Different forms of interactivity are also integrated into the narrative style of the reports on the rumour page. The use of hypertext is one such example, here. Most reports on the rumour page incorporate a number of hypertexts in their reports. It is a common narrative style of electronic articles which embed hypertextual links to some critical terms or key words in the articles; enabling readers to link to further information by clicking on these terms and words. Likewise, this kind of narrative style is widely adopted in the reports of the rumour page. For news-workers working on the page, using this narrative style does not only seek to provide in-depth information or background; moreover it is also a means of demonstrating the credibility of their reports. As the editor of the page, Chen (Jia-Hong), who is also in charge of reporting duties, indicated:

Sometimes we get a lot of criticism from our readers, thus we want to

'create' our credibility. We want our readers to know exactly where our

source comes from in the news report. It is convenient on the Internet

because we can use hypertext to link to the original news sources. (Chen

Jia-Hong, an online news editor, male, 34 years old, 16/02/2006)

This kind of hypertext usage in news reports to show the credibility complies with the findings of Wall's (2005) study of the narrative style of blogs. In her study, Wall notices that many bloggers provide hypertext to link to mainstream news websites. She

suggests that the hypertexts are an important aspect of blog journalism - not just as part of a changing story form, but 'in order to help establish credibility' (2005:166). However, Wall's explanation about j-bloggers' use of hypertext differs somewhat from that in my case study. For the news-workers of the rumour page, providing hypertexts to different sources is a means of presenting multiple choices for readers; enabling them to compare and judge the credibility of the news story concerned.

Furthermore, those working on the rumour page also try to display the outcomes of the interactions in the narratives of their reports; creating a special form of report which is rarely seen within the structure of conventional news. As mentioned, readers of the rumour page frequently contribute their 'knowledge' to the journalists and the editors. For example, the page's journalists often ask readers to provide information about those unconfirmed rumours to assist them with their news coverage. It is a way of inviting readers to participate in the production process. Journalists working on the page occasionally mention readers' contributions in their reports. For example, they often quote readers' e-mails and information directly, such as: 'some readers write to us...' or 'some readers say that...'. Readers' knowledge and information, to a certain extent, replaces the status of the 'expert' or 'official source' in the report that conventional journalism would usually used in reporting to show the credibility of news story.

The interactive process between the producers and consumers on the rumour page and the use of hypertext to provide multiple choices have made their reports resemble the model of what Matheson calls 'knowledge-as-process' rather than 'knowledge-as-product' (Matheson, 2004:458). The meaning of knowledge-as-process refers to news producers setting out along paths of exploration in their reports - which enable readers to choose their preferred route of story-telling; and the meaning of news is thus constructed through readers' own selection of different hypertext sources or their

interactions with news producers. Unlike conventional news media that usually show the final result (usually a result of the journalist's selection and editor's editing) of what readers should know (Bell, 1995); the reports on the rumour page correspond closely with the 'raw material' and details which might be treated as 'unnecessary information' within a conventional news report. For example, often journalists working on the page will write about the difficulties they faced during the coverage. They also describe in detail how they solve these difficulties, or write directly in their report about those problems which they cannot solve. Readers often send e-mails to point out errors in some reports. The editors told me that they usually revised their reports if the readers' criticism proved to be true and justified. In conventional news reports, as I stated, journalists seldom mentioned all the processes mentioned above. Readers usually read a report with carefully polished and selected angle according to journalist's profession. However, on the rumour page, part of the production process of news is presented in report to show how a report is produced; why some angles are used while some are discarded.

Taking one report from 30th March 2006 on the rumour page as the example, I analyse the key point I have discussed above. The editor used the following title: 'Asus laptop (the number one brand of laptop in Taiwan) explodes'. The news item, which came from a reader's e-mail, revealed that he got the information from the Internet that someone's Asus laptop exploded during use. In this report, the journalist indicated that the message was confirmed to be true after interviewing the owner of the laptop. The report also provided two hypertexts linking to two pictures of the damaged Asus laptops to 'prove' that the situation did happen and was not just rumour. The hypertext of the two pictures was in fact linked to other websites which also discussed the exploded laptop. The journalist wrote in the report that they got the names and addresses of the

people whose laptop exploded. So the journalist interviewed the customer to talk about the situation. However, in order to balance the reporting angle, the report also included an interview with staff from the laptop manufacturer and their explanation of the situation. A supplementary report about how hard the journalist worked to track down the interviewee whose laptop exploded in a rural village.

The exploded laptop case suggests that readers play an active role in deciding 'what they want to know', rather than having a journalist tell them 'what they should know'. The quality of a famous laptop appeared to be the topic that readers were concerned by. The journalist reported what readers cared about according to their actual requests – their e-mails – rather than according to their sense of news, or based on the news values gleaned from their professional training.

Readers who provided messages for this report participated in the process of news production, to a certain extent. In the original e-mail, the reader provided precise details of the exploded laptop case, including the picture on the Internet, as well as the name and address of the owner of the exploded laptop. Thus the journalist followed up the reader's story and interviewed the laptop owner. Additionally, the behind the scenes coverage is also has significant, here. This 'behind-the-scenes reporting' is an example of the aforementioned model of 'knowledge-as-process' in news reporting. From the behind-the-scenes reporting, readers did not just read the final outcome of a report but also understood the process of making a news report. Furthermore, the journalists also attempted to convince their readers that their reports were based on the actual occurrences, which was also another method to demonstrate their credibility.

To sum up, from the laptop case on the rumour page, we have seen that readers' participations in journalism are made through their interaction with the news producers. Through providing messages and 'knowledge', readers' contributions are integrated

into the professional news-workers' discourses of journalism. However, most of the user-generated content of the rumour page still has to be checked against professional news criteria. Normally, the page's journalists and editors still play the role of deciding how the final reports are presented on the news website. This is not to say that the user-generated content does not have any impact on the production practices of the professional journalism. My prior analysis has shown that the narrative style of the page has been constructed differently from that of conventional reports. The transformations are not only reflected in the form of reporting, but also in terms of the occupational identify of professional news-workers. I will discuss this aspect in the following section.

From gate-keeper to information-broker: the influence of participatory journalism

As mentioned, the development of the rumour page on *ETtoday.com* includes serially-negotiated and interactive processes between producer and consumer. It is important to point out here that the practice of interactivity of the rumour page was originally based on marketing strategy. By inviting readers to participate in the production process, *ETtoday.com* on the one hand assures the topics correspond to readers' interests; whereas on the other hand, it also increases the website traffic when readers interact with the journalists and editors. This seems to be a common strategy for online news media, as I have indicated in Chapter 2; whereby many organisations use 'interactivity' to increase readers' loyalty to their websites.

One significant impact of this producer/consumer interaction under the commercial logic is that it causes professional news-workers to re-consider their roles and position in process of news production. At the same time, it also relates to the transformation of the occupational identity of news-workers. Chen (Jia-Hong) indicated how the rumour

page deals with the readers' e-mail comments, thus:

We usually receive a great deal of criticism about our reports from readers. They may indicate our shortcomings and mistakes in reports. For example, they often point out some angles we ignored, or suggest further information for us to add. (Chen Jia-Hong, an online news editor, male, 34 years old, 16/02/2006)

Readers' criticism and suggestions might not totally be accepted by the news-workers on *ETtoday.com*, but their actions seem to influence the news-worker's perspective on their professional roles. Chen (Jia-Hong) told me that after having long-term interaction with their readers, he thought that the pages' editors and journalists became more 'modest'. He indicated that professional news-workers need to admit that there are many things they do not know, though most of them tend to refuse to admit this. From Chen's (Jia-Hong) interview, I found that user-generated journalism (content), to a certain extent, altered the news producers' attitudes towards both their role, as well as that of their readers' journalism.

As I have mentioned, news-workers' professional identities do not only create the norms and criteria for the production practices; they also serve to distinguish news-workers from non-reporters (see Chapter 2). The professional identities are thus adopted to establish the basic social relationship between news producers and consumers. That is, news-workers and consumers in journalism are usually defined as 'addresser' and 'addressee' (Hartley, 1996:3), or as 'symbolic producer' and 'recipient' (J. B. Thompson, 1995:96). This traditional social relationship strongly implies the leading role of professional news-workers by addressing them as information-provider,

gatekeeper (White, 1950), with the primary role of setting the agenda (McCombs, 2004). On the contrary, in this traditional relationship, consumers normally assume the role of information-receivers with little power to intervene or participate in the production process (J. B. Thompson, 1995).

My analysis of user-generated journalism suggests that the distinction between the information-providers/receivers or news producer/consumers of journalism appears to be different in the online news environment. Some studies (Signer, 1998), as well as my previous analysis (see Chapter 5) show that most of the time, professional news-workers in online journalism still assert their professional roles at work. Yet the case of the rumour page suggests that some aspects of their occupational identity have gradually shifted. News-workers seem to accept that in the circulated process of journalism, sometimes their roles are also see them as 'information-brokers' (Lee & So, 2000:13), rather than merely the gate-keepers. The work of the two is different. The information-brokers in journalism mediate information and viewpoints, but do not filter and select information like the gate-keepers. As my analysis revealed that the editors and journalists working on the rumour page tended to see their duty as having to report the issues provided by readers; and the way of using different hypertexts or presenting some raw information in their reports was thus to enable readers to discover the answers and details of news stories for themselves - rather than simply accepting what journalists told them they should know and believe.

Readers' roles on the rumour page case also imply a transformation of their position in the process of news production. That is, their consumption practices have changed from only 'information-receiving' to become more 'information-producing'. They are thus the 'productive consumers' (Couldry, 2004a:24) or 'interactive audiences' (Jenkins, 2002:157). On the rumour page, news consumption for online news readers thus

includes both the practices of reading news and contributing knowledge, perspectives, and content. Although incorporating the user-generated content into the news product for the rumour page is a kind of market strategy; this kind of participatory journalism still influences the producer/consumer relationship in online journalism. Most significant is the fact that the professional news-workers and readers form a 'cooperative relationship' in the online news environment. This kind of working model now can be seen on many online news websites or offline newspapers. One famous online example is *Ohmynews* in Korea (Kim & Hamilton, 2006) where the major content is provide by thousands of amateurs/citizens, but is nonetheless selected and checked by several professional journalists before being published on its website.

However, caution should be exercised when we claim that this kind of participatory journalism gives readers more power to intervene in the production process; or empowers them against the monopoly of institutional journalism. Some studies suggest that the mainstream newsrooms appear to be rather reluctant and cautious to open up all the production process to those active readers (Domingo et al., 2007). Paulessen and Ugille's (2008) study of the adoption of user-generated content in several Belgian newspapers also finds that professional journalists often worry about the quality of user-generated content which lead them seldom use the content in their reports. Besides, readers' contributions usually provide more soft news; however, professional journalists often focus on hard news (e.g. political and economic news). As a result, user-generated journalism does not constitute a significant part of journalists' daily news-gathering practices (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008). My observation of the rumour page also found that although the page listed all the readers' e-mails; it was still the editors' and journalists' decision as to which e-mails would be pursued and developed to into news items - although they claimed that their priority was driven by those issues

that concerned readers the most. Therefore, readers' media participation regarding this user-generated content is still constrained by the rules determined by producers. Nevertheless, user-generated journalism provides one example of how the producer/consumer relationship in the online news environment has been transformed. In the following analysis, I will use another type of media participation –blog journalism – to examine the changing relationship between news producers and consumers.

Blog journalism and its practice

In the following sections, I would like to examine another form of participatory journalism – blog journalism – and its impact on online news culture and the public sphere. Unlike the user-generated content in mainstream news, blog journalism in Taiwan engages with more citizens' attempts at media reforms and political participation - which can be traced to the development of alternative media use in Taiwan (see Chapter 3). Therefore, j-bloggers' practices in journalism have also been linked to the discussion of the public sphere and citizenship, as many writers have discussed (Barlow, 2008). In the online news environment, blog journalism no doubt has become part of online news culture as we can see that an increasing number of people, especially when some big issue occur (e.g. the 9/11 attacks in New York), get their news from j-blogs (see Chapter 2). In my following analysis, I do not use any big news event for my investigation into blog journalism. Instead, I focus on the everyday, routine practices from some j-bloggers, so as demonstrate that this grassroots journalism does not only occur at times when extraordinary events occur, but has become a daily news flow on the Internet, similar to mainstream news. In Taiwan, many mainstream media establish have established a blog sphere which enables individuals to contribute journalism-related content to it, and some bloggers' reports are also selected

by these news websites as extended readings or alternative viewpoints on the journalists' reports. A special group of 'blog-sharing websites' also collects different blog content and classifies similar news topics into different categories; which functions rather like a daily online newspaper. All these aspects show that blog journalism should not be treated as the practices which only take place in particular, isolated moments, but reflect the everyday, ongoing activities of bloggers.

Disclosing the hidden part and providing an alternative viewpoint: the case of Chen (Hang-Chi)

One significant aspect of j-bloggers' practices in journalism is their objective to discover the hidden part of news and provide alternative viewpoints on current news stories. In my interview with J-bloggers, most of them mentioned that their motive to write J-blog was, in their own words, to 'discover the facts or truth[39] of news'. They identified themselves as 'truth-tellers'. For them, most of the mainstream news media in Taiwan failed to reflect the overall picture of news story due to its political, economic and organisational constraints. On the contrary, j-bloggers thought they did not have these constraints because they wrote news independently; reporting what they wanted - which enabled them to discover more details about the news story concerned. This seemed to be an important reason for j-bloggers when explaining their participatory practices in journalism. This aspect can also be seen as an action of distrusting the performance of mainstream news media. As Erik Bucy & Kimberlys Gregson (2001) suggest that the growing frustration and scepticism among the public about the mainstream news media has pushed people to pursuing alternative –including their

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39 The notion of fact, truth and reality used in this thesis has been discussed in Chapter 2. These terms in social science represent a long-running debate which has yet to yield a satisfactory answer. Once again, here I would like to point out that I use these terms in this thesis simply according to the interviewees' own narratives. For them, these terms do not involve the complicated debate of social science; rather they reflect their perspectives on the social phenomenon. For example, in Chinese, people usually say 'everything has the fact behind it'.

own – media formats.

One of the j-bloggers, Chen Hang-Chi, a 63-year-old magazine freelancer, and his j-blogging practice help us to clearly understand this aspect. Chen (Hang-Chi) calls his j-blog 'the Digital Electronic Newspaper' (http://hanreporter.blogspot.com/). Of all cases I interviewed, Chen's (Hang-Chi) j-blog is a special example. He was a freelancer for some mainstream news magazines and worked for some small newspapers when he was young, but was retired when I interviewed him. Before he started to use blogs to write news, he used a photocopier to publish his 'newspaper' and only few readers could read it. Online media technologies enable Chen's (Hang-Chi) reports to break through the material and geographical limitations and can be read by more people. Now he writes one to three reports every day on his blog. The topics are various but mainly focus on economic stories which relate to his previous experience in mainstream media. Some professional journalists told me that they sometime visited Chen's (Hang-Chi) blog to see if there was any content they could use. Some organisations or government department - although not many - have begun to see Chen (Hang-Chi) as a formal journalist; and have started to send him invitations to present press conferences.

According to Chen (Hang-Chi), he wrote his j-blog in order to 'reveal the truth which is ignored or hidden by mainstream news media'. He said that he had rich experience in news-making in the mainstream media; thus he knew that a lot of important stories were discarded by the mainstream news organisations due to their own political and economic interests. As he told me:

I found there were many things that mainstream news media did not report.

For example, recently I knew that some journalists were invited by Taipei

City Council to travel abroad for free. They certainly would not report 'bad

news about the City Council because these journalists had got benefits from

the City Council and news media were also afraid of angering the

important official news resource. (Chen Hang-Chi, a retired news-worker,

male, 63 years old, 28/08/2005)

Unlike mainstream journalism - which provides readers with selected and polished news - J-bloggers usually emphasize their independence and personal experience in their reports. They provide first-hand and eye-witness reports which, from their perspectives, are closer to the real issues of the news story. This has become an important claim for blog journalism and J-bloggers; demonstrating that 'their practices represent that people in their natural dialect, writing from gut, saying things that wouldn't normally make it through the newsroom editing machine' (Lasica, 2002:online). One of the examples from Chen's (Hang-Chi) news -reporting experience enables us to see how j-bloggers connect their reports to this 'truth claim' of news.

Once I was presenting a lunch meeting held by the Asia Taiwanese

Businessmen Association at the Region Hotel, the second largest five-star

hotel in Taipei. The Association invited the Taiwanese Minister of Economic

Affairs to give a speech. While listening to the speech, I saw a cockroach

coming out from the dishes. I complained to the hotel's waiter, but the

waiter just used his table towel to catch the cockroach and left without

saying anything. There were other journalists from very big media

organisations sitting at the same table with me, and they all saw the

situation. I later reported this on my blog because I thought this is a more

important issue than the minister's speech. I wrote this 'news' in order to

'demand that the hotel to improve its hygiene because it is at hotel that

makes a profit of 23 billion NT. dollars every year'. (Chen Hang-Chi, a

retired news-worker, male, 63 years old, 28/08/2005)

Chan's (Hang-Chi) 'hotel report' gives us an example that j-bloggers usually

emphasizes their first-hand information and direct witness accounts in their reports. As

Chen (Hang-Chi) said, the hotel report was based on the activity he participated in

personally, and he was on the spot when the action occurred. Thus, the news of the

hotel's sanitary standards was based on his 'true experience'. This is also the way that

j-bloggers create their credibility and distinguish themselves from mainstream

journalism. Chen (Hang-Chi) compared his report to mainstream news media, thus:

There are many facts hidden by 'big media'; many things are not reported

[...] but I can write everything because I do not write for payment. (Chen

Hang-Chi, a retired news-worker, male, 63 years old, 28/08/2005)

It is also significant that we examine how j-bloggers select the topics they write

about. My interview with j-bloggers revealed that, although we can read about a number

of different topics on blogs, most bloggers seem to prefer news issues related to their

everyday lives. In his hotel report, Chen (Hang-Chi) was attending a lunch to which the

Minister of Economic Affairs was also invited and planned to give speech about the

Government's economic policy. The Minister's schedule was released in advance. On

this occasion, professional journalists, with their training or according to their

professional judgment, would no doubt focus on the speech. If the Minister revealed

some economic policy information in the speech, they would say: 'That is the news of

the day'. On the contrary, they might define Chen's (Hang-Chi) hotel report as 'too trivial' or dismiss it as not newsworthy.

Nevertheless, most J-bloggers in their reports do not follow the trajectory which the professional journalism usually does. That is, blog journalism, on the one hand, usually does not stress any professional norms - such as objectivity or impartiality (see Chapter 2 & 5); while on the other hand, they do not use the criteria, known as news values, which professional journalism employs for news selection as a matter of everyday routine. Chen's (Hang-Chi) blog shows some of these features. For example, Chen (Hang-Chi) usually adds comments with unpolished language and terms in his report. Clearly, this does not fit with the norms which some professional journalism emphasized. That is, journalists should carefully separate their opinions from the content of news reports. Chen's (Hang-Chi) news selection in the hotel case also showed that compared to the grand narrative issue of economic policy, bloggers tend to prefer news stories characterised by personalisation and an emphasis on non-institutional status (Wall, 2005).

J-bloggers' practices of following the different selecting different selection method imply a challenge to the professional journalists' account of what news is. In other words, by highlighting certain news issues and events differently, and reporting news stories first hand occasionally, though not frequently; blog journalism looks for its own version of what constitutes news (Lowrey, 2006:489). It is true nowadays that an increasing number of news issues are raised initially from the blog sphere. In my following analysis, I will use another case to illustrate this aspect.

Citizens' voices in the public sphere: Wong's j-blog and the case of Lo-Shang House

In previous section, I used Chen's (Hang-Chi) j-blogging practices to demonstrate

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For Wang, the public with their myriad 'professions' in everyday life sometimes might have equal or even higher 'interpretative abilities' than journalists. For example, a medical doctor's blog, in Wang's view, could provide more insightful opinion on medical issues than professional journalists. Wang emphasized:

Sometimes I do not believe certain news reports on mainstream news media, but when it is the only source I can get, I am obliged to believe it [...] but interpreting news is not the same as reporting news - the right of interpretation is with the readers. (Wang, a PhD student, male, 32 years old, 16/03/2006)

The j-bloggers' practices to provide alternative issues and viewpoints are significant to the operation of the public sphere. On the one hand, it represents citizens trying to define those issues which they acknowledge as most important in the public interest. On the other hand, their practices also provide alternative viewpoints and information which they think may increase public understandings and provoke public debate. To illustrate this aspect clearly, I will use the case of the Lo-Sheng Sanatorium to give more explanations.

On his blog, Wang wrote an article about Lo-Sheng Sanatorium on 13th September 2007. The article (see Figure 7.2) described the actions of police force against protesters who tried to stand in front of Lo-Sheng building and tried to stop the building from being demolished on 13th September 2007. The Lo-Sheng Sanatorium was built in 1930 for multi-drug therapy for leprosy patients in Taiwan. In 1982, a new building was constructed and most of the patients were moved into the new building. The old

some features of blog journalism. In the following analysis, I will indicate that that j-bloggers' media participatory practices are the means for citizens to re-assert their citizenship in a new, emergent public sphere – the blog sphere.

In my interview with j-bloggers, most of them were fiercely critical of the performance of the mainstream news media in Taiwan. J-bloggers thus justify their actions as a mission to provide alternative viewpoints which the commercial and politically-controlled news media in Taiwan fail to do. As I have mentioned in Chapter 3, the commercialisation of the Taiwanese news media after the deregulation of media control has created a highly competitive media environment. Most of the news media are eager to pursue economic interests in order to survive in this media environment. Consequently, news media offer no space for the prospect of being the public sphere for the society, nor do they provide sufficient information which has been regarded as a precondition of effective participation in the public sphere. Within this context, many j-bloggers commence their practice of participatory journalism with the aim of challenging and earning back the right to define and interpret news stories which have been monopolised by the mainstream news media but have long since been distorted by political and commercial forces (see Chapter 3). As James Wang, the blogger I interviewed indicated:

> *Bloggers might not have the same resources to compete with mainstream news media in reporting news; however, some bloggers may have much more knowledge to interpret the meaning of news events[...] Here I do not mean that J-blog will subvert mainstream news media, but at least we can provide an alternative [viewpoint]. (Wang, a PhD student, male, 32 years old, 16/03/2006)*

building of Lo-Sheng was reserved as a historic monument. However, a few patients still lived in the old Lo-Sheng building after the new location was used because these patients claimed they were too old to move, and had got used to the old environment. In the late 90s, the government planned to construct an underground system and part of the old Lo-Sheng building was on the route of the underground system. About 60% of the old Lo-Sheng house was to be destroyed according to the plan. However, the plan has caused debate on the preservation of historic buildings, human rights (the old patients' rights as residents), and local residents' expectation of a better transportation situation.

The debate of Lo-Sheng has been going on for several years, and the year 2007 was the deadline for dismantling the sanatorium to continue with the construction project. Mainstream news media have already lost interest in this issue since it has been going on for years. Only a few news outlets have covered the story in passing. J-bloggers, on the contrary, showed a great deal of interest in this issue. Different opinions were discussed on numerous blogs, which has raised the public's attention on this issue again.

The report on Wang's blog supported the preservation of the historic buildings and arguing that the 'State apparatus' (the term Wang used in his article) - with its police power - compelled people to accept the underground system; and mainstream news media were the assistants of the State apparatus. On Wang's blog, there was a short film recorded by the protester who remonstrated against the police while the old Lo-Sheng Sanatorium was planned to be torn down. The content of the film revealed that the police force was arresting those who refused to leave when the demolition work was in progress. The action of the police force was described by Wang in his report as 'a violent action of the State apparatus to expel, hunt down, and eliminate people in order to reach the aim of the material construction'.

For the mainstream news media in Taiwan, news and information about the

Lo-Sheng issue was often discarded as it was 'not fresh' to consumers. As mentioned, the issue has been in existence for several years and the lack of obvious progress on the issue caused most of the mainstream media to lose interest in the issue.

Figure 7.2 The report of Lo-Sheng Sanatorium on James Wang's blog

Therefore, Lo-Sheng gradually became 'invisible news' in mainstream news. It has become a 'non-event' (Fishman, 1982) for the mainstream journalism. That is, it was the event which really occurred but disappeared in the mainstream news media because there was no reporting on the issue. However, in 2005, the issue of Lo-Sheng attracted the attention of the mainstream news media again due to the approaching deadline for the underground construction, as well as the violent protests from an association called 'Saving Lo-Sheng' – a social group that aimed to preserve Lo-Sheng. As a result, the issue became 'news event' once again. Yet the issue was still labelled as unimportant (Lo-Sheng was classified as a local affair, not a national issue) and slightly out-of-date from the viewpoint of the mainstream journalism; so it did not occupy a significant space in most media outlets. Mainstream news journalists reported the issue only when it related to other news. For example, in 2005 most mainstream news media reported on the Lo-Sheng issue because the Vice President, Annette Lu, visited the site.

Lo-Sheng's case suggests that blog journalism can function as an alternative public sphere. In this public sphere, j-bloggers show their ability to determine the agenda for public debate. They also refuse to accept the definition and interpretation of some issues provided by mainstream news. In the blog sphere, different knowledge and viewpoints can be proposed freely; which enables the public to get alternative information for their public debates. Various details about Lo-Sheng have been posted on the blog sphere - including the official documents, the records of the official conference, the blueprint, and so forth. These were all documents that the mainstream news media did not have sufficient space to publish. For example, before the local government decided on its final plan to demolish Lo-Sheng house, there were several alternative plans were suggested, other than demolishing most of the building. However, the mainstream news did not pay much attention to these alternative plans; only covering the final decision or

the conflict between the police and protesters. Bloggers disclosed these alternative plans which offer the opportunity for the public to use a different framework to understand the issue.

To sum up, I have examined several practices of participatory journalism from j-bloggers. These practices include j-bloggers' dissatisfaction with the performance of the mainstream media; which in turn leads them to seek their own versions of journalism and express alternative viewpoints in public. Their practices also aim to provide different information and perspectives for public discussion. In the following discussion, I will discuss the influence of bloggers' particular participatory journalism. I will focus on the aspects of news culture and the public sphere.

Different public knowledge on the online news environment

One significant aspect of blog journalism is its influence on news culture. The influence does not only lie in online journalism, but also in other forms of journalism. As I have argued repeatedly, by reporting news from a different angle and providing alternative interpretations; blog journalism challenges the existing status of professional journalism. This challenge does not mean that the mainstream news media will be replaced. Even bloggers themselves do not think their practices will replace the mainstream media. Authors indicates that the major impact of participatory journalism lies in its capacity to challenge the monopoly enjoyed by professional and institutional journalism (Lowrey, 2006; Signer, 2005), as well as 'their occupational practices and ethics that are at the heart of their professional identity and democratic role' (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008:26).

Based on my analysis of the practices of blog journalism, we could say that the practices reinforce the construction of public knowledge which is usually controlled by the mainstream news media. It is worth discussing firstly the relationship between the

role of professional journalism and the output of public knowledge in the mainstream news media, here. As discussed in Chapter 2, in modern society the institutional news organisations enjoy a special status for mediating the social world. With their organisational resources, capital and division of labour force, the institutional new organisations have been labelled as the 'secondary definers' of social events (Hall et al., 1978:57). By this term, the authors mean that professional news-workers normally occupy the second priority of the person or institution that tells the public what going on in the process of distributing news after the primary definer. The primary definers of social events are those people or institutions that provide the original sources of the events (e.g. State or other official sources). Normally, the public hardly has the chance (or the resources) to access some institutions such as government departments; or to witness certain social events, such as war or mass distress. But professional news-workers are usually granted access these institutions or have the resources to cover these social events. This has made them one of the important 'mediators' for the social world in our everyday lives. It is why they are called the secondary definers of news events.

As the secondary definer of social events, the institutional media have become one of the important mechanisms for disseminating public knowledge and establishing the most ordinary form of public knowledge (Ekstrom, 2002). Public knowledge here is defined as knowledge of public affairs and political figures that people should know in their everyday lives. A survey shows that most Americans got their information about current affairs from the news media. Those who say they regularly watch, read, or listen to the news know more than those who do not. And people who use more news sources know more than those who use fewer sources (PEW, 2007). It is true that we regularly acquire, via journalism, the information about foreign wars and crises, political

proposals, natural disasters and stock quotations -- all these are in the categories of public knowledge. As Mats Ekstrom (2002:275) indicates, 'the citizens depend on journalism for information about conditions and events beyond their own horizons'.

Blog journalism tends to focus on different forms of public knowledge compared with the mainstream news media. For instance, one study asked professional editors about what they thought were the important issues, and compared their opinions to those issues that were discussed on the blog sphere. The study found that only one issue – the Iraq War –counted as both an important issue for the professional editors and the bloggers alike (Delwiche, 2005). A similar situation can be shown in my study of the Chen's (Hang-Chi) hotel reports and Wang's Lo-Sheng building report. In these two case, we have seen that j-bloggers followed the different trajectories of defining what count as the public knowledge in their everyday lives. Therefore, everyday trivial things or occurrences taking place near to where bloggers live can all be the issues they are concerned with - rather than government policy or the General Election.

However, J-bloggers show their ability to connect these trivial things or small issues to the public discourse. For example, in Chen's (Hang-Chi) hotel report, the blogger linked his report to the public hygiene issue. Compared to the hotel report, the Lo-Sheng case on Wang's blog presents an even more complicated connection to the dilemma between the conservation of historical buildings and the public's problems as far as transport and convenience were concerned.

J-bloggers' practices reveal their ability to provide alternative ways to set the agenda for public discussion in the blog sphere (Delwiche, 2005). It is important to examine how their practices of providing different forms of public knowledge in terms of the operation of the public sphere, since public knowledge is at the heart of public discussion in the public sphere. In this respect, in the next section, I will shift my focus

to the issue of participatory journalism and the public sphere.

Participatory journalism as a means of cultural politics in the public sphere

J-bloggers' participatory journalism can be treated as a cultural means of political participation. That is, their practices might not cause a direct change in politics or politicians' behaviour (e.g. voting behaviour or resulting legislation), but their aim of trying to change the public's perspective on some issues has been seen as a way of changing culture. In my interview with j-bloggers, they admitted that it was hard to get the Government or some organisation to change simply through Internet activity and blogs because these kinds of changes need other actions, as well. As Shi-Yo Lin, a college student and blogger who usually writes issue about gay rights indicated:

For many people, the Internet and blogs are the cheapest and most convenient way of getting their voices heard by people. But if you want have a bigger influence; you might need to initiate real social action. Blogs and online discussions are more useful in changing people's thoughts, social movement does not only 'take place on the street'. (Lin, an undergraduate student, male, 24 years old, 24/08/2005)

Lin's quote shows a common attitude among many bloggers, such that j-bloggers tend to believe that their practices are more likely to provoke public discussion and alter the public's knowledge by providing 'multiple perspectives and truth'. Alan McKee (2004:192) sees this kind of practices as a means of 'trying to change culture'. He also stress that the work of this practice is part of cultural politics in contemporary society and have profound influence to the operation of the public sphere. Before discussing how this cultural politics works in the public sphere, it should firstly discriminate how

the cultural means of political participation differs from the traditional viewpoint of politics.

McKee, in his discussion of the relationship between the Internet and the public sphere, analyses the different perspectives of political participation between the radical viewpoint (which he calls 'material politics') and the cultural means (which he calls 'cultural politics'). For the first viewpoint, political participation should involve some actual political behavior' and outcomes. In this traditional approach, as McKee (2004:189) indicates that:

It is only when you address material realities through political parties which are involved with government redistribution of scarce physical goods and of money that you (citizen) are really being political.

The above quote reveals the primary viewpoint of the material politics, which aims to make it possible for legislative change to take place. McKee asserts that this viewpoint has also been accepted by Habermas in his discussion of the public sphere; as he indicates that 'Habermas sees the political function of the public sphere primarily in its ability to challenge, determine or inflect the course of state policy' (McKee, 2004:191).

Contrary to the material politics, authors espousing the viewpoint of cultural politics argue that cultural practices can create intangible resources that lead to further political action (McKee, 2004). It refutes the view that materialist politics (e.g. participating in political party) is the only the way that counts as real politics. Those actions, such as circulating alternative viewpoints, participating in public discussion, or other activities related to changing perspectives and knowledge - which are described as

being part of culture - should also be seen as part of the political process. Through these processes, citizens are allowed to set their agenda and it even makes it possible for legislative change to take place. Moreover, some efforts which aim to cause cultural transformation - such as creating a sense of group identity and establishing connections between ideas and groups - can also lead to certain changes in government policy. For example, changing the way that women or minority groups think about themselves, their perspectives, becomes 'the end point of a political struggle' (McKee, 2004:195).

The viewpoint of cultural politics is useful for us to explain the practice of j-bloggers and its relation to the operation of the public sphere established on the Internet. In the hotel report and the Lo-Sheng case, the bloggers' aim was apparently to try to alter the public perspective on some social affairs; or to provide a different version of a news story which had been ignored or abandoned by the mainstream news media. The hotel report did not aim to influence the government policy; rather it sought to publicise the hygiene problem at the five-star hotel. The Lo-Sheng case might be more sophisticated because it had already integrated the actual actions from certain social pressure groups. Nevertheless, what most of the bloggers did in this case was to disseminate the alternative plan of the underground construction, as well as progress reports on the issue.

We could say that through the practices of participatory journalism, J-bloggers frame and interpret certain news stories with their own understanding and the perspectives they believe; and present issues which they think the public should know about. For example, in the Lo-Sheng case, mainstream news media and j-bloggers used different frameworks to interpret the issue. Most of the mainstream news media tended to describe the case of Lo-Sheng as a dilemma between the construction of the public transportation system (the underground system) and the preservation of historic

buildings. The policemen's actions, in the opinion of most mainstream news media, were described as being according to the law, though some conflicts occurred during the action. But for bloggers like Wang, the Lo-Sheng issue was to be understood as the political elite using its power to suppress human rights, and the police force was described as being agents of the political elite.

Similar to the viewpoints related to cultural politics, most of the j-blogger's practices in my study once again confirm that their practices did not anticipate creating a huge change in political action. Their primary expectations were to arouse others' reflections or to change their perceptions of certain issues. Another example is Wu-Long, a blogger who wrote a series of articles about the sovereignty problems between Taiwan and the PRC (Taiwan and the PRC relations has been called 'the Cross-Strait relations') on his 'personal news stations'. He insisted that Taiwan should cut any political, social and cultural ties with the PRC, and regarded those who supported Taiwan and PRC unification as people who had been 'brain-washed' by the KMT party after its 50 years in government until 2000 (for more historical background, see Chapter 3). According to Wu-Long, his articles can address the question and stimulate different ways of thinking about the sovereign issue, as follows:

I do not know whether or not Taiwan will be unified with China in the
future, but I think my article can at least propose the 'correct' perceptions
about the sovereignty issue of Taiwan [...] I hope those people who support
unification can discard the wrong information and the idea they got from
the old government (the KMT), and accept a different viewpoint. (Wu-Long,
a technique worker, male, 36 years old, 10/09/2005)

From the above quote, we can see very clearly that Wu-Long's practices are not intended to cause a huge shift in government policy about the relationship between Taiwan and the PRC (in fact, the Cross-Strait relations are written into the Constitution of Taiwan and even legislative means are also difficult to change). But he expected his articles to change the perceptions of people who hold the opposite opinion to him.

Cultural politics and the networked blog sphere

In the previous section, I have stressed that j-blogging practices involve the purposes of provoking public discussion and changing perspectives, knowledge, and ideas - which are similar aims to the argument related to cultural politics. In this section, I would like to emphasize that j-blogger's cultural means in the public sphere can sometimes actually cause political and social change. Two important aspects related to this are j-bloggers' practices to establish their respective blogs to become online interactive forums for their visitors, and to connect different blogs to form what Brady calls 'a networked mass of linked people and information' (Brady, 2005: online). I will use my empirical date to explain the two practices in the following analysis.

The first practice is to create blog as an interactive forum. Bowman and Willis (2003) describe blog as a technology which allows collaborative publishing. For them, 'a blog is designed to enable a group of participants (large or small) to play multiple roles: content creators, moderators, editors, advertisers and readers' (Bowman & Willis, 2003:25). The meaning here is that blog usually allows people from different locations and disciplines to interactive with each other. My interview with J-bloggers found that most j-bloggers welcomed public discussion on the issues they posted on their blogs. They allowed viewers to leave messages on their j-blogs, and they also responded to these messages regularly. They released their e-mail addresses on the blogs and invited people to contact them. For example, Wu-Long said that most articles he published on

his blog were the outcome of collective contributions. Usually, people would send him their opinions about certain news issues via e-mail, and he would respond with his opinion in return. According to Wu-Long, all these discussions are re-written after a period of time of discussion when he and his 'readers' had reached agreement on the news issue.

Wu-Long preferred political issues; therefore his blog was full of serious topics compared to other popular blogs. However, Wu-Long often submitted articles on his blog to newspapers or other online news websites (for example, he wrote many articles on the online forum of *ETtoday.com*, and the editor of the forum created a 'special column' for him which had archived hundreds of his articles). Wu-Long became famous when his articles were published on mainstream online news websites, which also made his blog attract more visitors and comments and opinions on his serious articles. Wu-Long also replied to some of these comments reciprocally.

The second practice which j-bloggers usually display is that of connecting their blog to other blogs and information. By doing this, j-bloggers collectively can form various networked online communities. Bowman and Willis (2003) in their analysis of blog journalism indicate that the networked blog sphere is facilitated by several technologies. In my studies, I noticed these technologies are widely used on blogs - including hypertext, trackback[40] and XML or RSS syndication[41] technologies (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Brady, 2005). All these technologies are commonly used in the construction of the networked structure of blogs.

My interview with j-bloggers revealed that their online networks were often related

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40 Trackback is 'a mechanism that automatically finds other comments about a message posted on a blog, and provide excepts and links to the comments alongside the post' (Bowman & Willis, 2003:23)

41 XML or RSS syndication are 'technologies which allow blogs to syndicate their content to anyone using a "news reader", a downloadable program that creates a peer-to-peer distribution model (Bowman & Willis, 2003:25).

to their off-line relationships (such as groups of friends, colleagues or classmates) and political preferences. For example, two bloggers – Scharnhorst and Wu-Long - who held opposing political positions - formed their blog networks with other bloggers who held the same political opinion and often disagreed with each other on the issue of Taiwanese independence.

On Scharnhorst's blog, we can see that he lists a many hypertexts linking to other people's blogs (see Figure 7.3). At first, his blog network was formed because his blog was constructed with his friend whom he met at a conference where a political issue was being discussed. Therefore, the friends on both sides of the debate often surfed their co-constructed blog. Later, more and more people they did not know also visited the blog and left comments. For a while, these people become acquaintances and Scharnhorst added their blogs to his 'networked list'. Scharnhorst told me that he did not know how his online network was established and neither did he know most of the bloggers in his network by name – except for their nicknames - though he thought most people found his blog through his articles on the online forum of *ETtoday.com* because he posted many articles there. Viewers who left messages on Scharnhorst's blog were usually labelled as 'pan-bluers'[42]. Scharnhorst's blog became the online forum for them to criticise and mock the other group – the pan-greeners. Wu-Long's blog is one of these pan-green groups. In contrast to Scharnhorst's blog network, Wu-Long was formed because of most of them wrote articles on the online forum on *ETtoday.com*. Having the same political preference (supporting Taiwanese independence), Wu-Long and other bloggers extended their discussions to the off-line world. They had regular face-to-face

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[42] In Taiwan, different colours are used to describe different political preferences. Blue is a representation of Kuomintang (KMT party), and green represents the ruling party – the Democratic Progress Party (DPP). Pan-bluer thus refers to those people who support the KMT but might not join the party and Pan-greener refers to the DPP's supporters. This is also related to the issue of Taiwanese independence because the KMT is traditionally against the independence of Taiwan; whereas the DPP on the contrary strongly supports independence.

meetings to talk about the issue related to the sovereignty of Taiwan, and discussed their articles on blogs. Similarly, Wu-Long and these bloggers linked their blogs to others via hypertext; thus forming a networked blog forum on the subject of Taiwanese independence.

Figure 7.3 The hypertexts of different blogs posted on Scharnhorst's own blog

好友名單

連結管理

親朋好友
玉門春風
世界逃亡的瞬間
童言童語 <-妹妹的blog
我夢
毒電波狐面宅
栗子鼠的blog
雞兔同籠
經常潛水之處
News 2.0工作室(黃創夏個人部
落)
廢業青年日記(研究樂青用)
樂生青年樂生聯盟(研究樂青用)
幽浮新聞(娛樂用)
苦勞網(我偶爾也會向左走)
南方電子報(我偶爾也會向左走)
迷幻機器(我偶爾也會向左走)
立報(我偶爾也會向左走)
破報(我偶爾也會向左走)
觀察...遊走...紀錄(我偶爾也會向
左走)
我心悠悠(心靈撫慰用)
忽忽亂彈(心靈撫慰用)
南方快報(敵情刺探用)
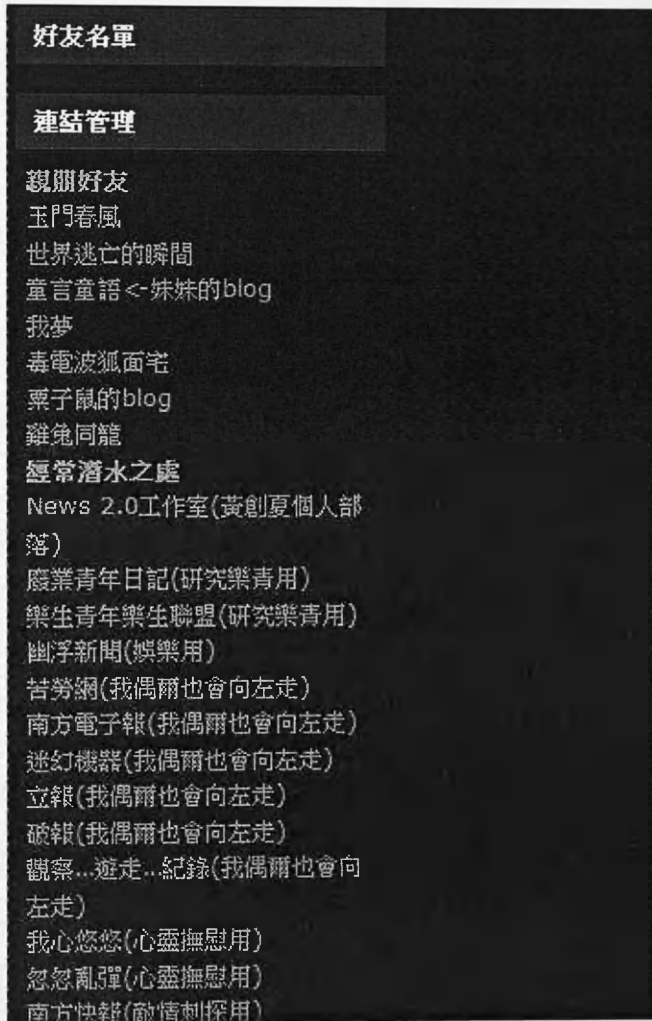
(The picture was captured from the author's blog, which shows that different hypertexts of blogs are integrated within a networked structure in the blog sphere. The upper part of the list shows the links of the blogs written by friends of the blogger; the lower part shows the websites that the blogger often visited.)

Sometimes bloggers get together voluntarily when some significant issue or event occurs. Such voluntary collaboration could integrate a range of different influences from gaining the public's attention to promoting changes in government departments or to legislation. For example, Wang, the PhD student, put a tag 'free Burma' on his J-blog to support the monks' protest for democracy in Burma in 2007. This was a cross-national initiative launched by j-bloggers online on 4 October 2007 (Figure 7.4), the day was dubbed 'the International Bloggers' Day for Burma'. From the picture captured from Wang's blog, we can seen that a short film about the news story was posted under the Free Burma label - indicating that the news content was embedded into the networked blog sphere; allowing people to watch the film when they visited Wang's blog.

However, it is still uncertain whether or not the blogger's online alliance had any actual influence on the Burma protest. However, reports from mainstream news media (Holmes, 2007) agree that at least the protests in Burma were made visible via the local blogger's picture when mass media was banned. This point, to a certain extent, illustrated the of cultural politics argument.

Nevertheless, in my study, the networked structure of the blog sphere can sometimes contribute to some actual changes in actions - especially when a blogger's practices are integrated into other social activity. Here we should return to the Lo-Sheng case. When the issue was revealed by few bloggers on their blogs at first, the issue encouraged many of bloggers to comment on the issue on their own blogs, or to include hypertext links to the website of the Lo-Sheng Youth Action Union. Some bloggers also provided the short clip they filmed when the police expelled the protesters; and asked bloggers to share the clip on their blogs by providing the hypertext freely. Some of the j-blogs practically recorded the daily developments of Lo-Sheng. In March 2007, some

bloggers decided to advertise their opinions in mainstream newspapers and ask people to donate in order to publish the advertisement. The initiative received a huge reaction online. Nearly 400 bloggers donated money and they reached their goal – 20,000 NT dollars (approximately 3,000 pounds) – in 24 hours. By linking their actions to the mainstream news (advertisement) and actual social action (the protest), bloggers' on the Lo-Sheng issue created a social atmosphere among many people who were opposed to the demolition of the Lo-Sheng building. As a result, the local government decided to cancel the construction of the underground system and considered a new plan to preserve the building.

Figure 7.4 James Wang's J-blog –Island Republic- and the tag of 'free Burma'

(Captured on 26 October 2007)

The convergence culture: the connection between blogs and mainstream journalism

I have analysed two forms of online participatory journalism in the previous sections. Now I shall turn my attention the mainstream media's response. Some aspects have been mentioned earlier in this chapter, but I would like to focus on the connection of the participatory journalism and the mainstream online journalism in this section; as well as the professional journalists' reactions to the participatory journalism in the next section. I would like to show how mainstream online journalism and participatory journalism have become integrated through different practices from production and consumption - which forms a convergence culture of online journalism on the Internet.

Today, we have seen that mainstream news media have started to incorporate blog journalism into their production practices. For example, three major mainstream online news organisations - *UDN.com*, *Chinatimes.com* and *ETtoday.com* all launched their blog forums and encouraged their readers to set up their blogs on their online news websites (see Chapter 3). Articles related to some news issues from the blog forums were then usually selected by the editors of these mainstream news websites in order to reflect the public's viewpoints.

The trend of mainstream online journalism embracing blog journalism has several significant meanings. Firstly, it means that blog journalism might become part of the mainstream news product. This facilitates the process I have argued: the convergence culture of online journalism. I have pointed out the meaning of media convergence for online journalism in the previous chapter (see Chapter 1 & 5); which demonstrated that convergence in online journalism is more than simply a technological shift (Jenkins, 2004) but includes the integration of reporting forms, practices, media organizations,

and so forth. My previous analysis of user-generated content in mainstream online journalism (the rumour page on *ETtoday.com*) and blog journalism can be seen as the elements of media convergence in the online news environment.

Online news readers, on the other hand, also contribute to this convergence culture through their consumption practices. We can observe this from two aspects. On the one hand, some studies have shown that many j-bloggers prefer to use the content in mainstream journalism as supplementary material or sources (Lowrey, 2006), which means that part of j-bloggers' practices are connected to mainstream journalism. On the other hand, many surveys have shown that, although they are very few in numbers, some blogs have gradually become one of the news resources in people's everyday lives. For example, a survey in 2007 found that about 6% of respondents cited news and comments as their major activities when browsing blogs (Cheng, 2007). Another marketing survey of blog use in 2005 in Taiwan showed that about 15% of respondents browsed blogs for real-time news information (Insight Explorer, 2006). These two aspects suggest that consumption practices combine with participatory journalism to become part of the convergence culture of online journalism. Moreover, through bloggers' comments, discussions, as well as the redistribution of the content of mainstream journalism; citizen's grassroots journalism brings journalism out into a larger community (Grabowicz, 2003).

Secondly, the convergence of the mainstream journalism and participatory journalism in the online news environment also, as Henry Jenkins (2004) suggests, sees a renegotiation of the relationship between producers and consumers in journalism. A great part of this re-negotiated relationship results from the blurring of the boundary between citizen and consumer. I have discussed several of these aspects in the previous section as I argue that user-generated content in mainstream online journalism leads a

redefinition and repositioning of news producer and consumer. I would now like to discuss this aspect in more detail.

Some authors indicate that media participation for the public through online media demonstrates that citizens who are normally treated as consumers by the commercial media, reassert their citizenship by expressing their opinions directly (Allan, 2003; Gillmor, 2004a; Jenkins, 2004).

It is worth outlining the historical perspective on the consumer/citizen distinction. Normally, the roles of consumer and citizen are assumed to exist in separate spaces (Couldry, 2004a). In media studies, this distinction is related to the perspective on the media audience by those involved in production. In Habermas's discussion of the public sphere, he indicates that the media get the change to become the public sphere for citizens' public debates in contemporary society; however, market forces and the commercialised media has led to an upsurge of popular culture (which has been called 'mass culture' by theorists of the cultural industry) (Hilmes, 2004). Therefore, the commercial media are engaged in promoting mass consumption, not providing resources for citizenship for public debate and political participation (Murdock, 1990). On the other hand, in some countries, especially in Europe, public service broadcasting systems have been introduced to ensure that the public media provide quality information which is considered necessary to inform citizens for the purposes of democratic debate and decision-making. Therefore, individuals have been assigned a two-role identity – consumer and citizen – according to the content they consume.

The distinction of consumer/citizen is also linked to the distinction of media ownership between private and public. That is, private media organisations and enterprises have been recognised as contributing consumption practices which promotes desire for comfort, beauty and leisure affairs which link to the individual's

(consumer's) private life. On the contrary, the public-funded media has been linked to the notion of the public sphere, which preserves the citizen's rights associated with freedom, truth, justice and public affairs.

From the above perspective, consumption has been conceived as being opposed to citizenship. As Justin Lewis summarises: 'while citizens can address every aspect of cultural, social, political and public life operating in what Habermas called 'the public sphere'; consumers find expression only in the marketplace' (Lewis, 2003, cited in Hilmes, 2004:online). Nevertheless, many authors have called for a rethink of the consumer (private)/citizen (public) dichotomy - especially taking new media technologies into consideration (Couldry, 2004a; Hilmes, 2004). They argue that the individual's two identities - as a consumer in the private sphere and citizen in the public sphere - tend to converge (Deuze, 2007a; Hartley, 2005), both in the design of media production and individuals' consumption practices. Hartley indicates that 'nowadays individuals are addressed in all media as both consumers and citizens' (Hartley, 2005:16). He uses the Internet and September 11 as an example and asserts that before the tragic day, the Internet search engines were groaning under the usual weight of requests for more about commercial and entertainment information; whereas the next day, the issue had completely changed - such that patriotic searchers were looking for news about the terrible events (Hartley, 2005).

The use of the blog also reflects the trend of convergence and blurring the distinction between the two identities. For example, in Taiwan, blogs were originally designed for consumers' private use, rather than for citizens' public discussions. Blogs were designed for users to write their diaries and post photos to share with friends[43].

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[43] The private feature of blog is illustrated by the example of Wu-Ming-Xiao-Zhan (無名小站), the most popular blog space in Taiwan. This blog space was run at first by a college student for the purpose of sharing a diary and photos with friends - which remains the most popular function for most of the bloggers today.

Mainstream news websites launched their blog forums for the purpose of promoting news consumption. For example, the blog forum on *ETtoday.com* has been designed to link to the main news website in order to attract more readers to read their news reports.

However, some j-bloggers I interviewed did not only treat their blogs and media participation as the practices in the private domain; they sincerely treated their j-blogs as spaces for public discussion. For example, Wang, the PhD student, told me that he thought that his blog was part of the 'public space' where he could discuss public interest issues with others. As he indicated:

At first, I wrote my blog very often and I had a picture in mind that my blog could become a public sphere. The visitors might not know who I am, but I hope they know there is a blog providing an alternative viewpoint. (Wang, a PhD student, male, 32 years old, 16/03/2006)

The above quote shows that bloggers try to connect their blogs to become part of the public sphere; and amplify their voices as citizens to be heard by more people. Therefore, they are not only consumers who consume news information or use online media technologies for private interests; they are also citizens who participate in public debate and express their opinions in the public sphere. Blogs have thus become, as Couldry indicates: 'the everyday space wherein people try to speak up for themselves or take action and their belief about what differences their actions will make' (Couldry, 2004a:23). It is also the space of public connection and participation (Couldry, 2004a). From this perspective, the consumer/citizen and private/public distinctions in the blog sphere seem inappropriate. Online news readers, Internet users, bloggers can be both as the 'productive consumers' (consumers who are involved in the practices of cultural

reproduction, such as fashioning information interpretation and object appropriation actively, see Chapter 6) and the 'dispersed citizens' (citizens who participate in public debate or provide alternative voices in different locations in the networked space) (Couldry, 2004a:24-25).

Response to participatory journalism

Being the productive consumer and the dispersed citizen at the same time, online news readers who are involved with the user-generated content and blog journalism have substantial influence on the practices of the mainstream news producers. In the users-generated content, producers and consumers seem to form a cooperative relationship. This has been shown via the example of the rumour page in my previous discussion. On the contrary, the relationship between professional news-workers and j-bloggers seems to involve different degree of contestation (Boczkowski, 2004b). As I have stated, blog journalism tends to challenge to the status of the mainstream news media in the way news is reported and interpreted.

As I have mentioned, many news organisations are trying to integrate readers' participatory journalism into their online news products. These attempts are combined for various purposes. One of these is to link their news products to public service values. For example, one of my respondents, Mai-Jane, a reporter from a famous financial newspaper – *The Economic Daily*, was requested by her company to answer readers' e-mails about their tax issues. According to Mai-Jane, although answering readers' e-mail took her a great deal of time and influenced her routine work; the company still asked her to do this job because the interaction with readers had been defined as part of public service of news media.

However, these kinds of 'public service' duties are also related to commercial considerations. As I have analysed in Chapter 5, interactivity in online journalism is a

strategy of increasing the potential scale of readership when converging consumers'
media participation practices. For instance, many professional news-workers I
interviewed were forced by their employers to establish their personal blogs to enable
readers to contact them. News organisations treat blogs and interactivity as the means of
attracting readers to visit news websites often if they can interact with journalists.
Media groups such as EMG (Eastern Multimedia Group) asked their TV stars and
famous TV news presenters to set up blogs on *ETtoday.com* to encourage their fans to
visit the websites. Additionally, many mainstream news media also set up their own
blog platforms and providing the facility for bloggers to write their own blogs on these
websites - which is regarded as another strategy to keep readers visiting their websites
regularly.

Professional news-workers have different attitudes towards participatory journalism.
One respondent, Chi-Kao, a journalist from a daily newspaper, told me that he thought
blog journalism posed no threat to mainstream journalism because the quality and
credibility of participatory journalism are still in question. Chi-Kao said that 'people
only treat participatory journalism as a supplement to mainstream journalism' (Chi-Kao,
a senior newspaper journalist, male, 40 years old, 02/09/2005).

Another respondent, Rong-Xin Ho, a senior newspaper journalist, used several
strategies when facing the demands of readers' interaction and challenges. As a
journalist covering political news, Ho was one of the pioneers in Taiwan who started to
write a blog at a very early stage. His early blog was concerned with the 'inside story' of
news items; such that some of his material was not allowed to be published in his
newspaper. His blog at this stage did not use his real name and was published in on a
very small website. Ho often criticised the performance of the mainstream news media
in Taiwan on this blog; and encouraged some readers to discuss these issues with him.

Later, Ho shifted his blog to the blog forum launched by the online version of the newspaper he worked for. However, when moving his blog on the mainstream news media, Ho began using his real name and changed his blog topics to Japanese drama and sport, which he said were the topics related his personal interests. The reason he turned his blog to soft topics, according to Ho, was a deliberate strategy avoid some 'ultra language' in online discussions when readers now knew his real name - thus he selected some leisure topics for the new blog. Ho said,

You know, some readers will leave messages with irrational words when

they know the journalist's name, because people like to transfer their anger

at the Government to journalists. (Ho, a senior newspaper journalist, male,

39 years old, 20/07/2005)

However, there were still many opportunities for Ho to write some controversial issues on his blog. In my interview with him, he seemed to dislike replying to reader's comments on controversial issues. As he told me:

In Taiwan, many discussions are easy to fall into the political debate. This

kind of interaction makes me feel tired. Readers do not want to

communicate with you; they just want to express their emotions. (Ho, a

senior newspaper journalist, male, 39 years old, 20/07/2005)

Ho told me that some issues were not appropriate for online discussion because most of the readers might have been affected by their political stance and could not consider the issues rationally.

Unlike the 'no comment attitude' to controversial issues, Ho did reply to readers' comments about other 'non-sensitive issues' on his blog – such as Japanese drama and sport. However, Ho said that readers' comments and messages on his blog so far had been quite rational. Some of his colleagues did not allow readers to leave their comments, nor did they reply to readers' comments because they could not bear their strong criticism. But Ho thought that the producer/consumer interaction would gradually become a significant part of news work in the future. As he indicated:

My blog is mainly about my personal interests, but this does not mean that my readers do not have the chance to question my daily reports. If someone visits my blog and question my report, I still have to respond to their questions. I think journalists do not have the right to remain silent in response to readers' questions; you will be forced to reply passively under these circumstances. (Ho, a senior newspaper journalist, male, 39 years old, 20/07/2005)

To sum up, my analysis above has suggested we are facing the transformation of the relationship between news producers and consumers. Professional news-workers and mainstream news media adopt different strategies when facing the challenge of participatory journalism and readers' demands of interacting with news producers. My analysis also confirms that participatory journalism and the change of the producer/consumer relationship cased by this practice cannot simply be seen as a technological shift and innovation liberating individuals from the constraints of their consumer identity. It is also bound up with the commercial considerations from the mainstream news media; such that they are trying to integrate participatory journalism

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to become part of the mainstream journalism. This is similar to Thurman's (2008) study which demonstrates that increasing circulation is one of the reasons that mainstream journalism elicits reader contributions and participatory journalism. However, professional news-workers' reactions to participatory journalism reflect a dilemma in terms of their own professional identity. As I have shown, news-workers, on the one hand acknowledge that producer/consumer interactions are unavoidable in the digital age; while on the other hand, they still question the quality and credibility of participatory journalism and the irrational aspects of the reader contributions.

Conclusion

The increasing online participatory culture in journalism influences both news culture and the operation of the public sphere. As my investigation of two forms of online participatory journalism has shown, readers' engagement with the production of journalism has challenged the existing role of mainstream news on the one hand, and provided different knowledge and perspectives to facilitate public discussion in the public sphere on the other.

On the basis of my findings in this chapter, I would suggest that participatory journalism cannot simply been treated as the practices triggered and fostered by the innovation of online media technologies. The practices in fact correspond with the motive of media reform and construction of a better public sphere for debates through cultural means resulting from citizens' endeavours. However, my study also suggested that the commercial considerations of mainstream journalism also provide a different range of spaces and efforts to utilize participatory journalism and readers' contributions to increase circulation of their news products.

A core argument of my findings is that participatory journalism, to a certain extent, fosters convergence cultural in online journalism. My study of participatory journalism

suggests that all forms of news reports, information, and knowledge are integrated with different contributions from different creators and locations. In this process of culture convergence, online journalism has been extended to cover a large landscape. As my analysis has shown, j-bloggers, via their practices, embed their blogs into a networked structure; and mainstream journalism also contributes to this convergence culture as they start to incorporate participatory journalism in their news content. Online journalism, thus, has become the domain which includes different contributions from whom Deuze (2007b:259) labels as 'co-creators' of cultural products in the media industry.

The convergence culture in online journalism also implies that the distinction between news producers and consumers in media work is blurred, as some authors have predicted (Poster, 2004). However, the effect of this blurred role of producers and consumers is not just that readers become producers and distribute their own news reports. It also includes attempts by citizens, by using online media technologies, to re-engage in more citizenship-driven practices. As my cases suggests, those citizen journalists (or j-bloggers) are actively pursuing the news agenda they define as important to the public; rather than simply accepting the predetermined mainstream news agenda.

Obviously my study suggests that some professional news-workers have recognised the complementary potential of participatory journalism - which confirmed the results of some existing studies (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008). However, many studies indicate that professional journalists have refused to embrace the increasing participatory culture and the demand of more interaction with readers due to the constraints of the newsroom routines (e.g. time, high workload, and division of duties) (Paulussen & Ugille, 200; Domingo et al., 2007).

In my study, I found participatory journalism to be counterintuitive to professional values and to the identity of the professional news-workers; which led them to employ different strategies to avoid directly interacting with the grassroots power of readers. However, some of them in my study did value readers' contributions and reconsidered their role in the process of news circulation. This has been reflected in the change of bringing more interactive outcomes into the narrative style of their reporting.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have sought to understand online journalism-related practices in Taiwan and how these practices shape online news culture. In this final chapter, I will discuss the findings of my investigation of three main research themes, including online news production, consumption and online participatory journalism; I will also point out the implications derived from my empirical investigation. Furthermore, I will assess the significance of my practice-based study of online journalism and address some limitations in order to highlight a possible direction for future study of this topic.

Throughout the chapters of this thesis, my analysis has centred on two main research questions: how is online journalism practised in the domain of production and consumption; and how is online news culture shaped or constituted through practices? By arguing that online journalism should be studied as an emerging cultural form, my basic viewpoint is that online journalism has created its own culture, through different practitioners' practices, around this emerging cultural form. I reject some perspectives that simply treat online journalism as a by-product or subordinate of conventional news media. I also argue that online news culture is not singularly shaped and determined by professional news-workers' everyday routine practices. Meanwhile, a great number of online news consumers also engage in activities that shape and construct the online news culture. This basic argument has been proven with my empirical analysis of Taiwanese online journalism and practices related to online news media.

As my analysis shows, in Taiwan, mainstream online journalism and non-mainstream (alternative) online journalism commenced at around the same time, and then became two important types of online journalism in the cultural domain. The two kinds of online journalism have become significant elements of the online news culture in Taiwan. As my empirical analysis indicates, with the practices that relate to

the two kinds of online journalism, different practitioners in fact create different ranges of convergence in online journalism; this I argue is one of the important characteristics of online news culture. Therefore, my findings assert that convergence in online journalism does not only lie within an integration of media content and forms, but also involves a convergence of different social and cultural practices. That is, different practitioners' (including professional news-workers and the general public) creative work and their contributions to news content are consolidated in the online news environment. This convergence, in online journalism, can occur as a result of market strategies from mainstream news media's intentions to embrace news interactivism – to engage with more consumer participation in the news production process. Nevertheless, most of the time, convergence in online journalism appears to be formed from different practitioners' unplanned practices of using digital media forms to produce journalistic content on the Internet. Therefore, my findings imply that it is a different range of 'practice' which creates the convergence characteristics of online journalism.

Within a different range of convergence, mainstream online news producers and online news consumers both engage in shaping online news culture. On the production side, mainstream online news producers emphasize the immediacy of news, constant news-updates and sequences of planned news flows in their news product. By contrast, consumers' online news consumption contributes to the creation of online news culture in different ways. Firstly, online news consumption involves various practices (appropriation, objectification, conversion and incorporation) of online news media to make online journalism meaningful in consumers' everyday lives. Secondly, their practices also include the decoding process of online news content. Unlike traditional news media, the processes in the online news environment are usually accompanied by

different usages of digital forms such as hypertext links, web engine searching, and multiple window surfing. Thirdly and more significantly, consumers also contribute to online news culture through their practices of online participatory journalism, such as blog journalism or user-generated content. This online participatory journalism produces a kind of online journalism that follows a different logic from that of mainstream online journalism in Taiwan.

The above findings suggest that online journalism, in Taiwan, displays a convergence culture, in which the characteristics of this culture depend on various practitioners' practices. My findings, in this aspect, resonate with Jenkins's (2004) argument about convergence culture in the age of digital media. As he indicates, convergence is 'both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom up consumer-driven process' (Jenkins, 2004:37).

Furthermore, the convergence culture in online journalism and related practices has significant meaning for democracy in Taiwan. My study of online participatory journalism reveals that whilst diverse news content generated by citizen-consumers and bloggers is presented in the blog sphere or other online spaces, it has extended the landscape of online journalism, which engages with plural opinions and an alternative version of news reports. With this level of convergence, online participatory journalism offers citizens a way into media and political participation through cultural means. That is to say, a way of altering and enlightening the public's perception and acknowledgement towards posting their version of news reports and comments on the Internet, and attempting to provoke public discussion, rather than aiming to change their actual behaviour or trigger policy approving legislation, which a radical political viewpoint has sought to achieve.

The contribution of this thesis has two dimensions. Firstly, I study online

journalism and its culture from a practice aspect. This practice-based study contributes a new possibility for understanding an emerging culture form through the practices organised around it. The value of practice-based research is that we analyse culture through publicly observable processes, instead of via traditional abstract notions which see culture as internal ideas or meaning. By looking into practitioners' practices, we can thus examine how different technological tools, criteria, and ethical frameworks are used in online journalism, and what other social activities are organised around the emerging cultural form.

Secondly, my study of online journalism also contributes an empirical understanding of how online news culture has emerged in Taiwan – a cultural region where news media needs to survive in a highly competitive environment, and the ability of using ICT (including online media) is highly valued within society. With these two important backgrounds, online news media developed quickly and soon became accepted by people on the island. However, many issues concerning online news media have attracted very few studies so far. Most online journalism studies in Taiwan still focus on the aspect of what commercial benefits it brings to news outlets. This has led related studies generally to cover the production side of the industry. Online news consumers and their consumption practices, on the other hand, have not been studied in depth. Structuring my research issues with the cultural circuit model in this thesis, my study examine the five moments within the circuit of online news culture, including production, consumption, regulation, identity and representation. With this framework, my analysis thus presents a more comprehensive study covering how online journalism is shaped and practised at these different moments.

The above discussion has outlined my main empirical findings and contributions in this thesis. In the following sections, I will discuss the implications and limitations

derived from the empirical findings of this thesis. My discussion in this final chapter will be divided into the sections described as follows. In the first part, I summarise the key findings of each chapter to respond to the research questions I have proposed in Chapter 1. Following this, I discuss the implications of my empirical findings and evaluating my empirical findings to the development of online journalism and democracy of Taiwanese society. Ultimately, in the final part, I make suggestions for future online news research.

Key Findings of Each Chapter and Responds to the Research Questions

In Chapter 1, I ask a series of secondary questions which emerged from the two main questions proposed in the previous discussions (see discussion above in this chapter). In my following discussion, I will retrace my findings in each empirical chapter of this thesis in response to these secondary questions.

Through the entire thesis, I examine online journalism and related practices through five articulated moments – production, consumption, regulation, representation and identity – within the circulation process of news in the online environment. In Chapter 3, I analysed the development of news media in Taiwan, from the authoritarian period to the liberal democratic period, and also introduced the government's policies that contributed to the diffusion of online media technologies on the island. My discussion suggests that the processes of regulation, de-regulation, and re-regulation of news media and telecom systems have influenced the development of online news media, as well as online news culture in Taiwan.

Following Chapter 3, in Chapters 4 and 5, I used one mainstream news website – ETtoday.com – as a case study, in order to investigate the production practices of online journalism. My empirical investigation of the online newsroom aims to answer the three secondary research questions of online news production I proposed in Chapter 1. In this

part, I firstly ask: '**how has online journalism transformed the practices of news production (SQ1)**'; and '**what norms, principles or criteria guide the production practices in the online newsroom (SQ2)**'.

Via my analysis of the practices in the online newsroom, my findings in Chapters 4 and 5 reveal that online journalism has restructured and changed some of the basic elements of news production practices, including time, space and news flow. My findings in this part respond to the first secondary research question I asked. As proposed in Chapters 4 and 5, with the assistance of online media technologies, the central online newsroom in ETtoday.com and the journalists who work at different locations outside the newsroom form a network working model. The network model is designed according to the producer's perspective of news time and news flows in the online news environment. That is, the model sustains the requirements of immediacy, constant news updates and sufficient news flows, which have been perceived as being the key features of online journalism. The aim of online newsroom reorganization is to reduce the complicated gate-keeping process that is usually adopted in traditional newsrooms. This newsroom reorganization has led to online news production practices requiring smaller workforces which enable the news websites to generate news reports more efficiently.

The second question (SQ2) concerns there being different norms and principles used in news selection in online journalism. As shown in my investigation in Chapter 5, in the online newsroom, data provided by the calculation of reader click-through numbers (CTN) of news reports, is also used to confirm the legitimacy of commercial values by linking consumer-reading preferences to production practices. In the meantime, this reinforces the logic of market competition in online news production. However, online media technologies are also utilized to reinforce the news

professionalism upheld by the news-workers in my case study. As my analysis showed, with the aid of some online media technologies, certain norms and principles derived from news professionalism have been used to resist market values in the online newsroom. Therefore, in the online newsroom, production practices are in fact a negotiated process within the interaction of the logic of market values and news professional values. This negotiation process seems to be a long-standing phenomenon in news media, but, in online journalism, my observations suggest that online media technologies have resulted in a new situation for the negotiating processes of the two values.

My third secondary question asked: '**how are online media technologies utilized in the process of online news production (SQ3)**'. My findings in Chapters 4 and 5 show that online media technologies in the online newsroom do not only provide new instruments for covering and generating news reports and new methods to distribute news, they also alter newsroom culture and routine production practices. The relationship between technology-in-use and the practices of online news production will discussed further, later in this chapter.

Following the analysis of production practices in the online newsroom, in Chapter 6, I explored the consumption practices of online journalism which aims to answer the fourth secondary research question in relation to online news consumption: '**how does online news influence consumers' news consumption in their everyday life (SQ4)**'. My findings suggest that online news consumption practices include the technological level: how the online news medium is used, and the textual level – how online news stories are read and interpreted. The two levels of online news consumption practices are related to each other – the double-articulation feature proposed by Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1992). Within this double-articulation feature, online journalism is

consumed through consumers' different practices, including connecting online news reading to sustaining their everyday living rhythms, sharing online news as a means of maintaining their social relationships, or treating reading online news as a way of displaying their imagination about their lifestyles in the information age.

In Chapter 7, I turned my focus onto investigating citizens/consumers' online participatory journalism, and suggested that this kind of practice is used by consumers as a cultural means of attempting to provide multiple versions of the truth and alternative viewpoints of news stories, which has a profound meaning in the public sphere and news culture in Taiwan. This chapter relates to some important research questions in this thesis, including: '**how does online journalism change the producer/consumer relationship in the online news environment (SQ5)**'; if online journalism does change the producer/consumer relationship, then '**how does this changed relationship influence journalism in the information age (SQ6)?**'

My findings in Chapter 7 indicate that the development of online participatory journalism has transformed the producer/consumer relationship in the online news environment, and this transformation influences several aspects of online news practices. First of all, the development of online participatory journalism has provoked mainstream news producers to rethink their occupational identities. The traditional role of the journalist as an information gatekeeper has partly been replaced by the notion of information broker. Some online journalists tend to use more reader-generated content in their news reports and treat their news reports as a product to present knowledge-as-process, rather than an end-product that simply tells readers what they should know. Secondly, the traditional information provider/recipient relationship has been transformed, with more and more consumers becoming 'citizen journalists'. News content generated from these citizen journalists has challenged the status of mainstream

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journalism, which has also shaped an alternative view of what news is and which information and messages should be counted as public knowledge in journalism when citizen journalists present different 'news topics' in the blog sphere. Thirdly, my findings also imply that professional news-workers tend to adopt different strategies to manage this transforming relationship, which include reducing interaction with readers or discussing non-journalistic issues to prevent conflicts and challenges.

The findings of Chapter 7 also address my question about the influence of online journalism on the public sphere. In this part, I asked: '**what are the implications of this change on the public sphere (SQ7)**'. As can be seen from my empirical investigation, online journalism provides those citizen-consumers with alternative ways and spaces to re-engage their citizenship. For instance, those j-bloggers in my study express their opinions in online space and arouse public attention about public interest issues. These aspects are essential for the operation of the public sphere in contemporary society. I will discuss this issue later in this chapter.

Online news production practices: convergence culture in mainstream online journalism

My investigation in the online newsroom of *ETtoday.com* suggests that the characteristics of practice in the online newsroom do not transplant the model of the old newsroom infrastructure, or the way of reporting and editing news from conventional news media (in particular newspapers). Nor does it only work for simply digitising news information or producing multi-media content to fit the demands of online journalism. Instead, in the online newsroom, production practices combine with existing values, principles and norms, with some novel technical capabilities that help reproduce a different nature of production practices. For example, a news value such as time has been a wildly emphasized value in different news media. However, in

association with online technologies, the online newsroom has re-organised its working patterns and newsroom structure in order to produce immediate reports, have constantly updated news or maintain non-stop sequences of news flow for the website. These elements seem to have become the important newsroom culture in online journalism.

A significant way to understand this online newsroom culture and its relationship to online news product, as argued, is through practice. From the perspective of practice theory, there is no single activity or aspect that is determined as a social practice. This has been confirmed in my case study, as my analysis has suggested that production practice in the online newsroom involves different elements including agents' actions, material aspects (e.g. technologies-in-use), and discursive aspects (e.g. values and norms), and other practices related to the production process of online journalism.

The culture of convergence in the online newsroom is the most significant feature to describe the character of production practice in my case study. As my analysis suggests, convergence in the online newsroom refers to diverse meanings and is also connected to different production practices. This convergence culture is not only determined by technological integration in the online newsroom, but is rather a developing process. As can be seen from my case study, the mainstream online news website (*ETtoday.com*) does at first try to produce news content through independent staff websites. However, when a large number of employees was laid off, due to the financial problems of the news website, convergence became important. For the news website, using news content directly, from other news media within the in-group media, was essential to presenting multi-media content quickly and providing sufficient news flow to update website news, which have been seen as important features for online journalism. From this point, we have seen that convergence in mainstream online journalism is not a pre-determined condition, but is a process developing according to some actual

conditions (e.g. newsroom policy, economic aspect, staff and so forth) of the online newsroom.

Convergence and production practices in my case seem also to be a mutually-shaped outcome. On the one hand, through using cross-media content from in-group media or business, the online news website created for itself a digital platform. This platform breaks boundaries of different forms of media and has integrated production practices in different newsrooms (or companies). On the other hand, my study also shows that, through digital convergence, different genres of information (commercial, entertaining or even superstitious) are embedded into news reports to serve commercial purposes in a more elaborate way (e.g. to embed commercial information in online news reports with hypertextual content), as well as in-group business promotions being presented as further information of news that links to commercial websites via hypertext. Convergence here is similar to what Ben Scott (2005:101) states, where it: 'refers to a new strategy in the economic management of information production and distribution'. One of the examples in my case study is that superstitious content was written in a journalistic style and presented as supply information linking to news stories via hypertext, and was in fact a cross-media promotion for the in-group business.

My findings about convergence culture, within the online newsroom, imply that it is not simply technological innovations that determine the creation of this culture. Furthermore, as mentioned, this convergence culture is shaped by different practices and vice versa. These practices relate to the following aspects. Firstly, convergence culture relates to material use. As can be seen in my case study, convergence is in fact reflected in the cross-use of media content. The use of hypertext and multi-media genres in online news reports, to a certain extent, represent a different range of

convergence in online news production. Secondly, it also relates to market strategy, as indicated, that media convergence is utilized to promote in-group business. Thirdly, this convergence culture also involves the practice of value judgment. That is, as my analysis shows, because of the value of immediacy and constant news updates being perceived as important values for online journalism; therefore, the online news website I investigated has to use other news media's content to support these values.

Technology-in-practice in online journalism

The role of technology, as previously mentioned, has attracted a lot of attention in online journalism studies. From some utopian perspectives, online journalism researcher like Pavlik (1999; 2001) seems to amplify the effect and influence of technology in online journalism. They imply that technological innovation and adoption aid online news-workers to do better in news reporting, and also empower online news consumers by offering them more opportunities to decide their news reading path, more space to express their opinions and diverse channels to interact with news producers (see discussion in Domingo, 2006). However, my empirical study seems to reject part of this utopian perspective of the relationship between technological effects and online news production and consumption. In the online newsroom, my findings suggest that technologies are a part of materiality aspects for online news production practices. Technologies in online journalism are set up to become one of the elements in online news-making. The use of different technologies should be negotiated with other aspects or embedded in other practices in the online newsroom.

One of the significant findings in this respect, which is driven from my empirical investigation, is how online media technologies are used in shaping news product in the online newsroom. My study reveals that CTN – the online readers monitoring system –

has been used as a benchmark to evaluate the value of news reports in the online

newsroom and has become an important guideline for news selection in the online

newsroom. Originally, the CTN data was used as an online technique for evaluating the

effect of online advertising. In my case study, this online technique was used as a

constant reader-monitoring mechanism, to calculate page-view times of online news

reports. In order to increase its consumer base, the online news media requested its

news-workers to select and produce news reports based on the CTN data. In the

meantime, the data was also used to evaluate its news-workers' performance.

Investigating how the CTN data is used highlights several significant thoughts

about online technologies in the online newsroom. Firstly, my study asserts that

technologies in online journalism cannot be seen as a separate or external force which

cause transformation and change to online news product. On the contrary, technologies

are embedded into production practices, and their values and meanings are determined

by what end they are applied and appropriated to. In addition to the use of the CTN data,

another example in my case study is how online technologies were put into practice to

aid the newsroom to re-organise time, space and news flows, in order to produce

immediacy, and constantly-updated, continually-flowing news. As mentioned, the

online newsroom achieved these goals by constructing a network working model,

which reduced the gate-keeping process of publishing news; it also allowed for the

re-location of working assignments, which would assure that online news reports were

produced as quickly as possible.

Secondly, in online journalism, technologies seem gradually to be used as

non-human delegation, to replace the human work of news selection and publishing.

That is, as my analysis has shown, a random selection mechanism was installed by the

online news websites which replaced human practice. This non-human delegation was

set up to select news according to the CTN data. As indicated in my analysis, these news reports selected by non-human delegation were presented as 'hot news' or 'top news' on the news website, so that online news readers would be attracted to read it.

From this example, we can see how online technologies are involved in shaping the representation of news content on online news websites. Here, technologies served as a filtering system in the process of online news production, which selects news automatically or provides criteria for new selection (the CTN data), thus influencing news production practices. Similar cases, of filtering online technology, can also be found on the consumption side of online journalism. For instance, Google News (http://news.google.com/) enables readers to customize their news page, which means once readers set up the news formats they prefer, the online news filtering system will automatically select news according to their preferences. Scholars thus indicate that an inevitable consequence is that technological progression will be poised to replace human news editors (Allan, 2006).

Yet, it is still too early to say that the automatic mechanism of news selection will totally replace human work in online journalism, or that market values accompanying this kind of technological adoption will completely manipulate online news product. My observations in the online newsroom indicate that most news-workers still insist on their news professional norms and principles, whilst news organizations try to adopt online technologies to achieve their commercial purposes. However, some resistance can still be seen in the online newsroom. In my case, news-workers used different 'technological tactics' for their practices of resistance to the penetration of market logic into the online newsroom. These technological tactics are based on the special features of online journalism. For instance, some news-workers used the feature of constant news updates to online news websites to change commercial news quickly, with some

hiding their real opinions inside online news reports, which attempted to hinder the amount of time that management spent checking the news stories. However, the effect of these 'small tactics' still requires long term investigation and observation, but suggests that resistance practices in the online newsroom, towards political and economic forces, seem to take place as part of everyday routine in the online newsroom.

Online news consumption practices and the convergence culture

Following the cultural circuit framework, this thesis takes consumption as another significant element in the circulation of online news culture. Through my empirical analysis, I suggest that online news consumption does in fact align with various social practices, rather than be simply 'reading news on the Internet'. Examining online news consumption, from a practice aspect, enables me to observe and analyse different practices related to online journalism. Many consumers in my case have shown their abilities to make the online news medium meaningful to them, via practices of appropriation, incorporation, objectification and conversion. Within these practices, online news consumption for some people can be a routine, which accompanies other everyday activities. The easy-come-and-go feature and constant news updates of online journalism have made it easy for this medium to be incorporated into a reader's everyday rhythm. Online news also functions and is used as an innovative object to display readers' perspectives and imagination about their capabilities to receive fashionable and advanced information. Furthermore, online news reading activities can also be an extension of readers' off-line social relationships.

Yet online journalism also provides news readers with miscellaneous digital forms and online technologies which influence their news reading and interpreting practices. Through these digital forms, online news readers can click different hypertexts for

further information, search related news via a Web search engine, or change multiple screen windows via a mouse click. A reader's online news consumption with these digital forms and technologies enables them to generate their own combinations of story-line, genre and reading path for their news.

These various online news consumption practices in the meantime imply that readers contribute to the convergence culture of online journalism in some circumstances. As indicated, online news readers generate different ranges in their combinations of news, information and media form in the process of their consumption. Each combination represents a complex of convergence, and this convergence appears to be determined by online news readers' own reading practices, rather than explicitly following online news producers' designs.

Online Participatory journalism: a reinvention of publicness

Online news consumption is also involved with the practice of producing news content, as my study of online participatory journalism has shown. This type of online consumption practice has yielded profound meanings to online news culture and the public sphere within Taiwanese society. Scholars have argued that the public's online news participatory practices, to a certain extent, 're-write the rules which have traditionally governed journalism as profession' (Allan, 2006:179). That is as well as providing another way of public participation in politics, and I use the term 'cultural politics' in this thesis.

This cultural politics that was provoked by blog journalism (or online participatory journalism) has had a significant impact on the public sphere in Taiwanese society. As mentioned, the public's participation in media and journalism, in Taiwan, has its special cultural background. Politically, after the end of the authoritarian period and the entrance of democracy into Taiwan, some issues do not have solutions or agreements

that include the aspect of national identity (e.g. should people living in Taiwan be seen as Taiwanese or Chinese?), and the nation's future (e.g. should Taiwan be unified with the PRC or be independent?). Social, cultural and economic issues are also influenced by these unsolved political debates (e.g. some high-tech companies are not allowed to invest in the PRC to date because China is still treated as a hostile country by Taiwan). Conflicts caused by confronting these issues deepened after political democratization. These uncertainties in politics seem to be the critical reason why Taiwanese people enthusiastically involve themselves with journalistic-related practices, because everyone in Taiwan wants to express their opinion on these unsolved questions through different media participation.

Online journalism provides a cultural means for the Taiwanese to intervene and participate in political debates and media reform. Participatory journalism, from j-bloggers, shows their motivation for revealing 'multiple angles' on news stories and plural opinions, which aim to alter peoples' perspective of issues, or challenge the discourse of some issues which are created by mainstream news media and official powers. Hence their purpose is mainly to focus on cultural aspects such as symbols, values, discourses and perceptions. However, my analysis suggests that cultural politics, which is triggered by the practices of online participatory journalism, can sometimes bring about real behaviour or actions. This is especially true when some issues are distributed and form a networked structure within a number of personal blogs, and thus connect their blogging practice with other actions or social movements.

The implication here is that online participatory journalism creates a new model of publicness, or more specifically using John Thompson's term (1995:235) – reinventing publicness. In his book *The Media and Modernity*, Thompson, following Habermas's discussion of the public sphere, reviews the different models of publicness in different

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eras. The ancient Greek city-states model is that individuals came together in the same spatial-temporal setting to discuss issues relating to common concerns or public interests. In the eighteenth century, coffee houses and salons in Europe offered a place where the bourgeois gathered together, to participate in public life and discuss issues in newspapers; at this time public opinion was formed through these discussions (Habermas, 1989).

In contemporary society, mediated publicness, a form of publicness expressed through journalism from the mass media, has become the major form of publicness. This model of publicness 'does not involve individuals coming together in a shared locale to discuss issues of common concern' (J. B. Thompson, 1995:236). On the contrary, public opinions and public debate are formed and mediated by mass news media, through their news reports, comments or, to a limited extent, the public's 'letters to the editor' or a hotline phone-in to the newsroom. However, this kind of mediated publicness seems to be looked on unfavourably by most Taiwanese due to the commercialisation of the media. Most people in Taiwan think that the news media industry, as mentioned in Chapter 3, is too eager to pursue economic benefits and concerned little with the public interest relating to issues that facilitate public debate.

Thompson (1995) argues that we need to find ways to create a new form of publicness, which will go beyond mass meditated publicness. The emergence of online participatory journalism echoes Thompson's perspective. However, the blog sphere does not operate and function like an ancient Greek city-state or the eighteenth century bourgeois public sphere that citizens co-presented at the spatial-temporal locale. It provides a possible way of forming publicness through more dialogue, and conversations from dispersed participants located in a different space and time. Within this new form of publicness, dispersed people, who are located in different places, make

their opinions and different angles of news stories 'visible' to the public via online media, so that their practices in this respect overcome the spatial-temporal locales, through their practice of online participatory journalism.

Citizens' journalism and its impact on global online news

In addition to the public sphere, online participatory journalism appears to have certain influences on news culture in the digital age. As my analysis implies, Taiwan's mainstream news media and participatory journalism have gradually merged in the online news environment. As mentioned previously, this trend seems to be driven by the growing news interactivism in mainstream news media, which tries to incorporate user-generated content into online news product or integrate blog journalism onto the news website, for the purpose of increasing the consumer base and maintaining readership. Besides, another kind of integration between mainstream news and participatory journalism also takes place when j-blogs refer to information from mainstream news media in their blogs. Nevertheless, this trend represents a convergence between mainstream journalism and participatory journalism, which is similar to what Deuze (2007b) and John Hartley (2005) suggested – a convergence of consumers' creative work in the media industry.

Boczkowski (2004b) uses the term 'news world' to analyse this convergence culture between the production and consumption processes in online journalism. He uses Howard Becker's notion of 'art world' to describe the emergence of 'news world' in online journalism. In his notion of 'art world', Becker (1984: 34) refers to 'all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art'. Accordingly, Boczkowski indicates that, similar to Becker's argument, that art is not only the product of artists; news in the online news environment could be what emerges from the news world and

'may not always be what newspapers people make it' (Boczkowski, 2004b:184). Here, Boczkowski denotes that, in this news world, news should not be completely produced by professional news-workers and should also be produced by others – no matter whether they are news consumers, citizens or other members of the general public.

Embracing news interactivism in mainstream online journalism can be seen as part of convergence culture as well. This practice, to a certain extent, has altered the existing producer/consumer relationship in the process of the circuit of news culture. Boczkowski (2004b) indicates that a trend towards more user-generated content, in online journalism, will depend on the civic or public journalism movement, which 'has sought a greater involvement of the citizenry in the editorial process and the publication of all the news that the citizen wants to know' (Boczkowski, 2004b:185). In my analysis, we have seen that it is true that readers'/producers' interactivity and user-generated content have gradually been accepted by some mainstream news-workers. User-generated content is unlike traditional forms, such as a letter to the editor, but incorporates more creative work from online news readers as interpretation, news source or even writing the news directly. In other words, online news producers and consumers are now involved with more ongoing conversations and negotiations in the process of news production. Mainstream online journalism thus shows some intention to integrate more readers' viewpoints in their reports. As Boczkowski (2004b:185) asserts: 'the online convergence of an event tends to elicit a wider spectrum of voices and the explicit and implicit exchanges among them'.

Converging blog journalism or user-generated content also suggests identity transformations between news producers and consumers. On the rumours page of *ETtoday.com* – the case I analysed – I found that news-workers acknowledge their professional role more as the information brokers, rather than the information fillers

(gatekeepers). Online news readers, on the other hand, express their motivation to re-engage in their active roles as citizens, through their online journalism participatory practices; and this, to a certain extent, represents a rejection of being constructed as passive consumers or 'spectators' in the process of online news circulation. These identity transformations, between online news producers and consumers, also imply a changing producer/consumer relationship in the online news environment. Jenkins (2004) provides a description of the producer/consumer relationship in convergence culture, which can be used in online journalism as well. He says that sometimes a media producer and consumer represent two forces that 'reinforce each other, creating closer, more rewarding, relations' between the two poles; but 'sometimes, these two forces are at war and those struggles will redefine the face of popular culture' (Jenkins, 2004:37). As my analysis shows, consumers/citizens in the online news environment will engage more and more in practices of online participatory journalism. These practices will sometimes contribute to the professional news-workers' information sources, but sometimes will also challenge and question news reports from mainstream news. Both of these two forces (producers and consumers) will encounter one another in the online news environment, within a different range of convergence.

More 'infotainment'? The consequences of convergence to online news content

After identifying the convergent character of online news culture and its relationship to practices, it is worth asking: how is online news influenced by convergence characteristics? It is clear that my study suggests convergence in online journalism, on the one hand provides online news readers with more opportunities to access diverse information and plural opinions, but on the other hand, also provides new ways of embedding market values into journalism in the online news environment. Commercial information and journalistic information are mixed in the online news

realm. Readers in an online news environment do not only receive plural information, but will also discover more 'infotainment news' – news which consists of information with superstitious content (in a group media programme promotion), celebrity interviews, and commercial advertisements. The implication here is that in this convergence culture, online journalism practices seem to involve a negotiation process. On the one hand, mainstream news media are 'learning how to accelerate and control the flow of news content across delivery channels and media to expand revenue opportunities and, broaden markets, as well as reinforce viewer commitments' (Jenkins, 2004:37); and online news readers, on the other hand, are learning how to use different online media technologies to bring the flow of news under their control, so they can interact with news producers and other readers. In the meantime, this convergence culture encourages online news readers to seek more opportunities to participate in the media and political process, and to talk back to the mass market via journalism participation.

Yet, it is indeed that convergence culture that leads online news products to become a product that has fewer cultural boundaries. Following Deuze's (2007b:259) description of 'a liquid journalism', meaning all the boundaries between – professional journalism and amateur journalism, producer and consumer, news and entertainment and so forth – are blurred in online journalism. This phenomenon is not only found in my case, but is now passing to other online news in Taiwan. For example, one popular online news website – *Chinatimes.com* – provides a so-called 'content-inside' service. The service embeds commercial information with a key word hypertext link in news articles. When readers click the key word hypertext they are led to a commercial advertisement. For instance, when a news article mentions 'computer', the word is linked to a page that offers information on computers for sale. Some cases also show

that commercialisation also penetrates into the realm of participatory journalism, which is what Stuart Allan (2006:173) calls 'commercialisation of culture of dissent'. By this, Allan refers to the process of a citizen's participatory journalism that will be absorbed by mainstream journalism, as Billmon (2004, cited in Allan, 2006:173) writes, 'what began as a spontaneous eruption of populist creativity is on the verge of being absorbed by the media-industry complex it claims to despise'. In my case study, I have suggested several examples of how mainstream news media have embraced online participatory journalism as part of their product. Fundamentally, from the perspective of most news organizations, integrating citizens' participatory journalism into the production process is based on a market strategy that aims to increase the scale of readership. Many blog forums on mainstream news websites, in Taiwan, have also started to display many different political advertisements, personal advertising, and media promotions. These kinds of blogs usually hide their real intentions and present themselves in journalistic style. Therefore, there are many 'pseudo j-blogs' in the realm of the blog sphere.

To sum up, convergence culture in online journalism appears to lead to a more complex journalistic world. It is without doubt that online news readers do get more choices in their access to different versions of reports, as well as many different opinions from both mainstream news websites and blogs. However, we should also be careful as news, entertainment, advertisements and other kinds of information are mixed into the online news world in more elaborate ways and become possible choices when readers think they can control the news flow and generate their own storyline in online journalism.

Evaluating Main Research Findings

My study of online journalism has raised several issues about media technologies, news culture and the public sphere in the information age. Here I would like to evaluate

my findings of online journalism from the viewpoint of news culture and democracy.

One of the key findings of my study concerns the convergence culture of online journalism. This convergence culture, to a certain extent, concerns the convergence culture of online journalism (see Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7). However, my study tends to suggest that the impact of this convergence culture on online journalism is still uncertain and ambiguous. My study of online journalism shows that online journalism, with a convergence of various genres, forms, and the content contributed by consumers' creative inputs; provides both producers and consumers with different ways of generating, presenting and consuming news. However, convergence in online journalism in my study also blurs the boundary between news and commercial information due to the use of online media technologies and acts to re-consolidate market values in the process of news production in certain ways.

For those who advocate a public service role for journalism, the convergence culture which I proposed in my study seems to present risks to journalism. On the one hand, when convergence in the mainstream online journalism is utilized to achieve some commercial purposes, then consumers seem willing get more commercial information rather than varying opinions and news coverage. This can be seen in my analysis of media convergence in *ETtoday.com* in Chapter 5.

Although the convergence culture appears to pose a dilemma for online journalism, its influence upon the public sphere seems to be more positive. In my study, I have used many examples to indicate how citizen-consumers use online media technologies and forms (especially blogs) to re-engage with their citizenship. Online media play an important role in citizens' practices of re-engaging with their citizenship, although some professional news-workers in my cases worried about the credibility and 'qualities' of online participatory journalism. For example, they expressed the view that j-blogs

might encourage irrational discussions (see Chapter 7) in online spaces.

Yet my findings suggest that online journalism offers significant potential for fostering engaged citizenship. Firstly, for the Taiwanese government, my findings reveal that the government's policy which encourages people to use the Internet and express their opinions through online participatory journalism seems to be an alternative way for stimulating diverse opinions and public discussion on public interest issues. Although the government's role has been criticized by some j-bloggers, we still see in Taiwan that some issues which are neglected by mainstream news receive lots of discussion and feedback when j-bloggers report these issues on their blogs. From this viewpoint, encouraging people to participate in public discussion through online participatory journalism, to a certain extent, helps create a new public awareness in the online environment.

Secondly, however there should be caution when some people support the development of online participatory journalism as a means of media reform. It is true that in some unique cases (e.g., Ohmynews in Korea) grassroots journalism or citizen journalism do become an organizational power to compete with mainstream news media. However, this does not mean that grassroots journalism will replace mainstream news. In Taiwan, the government and many journalism scholars seem to think that developing grassroots journalism can force mainstream news to change. This approach needs to be viewed with caution because, in my case, we have seen that mainstream news media now is trying to integrate consumers and bloggers creative content into their commercial and market logic of journalism.

Media reform should be conducted from multiple angles. For example, social education which teaches the public to know about the processes of news production (media literacy) is one of the ways to enable people to know more about journalism

when they read the news. Besides, it is also important to construct some independent media-supervision organizations[44] to promote newsroom autonomy and democracy. Grassroots or citizen journalism helps the public to have alternative ways to express their opinions and enables people to have diverse information, but they do not guarantee mainstream media reform will take place.

Future research into online journalism

Since online media have been introduced to the news industry, online journalism has apparently become a global phenomenon. We have observed that, all over the world, going online seems to have become one of the important strategies for mainstream news media. In the meantime, we have also seen that numerous non-mainstream online news websites and journalism blogs are growing in importance for some critical social events. To a certain extent, the aim of this thesis has been to explore how a global phenomenon (journalism going online) is put into practice in a Taiwanese context. However, there are several aspects not included in my discussion, due to limitations on my research sources.

One of these is how the global context and local context are intertwined, and how they influence the practice of online journalism and its circuit. Theoretically, the Internet has been assumed as being a 'boundary-less medium', which means it overcomes geographic limitations of news distribution and communication. However, since Internet-based news media break geographical limitations, how can the practice of online media negotiate with political, economic and cultural forces in different regions? This is significant for an online journalism study. For example, in Taiwan, online journalism is not only read by local people, but other people who speak Mandarin all

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[44] For example, in Taiwan some journalism has constructed the Association of Taiwanese Journalists which aims to help create newsroom democracy and media supervision. However, the association does not receive much support.

over the world. It is clear that, in some Mandarin-speaking regions such as the Greater China region (mainly refers to Taiwan, PRC and Hong Kong), the practice of journalism is very different, due to its political, economic and cultural differences. So far, it is forbidden for the Taiwanese news media to be distributed and broadcast in the PRC and vice versa, due to the hostile relationship between the two countries. Many years ago, when news outlets started to publish news online, some Taiwanese online news websites broke the political and geographic constraints and could be read by people in mainland China. Nevertheless, most Taiwanese news websites were forbidden later, due to their reporting of some sensitive news which displeased the local government and were not allowed by the PRC. This case briefly shows the significance of such issues in online journalism studies, which could be the focus for a future study.

Secondly, this thesis has provided an exploratory study based on the practice aspect. As mentioned in Chapter 1, social practice consists of several aspects, such as agents who perform the practice, material that is used for conducting the practices, knowledge and values relating to the practices, and other practices organised around such practices. All these are combined in a social practice, but different practitioners performing the same practice may reproduce different results. Due to the limitation of resources, this thesis has not focused on how special news issues are produced and consumed in the online news environment. As practice theory suggests, social practices should be examined in the context where the practice is situated, because any social practice should be examined as a unique case. Thus, different news issues in online journalism might yield different practices, by taking context issues into account. Therefore, it is worthy of an online news study to explore how different news issues or topics are practised in the online news environment, including what practitioners participate in, what knowledge, discourses, values and norms they reside in, and what material aspects

they relate to, and moreover, what other social practices link to the practice of social news issues in online journalism.

Taiwan, online journalism and journalistic practices: a future perspective

At the very end of this thesis, I would like to use some recent Taiwanese cases of online journalism to show the opportunity and crisis that digital news media present to both consumers and news-workers. In this thesis, my study of online journalism covers mainstream online news and participatory online journalism in Taiwan. To a certain extent, both types of online journalism have changed journalism practices, from their material infrastructure, production routines, and consumption process, to the definition of journalism.

However, most mainstream online news websites in Taiwan did not develop well. In 2000, several online newspapers were launched in Taiwan, and attracted numerous news-workers to participate in an online news dream. After one year, their dot-com dream was shattered. Many news websites, launched in 2000, were later closed or downsized to minimum scales, so that they could survive. However, this is not the end of the story for online journalism. The Taiwanese cases show that online journalism in this region seems to keep transforming and evolving. Different material aspects, practices and discourses are engaged in this new cultural form. For example, the one-year life of Web-only news website – *Tomorrow Daily* (launched in 2000 and closed in 2001), redesigned their website to switch from providing daily news to become a 'personal news station', which recruited consumers to contribute to their journalism content, and emphasized its website as a domain for the public to share its knowledge.

On the consumption end, online participatory journalism also shows an impact on Taiwanese society and the news industry. While online participatory journalism has

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become an important part of online journalism, several questions have been raised. One is the commercialisation of citizen journalism; another question is the credibility of its news. For example, during the period of the local governor election in 2007, in Taiwan, a blogger constructed a blog and wrote some news accusing the candidate, a Taipei county magistrate, of having forced certain banks to give him special privileges for loans. Later, the blogger was found to be a volunteer working for the candidate's rival camp.

From the above case, we can see that comparing with other alternative media, which had been used for media participation in Taiwan, online media had the possibility to become 'the people's media'. However, the credibility issue of online participatory journalism has made it hard for readers and professional news-workers, who use online participatory journalism as a reference in their reports, to make judgments about the credibility of its news (unless readers just accept it without any doubts). Professional news-workers might complete some news-checks before using user-generated content or blog journalism; however, some cases in Taiwan have shown that professionals sometimes did nothing due to their hasty news production work. Readers, on the contrary, might not have the time and resources to check the information that they get from a j-blog or other websites. This is a dilemma for online participatory journalism. On the one hand, readers do have access to a huge amount of information and plural opinions, but, on the other hand, some information (perhaps a very high proportion) in the digital environment falls short in terms of the standards of credibility that are applied to news content in other media forms. However, one thing which is certain is that online participatory journalism will occupy a more important position in the future, within the online news environment, which means that both professional news-workers and online news readers will face more opportunities as well as more challenges.

Appendices

Appendix 1 List of the respondents of ETtoday.com

Name	Backgrounds	Date of interview (dd/mm/yy)
Shi-Pei Yu	female, 34 years old, the domestic news page editor	05/07/2005
Judy Hu	female, 36 year old, journalist of the economic news sector	08/07/2005 18/02/2006
Zhi-Dong Tan	male, 42, the front page editor	10/08/2005 12/02/2006
Ching-Hui Cai	male, 45 year old, the chief editor of ETtoday.com	10/02/2006
Yi-Wen Tzao	female, 36 years old, the journalist of the economic news sector	10/07/2005
Tin-Tin Chen	female, 27 years old, the journalist of the political news sector	11/08/2005
Chung-Ping Chu	female, 26, the journalist specializes in educational affairs	14/03/2006
Jia-Hong Chen	male, 34, editor of the rumour page	10/02/2006 16/02/2006
Yu-Ling Zhuang,	female, 40, chief report of *EToday.com*	06/03/2006

Appendix 2 List of online news readers

Appendix 2.1 the interview cases

Name	Short backgrounds	Date of interview (dd/mm/yy)
Chi-Kao Lu	Male, 45 years old, a newspaper journalist	22/07/2005
Kuo-Shing	Male, 31 years old, a web system maintainer	25/08/2005
Jing-Zi	Female, 28 years old, a journalist	05/08/2005
Mai-Yue	Female, 35 years old, a fulltime mother	25/07/2005
Mai-Zhen	43 years old, a newspaper journalist	22/08/2005
Qiao-Lun	Female, 27 years old, a former high school teacher	23/07/2005
Qiong-Wen	Female, 37 years old, a junior high school teacher	10/08/2005
Sue-Fan	Female, 41 years old, a camera studio host	26/08/2005
Li-Ying	Female, 43 years old, a Ph.D. student	20/06/2007
Xin-Ru	Female, 25 years old, a sales clerk	02/08/2005
Shi-Xuan	Male, 18 year old, a high school student	29/07/2005
Shing-Yue, Zhang	Female, 21 years old, a college student	20/06/2007
Chi-Kuo	Male, 26 years old, a graduate student	08/08/2005

Appendix 2.2 the observation cases

Case	Family members	background	Date of interview (dd/mm/yy)
1	Nai-Jing (35 years old, the male host)	Nai-Jing is an insurance agent, male.	13/07/2005 30/03/2006
	Mei-Jun (34 years old, the female host)	Mai-Jun works for a commercial bank	13/07/2005
2	Hui-Ying (35 years old, the female host)	Hui-Ying is a chief director of a public relation company	21/08/2005
	Yue-Long (37 years old, the male host),	Yu-Long is a TV programme director	21/08/2005
3	Mother, Shove-Fong (42 years old, the female host),	Shove-Fang was used to be an employee in an insurance company but quit the job when interviewing her.	10/03/2006
	Lin-Lin (17 years old, the daughter),	Lin-Lin is a third grade high school student, and was preparing for her college entrance examination.	10/03/2006
4	Shu-Yuan (33 years old, the female host)	Shu-Yuan was a newspapers journalist but later she works for an Internet company.	25/03/2006
	Ji-Yuan (44 years old, the male host)	Jin-Yuan is a magazine editor and worked for online news website as journalist before.	25/03/2006
5	Wei-Sheng (31 years old)	Wei-Sheng lives alone due to his work and gathers together with his family only on weekend or holiday.	22/03/2006

Appendix 3 The blogger cases and the mainstream news-workers

Appendix 3.1 the bloggers

Blogger	Blog	Short background	Date of interview (dd/mm/yy)
Chen (Hang-Chi) Male, 63 years old	*The Digital Electronic Newspaper* (blog) (http://hanreporter.blogspot.com/)	Chen worked for some small newspapers, but retired when I interviewed him. He was recommended by one of my former colleagues and I contact with him personally and asked him to accept with my interview.	28/08/2005
Wu Long (nick name) Male, 36 years old	*Wu Long's Personal News Station* (blog) http://mypaper.pchome.com.tw/news/zzaq25/	Wu Long said that he is a 'plumber'. He writes many articles on his blog and for some online forums. He was recommended by the front page editor of *ETtoday.com*.	18/09/2005
James Wang Male, 32 years old	*The Island Republic* (blog) http://irepublic.blogspot.com/	James is a PhD student and usually writes political issues on his blog. He was my friend and I knew that he writes blog, so I asked him to participate in my study.	16/03/2006
Ho Rong-Xin Male, 39 years old	*A Journalist's Bias* (old blog) (http://iwebs.url.com.tw/main/html/turtle/home.shtml) *An Ostrich's Personal Letter* (new blog) (http://blog.chinatimes.com/turtle/)	Ho is a senior journalist from the *China Times*. He was introduced to me by one of my friend, and he used to work at the same newspaper with me before, so I have knew him before the interview.	20/07/2005
Scharnhorst (nick name) Male, 28 years old	Online forum on *ETtoday.com* http://www.ettoday.com/project/0003/288_1.htm *Big Light Company* (blog)	Scharnhorst works in a high tech company. He was introduced by the front page editor of *ETtoday.com*.	16/08/2005

	http://blog.sina.com.tw/sch orst/index.php?idx_page= 2		
Shi-Yo Lin Male, 24 years old	Lin does not have personal blog, but usually participates in discussion in different blogs and online forum.	Lin is a college student. He was introduced by his friend who is my former colleague.	24/08/2005

Appendix 3.2 the mainstream news-workers

Name		Date of interview (dd/mm/yy)
Mai-Jane	Female, 45 years old Journalist of the *Economic Daily*	10/09/2005
Chi-Kao	Male, 40 years old Journalist of *Ming-Sheng Daily*	02/09/2005
Ho Rong-Xin	Male, 39 years old Journalist of the *China Times*	20/07/2005

Appendix 4: Outline of the Ethnographic Methodology of this thesis

Media Ethnography: its advantages and limitations

My study of online journalism in this thesis is called media ethnography (see Chapter 1). For this research method, researchers (ethnographers) spent some time with a number of people (usually quite small numbers) that they studied in the locations (research site[45]) where these people work or live. Research that adopts this method argues that researchers (ethnographers) need to look at people's activities in the context of their lives as a whole in order to understand why people do something in a natural context. As David Machin (2002) indicates:

> They [ethnographers] will have assumed that there is no point simply
>
> counting instances of such behaviour, nor is there any point asking
>
> people why they behave in a particular way through a questionnaire.
>
> (Machin, 2002:3)

To understand why people do something, ethnographers collect all the data, information, documents and materials they can obtain from the research site. Therefore, media ethnography in fact includes multiple methods such as observation, interviewing, and textual analysis. However, this method, like any other research methods, has its advantages and limitations.

Media ethnography has three main advantages. Firstly, ethnographic methods focus on the natural context in which people perform their social practices; therefore, researchers can investigate what people actually do in different social and cultural

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[45] For media ethnography, research sites are usually media organizations such as the newsroom, or the places where people conduct media related practices such as home or their workplace.

contexts. This has been the essential argument in journalism and media studies in recent years (Bird, 2003; Ang, 1996; Silverstone, 1992; Morley, 1986). However, this aspect has not been emphasized in existing online news studies (see discussion in Chapter 2).

Secondly, ethnographic methods do not emphasize hypothesis-testing which many quantitative research methods usually do. Contrarily, they emphasize that researchers should follow what they observe and hear in the field. The rationale of ethnography is based on a critique of quantitative research. From the viewpoint of ethnographers, some quantitative studies collect research data by asking respondents to react within a very short time. Data which are collected by this instant reaction method tend to 'rely on what people say about what they believe and do without also observing what they do' (Hammersley, 1992:11). The problem is that many people are not aware of the reasons why they act in certain ways. Working differently, ethnographers want their 'data collection to be flexible and unstructured to avoid pre-fixed arrangements that impose categorises on what people said say and do' (Brewer, 2000:19) so they consider their practices before they enter the field. As Goffman (1968) indicates:

> It was then, and still is, my belief that any group of persons – prisoners, primitives, pilots or patients – develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it, and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself to the company of their numbers, to do the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject (Goffman, 1968:9).

This feature of ethnography enables me to put aside any presumptions I have about online journalism before I enter the field, as well as re-examine the debates about

technological innovation in online journalism, and focus on what people really do in relation to the production and consumption practices of online journalism.

Thirdly, using ethnographic methodology in fact links to the practice approach in this thesis. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the practice approach emphasizes what people 'do' and 'say' in relation to various kinds of knowledge, material and social actions. Ethnographic methods tally with the rationale of the practices approach, since their goal is to observe people's behaviour and practices in their everyday lives.

However, media ethnography has its limitations, one of which is that ethnographic research is often criticized for not being representative because most ethnographic studies tend to involve relatively small numbers of people (Machin, 2002). Yet this criticism is not relevant as the aims of most ethnographic studies are different from those of quantitative research. Their research, which involves working with small groups of people, aims to investigate what and how people actually do and say, rather than generalize their research outcome to fit a larger population. Producing fully 'representative' data is thus not a key concern of ethnographers.

The issue of the representative nature of my data is one of the weaker aspects of the thesis. Nevertheless, my research purposes in this thesis also try to explore what people do and say in the online newsroom and their private space in relation to online journalism. Thus, I do not claim that my research findings can explain any production and consumption practices of online journalism in other cultural regions, but my findings in this thesis seem to concur with some findings in the existing literature which were conducted in different cultural contexts.

The second limitation of ethnographic methods lies in their 'reliability'. That is, ethnographic methods usually do not follow any standard procedures strictly as experimental methods or survey research do. It seems partly true that, for ethnography,

most of the time the actual data-collecting process that is undertaken is neither systematic nor planned (Machin, 2002). Ethnographers basically just wander around in the field and see what happens. However, this does not mean that ethnographic methods cannot be evaluated and duplicated. Most ethnographic research still follows certain processes and ethical guidelines (see Brewer, 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2005/1995) during the period of conducting fieldwork.

My media ethnography in the online newsroom and online news readers' private spaces (home and workplace) also followed a semi-systematic procedure. That is, the procedure I adopted was generally the same, but I adjusted it, case by case, in certain situations in order for my research to be conducted smoothly. In the following discussion, I will present these procedures. They include: deciding on an area for investigation, generating research questions, finding respondents, recording and analyzing data. I will also evaluate my research design and discuss ethical guidelines.

Deciding on an area of investigation

My first step in adopting media ethnography was to decide on my research site for participant observation. There are two main research sites in this thesis – the online newsroom and the place where my respondents (interviewees) read online news (usually at their home and workplace).

(A) The Online newsroom as a research site

I choose *ETtoday.com* as the main site to observe professional news-workers' everyday online news production practices. I chose *ETtoday.com* for my case study for the following reasons:

1. *ETtoday.com* is the so-called web-only news website, thus I could investigate

how news is produced just for an online format.

2. Due to my past working experience, I knew some staff at *ETtoday.com* already; this made my access to the research site easy.

3. *ETtoday.com* is also one of the most popular online news websites (see Chapter 4 for a brief history of *ETtoday.com*).

I was approved for entry into the online newsroom of *ETtoday.com* by the chief editor to conduct my observations and interviews, the only requirement they stipulated was that I should be careful not to interrupt their work. I spent two or three periods a week in the newsroom during my five-month fieldwork in Taiwan (see discussion in Chapter 1 also).

My observations at *ETtoday.com* included an investigation of online journalists' everyday practices outside the newsroom, which is also a significant aspect of everyday news production for the news website. I shadowed two journalists from *ETtoday.com* to see their everyday work of covering and reporting online news. The places they stay – the press conference room in the Central Bank of Taiwan (CBT) and the Ministry of Education of Taiwan – on the day I followed them also became two of my research sites. However, at these two sites, I only focused on the journalists' everyday work and their connection with the main online newsroom; I did not pay much attention to their interactions with other journalists in the press conference rooms.

(B) Private places as research sites

For online news consumption cases, I chose online news readers who had experience of reading and surfing online news websites. I selected cases for observation from participants who I had interviewed. After my interviews with them, I asked their permission to visit their homes or offices to see how they read online journalism at the

places where they usually access online news information and websites on a daily basis. Considering limitations on the time I had available to conduct fieldwork, I only observed 5 respondents (four family cases and one office case). They were selected on their basis of their feasibility and validity. Feasibility means that it was easy for me to observe the families' daily activities (e.g., they were not living too far away and/or their family members all agreed with my observations). Validity means that these observation cases had been carefully evaluated in advance in order to satisfy my research purposes.

Finding Respondents and Conducting interviews

My respondents in this thesis can be categorised into three groups: professional news-workers, online news consumers (readers), and j-bloggers (see also Chapter 1). Most of the interviews with each respondent lasted from one to one and a half hours, using semi-structured questions, and every interview was recorded. Note-taking was also used in the interviews in order to record interviewees' key words and body language (e.g., their behaviour, facial expressions, and gestures). Some interviewees were asked to take part in a follow-up interview depending on their answers. However, most of these follow-up interviews used real-time chat systems, telephone or email, and only a few used face-to-face interview techniques again. The process of interviews in this thesis is discussed below.

(A) Interviewing with the professional news-workers

Interviewing professional news-workers was usually conducted in the newsroom of *ETtoday.com*. Some professional news-workers were interviewed in the press conference room where they usually stay (i.e. the two journalists I followed to observe

their daily work outside the online newsroom) or in cafés. Interviews included both formal and informal sessions. Formal interviews followed the semi-structured questions (discussed later). During the time I observed the news-workers' daily production work, I also asked them questions derived from my observations. These interviews are categorized as informal interviews in my research. All news-workers were interviewed more than once including formal and informal interviews.

(B) Interviewing Online News Readers

Online news readers in this thesis were recruited by the snowball method (see Chapter 6). Due to the limitations on my research time, most of the online news readers were interviewed once (formal interview) and those who needed a further interview, to clarify their first interview data, were interviewed via telephone, email or face-to-face (follow-up interview). These interviews also used semi-structured questions (see discussion below) and were held in cafés, restaurants or locations the interviewees thought convenient for them. However, I preferred to use quieter places in order to maintain the recording quality. Although the whole process of each interview was recorded by using a long-duration digital recorder, I still took notes during the interviews. The content of the notes included some key words, ideas the interviewees used and their body language.

(C) J-bloggers

J-bloggers in this thesis represent online news consumers who conduct online news consumption practices from different aspects. J-bloggers in this thesis were recruited with various methods (see Chapters 1 and 7). Their background and blog information are listed in Appendix 3. Most j-bloggers were interviewed once (formal interview),

with semi-structured questions. Those who needed a further interview to get more detailed data had follow-up interviews via telephone and/or email.

Semi-structured questions and interviews

To make my interviews more flexible, I used semi-structured questions. For professional news-workers, the questions were slightly different according to their occupational role in the online newsroom. That is, although I used a similar set of semi-structured questions to interview them, I changed some detailed questions when interviewing journalists and editors. For online news-readers, the questionnaires were longer because I tried to find out if there were different types of online news consumption practices.

The semi-structure questions used in my interview were quite broad. Before the formal interviews, the questions were read by some Taiwanese students at Lancaster University to make sure my wording and meaning of the questions could be understood by ordinary people. During my interviews, if interviewees did not understand the questions, I gave them a short explanation or used some examples to make my questions clearer.[46] The main questions used for interviewing professional news-workers, online news readers and j-bloggers are listed in Appendices 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3. It should be mentioned here that all the questions listed were original written in Mandarin, but I translated them into English.

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[46] For instance, when I asked online news readers if they used any 'web functions' when they read online news, some interviewees asked 'what are web functions'? I then gave some examples such as hypertext or search functions to them. Most of them understood my questions very soon thereafter.

Table Appendix 4.1 Semi-structured questions for professional news-workers

Q1: Could you talk about your working experience (or training) before *ETtoday.com*?

Q2: Could you describe your daily work at *ETtoday.com*? For example, how do you start your daily work and what do you do in the online newsroom everyday? (I asked the following questions when interviewees said something interesting about their work).

Q3: How do you select the news you report on your news website everyday? Do you think your selection differs from other news media? If so, what are the differences?

Q4: How do you present your news on the website? Do you prefer using any online media forms in your reports (e.g., hypertext and multi-media)? What are the reasons you use these online media forms in your report?

Q5: Do you think that online media technologies influence/transform your everyday work? Why do you think so?

Q6: (For those who had experience of working in different news media before.) Could you explain the differences between working for an online news company and for other kind of news media?

Q7: According to your experience, do you notice any interventions in your work in the newsroom? If you do can you talk about them?

Q8: How are your relationships with staff of other departments in the company (e.g. IT department or advertising department)?

Table Appendix 4.2: the semi-structured questions for online news readers

Q1: How do you use the Internet each day? (describe in detail)

Q2: Could you talk about your daily news reading/watching/listening habits? (describe in detail)

Q3: Could you describe in detail your activities of reading/surfing online news?

Q4: Why do you read/not read online news? (describe in detail)

Q5: Could you recall any news you have read online recently, and what do you think about that online news? Why did you choose to read that news online? (compare the differences in news you get online and from other media)

Q6: In general, what do you think of online journalism? What are the most important aspects of online journalism for you?

Q7: When reading online news, do you use the features of news reports (e.g., hypertext, search engine ... and so on)? Do you think these features of online journalism are important/not important to you? Why do you think they are important/not important?

Q8: Following on from the above question. If you use these features of online journalism, could you talk about your experiences? How do you use them when reading online journalism?

Q9: What do you think about the quality of online journalism compared to other forms of news? (explain the meaning of 'quality' if necessary)

Q10: Have you ever used/not used email or online forums to express your opinions? Why and how do you use/not use them?

Q11: Have you read blog news? If you have, please describe your experiences in

reading blog journalism.

Q12: In your opinion, do you think online news forums or blogs are important
news sources to you?

Table Appendix 4.3: the semi-structured questions for j-bloggers

Q: Why and how did you start writing your j-blog? (describe in detail)

Q2: How do you decide what to write on the blog? (describe in detail)

Q3: Do you think your blog entries have made any contributions/influences to news or the whole of society?

Q4: Can you talk about some news reports you wrote on your blog? Why did you write the news? How did you cover this news? What are the differences between your news reports and those of other news media? Have your news reports received any feedback?

Q5: What do you think about those who leave messages/comments/critics on your blog?

Q6: Can you talk about the hypertext material (if any) you use on your blog? Why do you link your blog to other, different, websites?

Q7: (for those bloggers who link their blogs to other blogs or websites) I noticed that you link your blog to different blogs and websites, could you talk about that?

Q7: What do you think about blog journalism?

Equipment used in the field

To record my research data, my fieldwork used various forms equipment and techniques.

1. Digital recorder: I used a long-duration digital recorder (Samsung YV-120) which can record 8 hours of interview data. As this digital recording can be saved to hard disc and listened to on a computer, this is easier for a researcher to listen repeatedly when coding and transcribing interview data. Another advantage of this recorder is that the researcher does not have to change tapes when conducting long-term observations.

2. Digital camera: I used a digital camera to take photos and record the respondents' production and consumption practices at the research sites.

3. Field notes: I took field notes when observing respondents' interactions and conversations at research sites. When I observed the daily production practices in the online newsroom, I noted their actions, facial expressions, gestures, and their interactions with other respondents in as detailed a way as possible.

4. Research diary: I wrote a research diary during the two periods of fieldwork. In it I aimed to take down the ideas I got from my observations and interviews. Sometimes I also made a preliminary analysis when writing this diary.

Online capture software program: This software program was used to capture web and analyse the content of *ETtoday.com* or a blogger's j-blog.

Coding and analysing research data

Interview data were coded word by word in Mandarin – the language used in all observational interactions and interviews. Data analysis was also based on Mandarin. My data analysis obeyed the following procedure:

All the interview data (audio data) were transcribed into textual content.

All the data, including field notes, interviews and observations were read repeatedly at the first stage, and generalized into some important concepts. Based on the practices approach, my strategy in this stage focused on what people do and say in relation to online journalism.

The concepts generalized in the first stage are analyzed and an attempt made to link them to existing literature, theoretical arguments and approaches.

The above procedure was conducted repeatedly until I thought that all the data had been fully analyzed and there were no new concepts or ideas that could be abstracted

from them.

Ethical guidelines for my observations

Some ethical issues were raised during the period of my fieldwork. These issues and my responses are outlined thus:

My observations in *ETtoday.com* were approved by the editor-in-chef, and I was allowed to observe and ask questions in the newsroom, the only requirement being that I should not interrupt their everyday work. The content and information of *ETtoday.com* I used in my thesis were with the permission of *ETToday.com*. However, I was asked that this content and information only be used for academic purposes, and that I should seek further permission if I want to publish this content and information in a different format (e.g. a book).

When entering the research sites (online newsroom or homes), I first explained my research purposes and how their data would be used in my research. I gave them a letter with my signature which explained my research purposes and guaranteed their data would only used for academic purposes. If my respondents had any questions about my research and observations, they were encouraged to ask me directly so I could explain further to them immediately.

My position during my fieldwork was to keep myself as an outsider as much as possible. I did not participate in any online news production or consumption procedures which my respondents engaged in during my fieldwork. Although I have many friends in *ETtoday.com*, due to my previous working experience, I tried to maintain my position as a researcher. That is, news-workers in *ETtoday.com* knew that I was conducting research and knew they were being observed.

Some of the interviewees from *ETtoday.com* asked me to use change their names

when I quoted their words. Therefore, I was careful to ask every interviewee, before interviewing them, about this. They were also given a covering letter to guarantee the data would only be used for academic purposes and their name would not be revealed in any circumstance before or after my study.

The photos I took were all permitted by the online newsroom workers or families I observed. Thus they were fully aware that some of the pictures in their private spaces might be used in my thesis.

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