

2008

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Understanding its impact upon  
contributors, non-contributors and BBC  
News

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## Executive Summary

This report is the culmination of 12 months of collaborative research between a team of Cardiff University researchers and the BBC. It is the most comprehensive research to be completed on the subject of User Generated Content (UGC) in news.

This groundbreaking project involved 6 different methodologies:

- newsroom observations in 9 different newsrooms across the BBC
- 115 interviews with BBC journalists and 10 interviews with senior managers and BBC executives
- an analysis of 105 hours of news output from 13 national and regional TV and radio programmes (and their associated websites)
- a nationally representative MORI survey of 944 people
- an online survey of 695 BBC contributors
- 12 focus groups with 100 people.

The research was made possible because of unprecedented access at all levels of the BBC, and across geographical regions. Research was undertaken at BBC Network news, BBC World Service, BBC Devon, BBC Wales, BBC Sheffield and BBC Leeds.

The data provides a comprehensive picture of the way 'UGC' is used within the BBC, how 'UGC' is perceived by journalists and senior managers, of the motivations of contributors, the disincentives for those who don't contribute, and the attitudes of the general audience to the increased use of UGC in news within the organisation.

The project was co-funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the BBC, as part of a Knowledge Exchange Programme. The research started on 1 August 2007 and was completed on 31st July 2008. The research team was led by Dr Claire Wardle and the Research Associate was Dr Andrew Williams. The team also comprised Dr Howard Barrell, Dr Tammy Boyce, Professor Justin Lewis, and Dr Karin Wahl-Jorgensen. There were three ad-hoc Research Assistants: William Taylor and Ody Constantinou and Liezel Longboan.

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## Introduction

Media organisations, so the conventional story goes, have not facilitated a two-way conversation between news producers and audiences. More recently it has become commonplace to point out that new technologies enabling more collaborative forms of journalism have forced us to reconsider the traditional model of mass communication. This 'citizen' or 'networked' journalism increasingly takes place outside of traditional media, and allows people to gather, process, and publish content independently of major news organisation. It is hoped by many that this democratic interest in producing news, and the increasingly easy access to technological modes of production and dissemination, will slow or halt the general decline in civic participation and public interest in politics that has been witnessed in recent years.

Prompted largely by developments that took place outside of the traditional media, large media organisations were forced to react to these new trends, and have embraced the new emphasis on citizen/audience engagement in different ways.

The BBC has been investing in online journalism since the early 1990s, allowing it to produce one of the world's most visited websites, and providing a platform for readers to comment on published stories. Since 2001 the BBC's digital storytelling projects have been training hundreds of people across the country to shoot and edit their own multimedia packages for broadcast over a range of BBC output. Running since 2003 the flagship Island Blogging programme in Scotland is only one of a steadily growing network of blogs which allow members of the public to post their own content using the BBC website. Less high-profile collaborations between the audience and BBC journalists in the form

of regular or one-off online web diaries have been hosted on the local network of Where I Live (now called BBC Local) sites for a number of years<sup>1</sup>. In addition, in 2003 the BBC launched iCan (which would later become the BBC Action Network) as a civic space online where it hoped people would share concerns, build communities of interest, exchange information and advice, and plan and organise campaigns (the network was wound down in early 2008, because the BBC's investment was not seen to be appropriate to the small numbers of people using it).

A sustained interest in audience participation in the production of news at the BBC has been more recent, and has been driven forward by a number of high-profile news events. The New York terror attacks in September 2001 were clearly a very important wake-up call to media organisations about the potential of the general public to supply audiovisual and eyewitness accounts. They were also important in alerting journalists to the power of alternative media forms like blogs and bulletin boards in supplying different sources of news on big events like this<sup>2</sup>. But 9/11 was not a huge 'UGC' event for the BBC specifically. For example, only two eyewitness e-mails sent in by the public to the BBC from New York generated live interviews on the news (Walton 2007)<sup>3</sup>. A turning point at the BBC came with the Asian tsunami in December 2004, and the London Bombings in July 2005. These events really mark the beginning of a period during which citizen or user generated content, in the words of Stuart Allen 'went mainstream' at the BBC (see footnote 2). For example, Richard Sambrook the Director of the BBC's Global News division, has stated that it was an email about the bombings sent in by a viewer which first challenged the initial official reports.

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<sup>1</sup> The Where I Live sites have been re-titled BBC Local and will be referred to as such throughout this report.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, Stuart (2007) 'The Cultural Politics of Citizen Journalism', Cardiff University Critical Theory Seminar, 24th October.

<sup>3</sup> Walton, Chris (2007) 'Have They Got News For Us?', BBC College of Journalism UGC training session, BBC Wales, 11th December

that the disturbances had been caused by a power surge on the tube.

Within six hours we received more than 1,000 amateur photographs, 20 pieces of amateur video, 4,000 text messages, and 20,000 emails. People were participating in our coverage in a way we had never seen before. By the next day our main TV newscast began with a package edited entirely from video sent in by viewers.<sup>11</sup>

In the words of one junior broadcast journalist we interviewed, 'this whole idea of citizen journalism – I don't think it's going to take over the world. But if you have got somebody there taking pictures seconds after an event has happened it's incredible. You couldn't get a camera crew there. I think it's valid and I think it's very important'. Before 7/7 BBC News interactive in London got around 300 e-mails on an average day. This has now risen to around 12,000, with spikes around certain popular stories. The BBC received 25,000 e-mails just on the Sudan teddy bear story in December 2007. From a very low base around 3 years ago, they now get around 1000 stills and video clips sent in on a quiet week, and during the floods in June 2006 they received around 7000 photos and videos in five days. These are just approximate figures for the information and raw material flowing into the BBC's growing User Generated Content Hub, and do not count the volume of content sent directly to individual programmes, or to the many local and regional newsrooms across the UK, which can be considerable, especially during big 'UGC stories'.

Faced with this level of audience participation in the coverage of such news stories it is no surprise that the BBC has since decided to enthusiastically embrace 'UGC' in a number of ways. Amongst other things: it has invested heavily in its 'UGC hub' (the department responsible for the flagship Have Your Say website) which only employed a handful of people in 2005 but

has since grown to 29; it has promoted a network of blogs relating to news and current affairs programming

to extend the conversation off air, and in some cases (such as the Newsnight and PM blogs) to make the editorial process itself more collaborative and transparent; and it has concentrated on training, putting a 'UGC'-related course called 'Have They Got News for Us' at the heart of the new BBC College of Journalism.

After this heady time of 'UGC'-related expansion the BBC has now entered a period of reflection, and is pausing to consider the best ways forward. At a time when many UK media organisations are still rushing to embrace online participation in the form of discussion and comments hosted on their websites, senior BBC editors are beginning to question how the Corporation should be hosting these conversations:

Peter Clifton (Head of Editorial Development for Multimedia): Over time, we may want to devote less time to encouraging heated debate which is just hot air and actually not a huge amount of value and actually focusing more on the real added value insight in User Generated Content.

Peter Rippon (Editor, Radio 4's PM, iPM, World at One, and Broadcasting House): I don't think the BBC should be providing platforms for just noise which you can find anywhere on the Web anyway. And I think we should be focusing more on the kind of user-generated stuff that's more about public service and has more of a public service element.

Peter Horrocks (Editor, BBC Newsroom): The dilemma is that the insatiable resource requirement around just dealing with comments doesn't seem to me is generating enough, or will not in the future, generate enough extra value for the kind of effort that we need to put into it.

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<sup>11</sup> Sambrook, Richard (2005) 'Citizen Journalism and the BBC', Nieman Reports, 59 (4): 13-16.

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Draining as they are on shrinking news budgets, it is being suggested by some that hefty moderation costs can be avoided by reducing the number of these types of discussion spaces, and linking to alternative spaces for debate elsewhere on the net, while concentrating on the provision of high quality news content. Some suggest that the effort devoted to maintaining the conversation between the news organisation and its audience would be better spent encouraging those who have witnessed a news event, or who have some experience or expert knowledge of it, to contact the BBC.

Such a move would be applauded by many journalists within the BBC, as well as by certain sections of the BBC's audience. The use of eyewitness audience content, and informed opinion from amateurs, is widely appreciated amongst BBC journalists and audience members alike (with some important riders and caveats, of course). However, many believe much of the audience opinion about the news that gets published, what we call Audience Comment, is often dominated by the uninformed and those who hold extreme (and sometimes distasteful) views, and therefore emphasis should be placed on other types of Audience Material.

There is no simple answer, however. Many supporters of the BBC's Have Your Say forum, for example, suggest that if it were not for these important spaces for debate many news stories and the case studies and eyewitness accounts which accompanied them would never have been found. Journalists at the 'UGC' hub spend much of their time trawling through comments and pre-moderating debates, and if they didn't do this many valuable nuggets of useful information might slip through the net, never to be discovered and investigated further by BBC news journalists.

Some believe 'UGC' is nothing new, others believe the technological developments, if correctly tapped, provide real opportunities for re-connecting with the audience for news and current affairs. Whatever the opinion, this research demonstrated that everyone had an opinion about User Generated Content at the BBC,

whether it was a senior executive, newly qualified journalist or a licence fee payer.

As Steve Herrmann (BBC Website editor) argued,

I think we obviously have to continue to engage with [UGC]. It's really a very important area. We cannot ignore it. I think we, as a public service organisation, have to be even better at it than otherwise. I think it's a crucial weapon, as it were, in our news gathering arsenal, in terms of being a successful news organisation. And I think in terms of reflecting back to Britain and the world, voices and opinions and points of view. It's also absolutely crucial that we develop really sophisticated, smart, engaging ways of continuing to do it. But it's going to be one of the big challenges we face. It already is and it has been for the last couple of years.

This report feeds into the ongoing discussions at the BBC, and will hopefully provide insights both into the ways in which 'UGC' is being used at the BBC as well as the views of the audiences (both those who contribute and those who do not).

## Methodology

This project consisted of 5 different methodologies: Newsroom Observations; Content Analysis; MORI Survey; Online Survey of BBC contributors; and Focus Groups.

### Newsroom observations

A team of 5 researchers spent a total of 37 days in 9 newsrooms. Those 37 days break down as follows.

#### REGIONAL:

BBC Devon in Plymouth (10 days)  
 BBC Sheffield (10 days)  
 BBC North in Leeds (3 days)  
 BBC Wales Cardiff (5 days)

#### NETWORK:

BBC 'UGC' Hub (6 days)  
 BBC Breakfast (1 day)  
 BBC News (1 day)  
 World Service: Newshour & World  
 Have Your Say (1 day)

The researchers were following participant observation techniques, attempting to be as unobtrusive as possible in order to observe and capture the ways in which 'UGC' is being used by journalists, without having to rely solely on asking journalists to explain everyday actions (many of which are so naturalised it is impossible to consciously consider all the thoughts and actions involved). During the time in the newsrooms, the researchers undertook a number of semi-structured interviews with journalists and editors in order to gauge

attitudes about 'UGC' within different newsrooms, to find out about examples of good practice, and to learn about obstacles and challenges faced by journalists using and sharing 'UGC'. These interviewed totalled 115 during the 37 days of observations.

### Content Analysis

Content Analysis is a methodology which captures large amounts of media output as a way to gauge underlying patterns. Mutually exclusive categories are used to 'code' different aspects of the media output, in this case

- the number of requests for 'UGC'
- the types of requests
- the types of 'UGC' requested
- the length of time of each request slot
- the number of segments in which 'UGC' was used
- the number of individual contributions broadcast
- the types of contributions used
- the length of 'UGC' segments

Designing the sample for the content analysis was particularly difficult because of the sheer amount of BBC output. In order to make the content analysis manageable we chose 'flagship' news shows across all channels, on network TV and radio, as well as BBC Wales. These were:

- BBC Breakfast (BBC 1)
- 6 o' clock News (BBC 1)
- 10 o'clock News (BBC 1)
- Newsbeat (Radio 1)
- Jeremy Vine (Radio 2)
- Today (Radio 4)
- PM (Radio 4)
- Breakfast (Radio 5 Live)
- Drive (Radio 5 Live)
- Welsh Breakfast half hourly cutaways from BBC Breakfast (BBC Wales)
- Wales Today (BBC Wales)
- Good Morning Wales (BBC Radio Wales)
- Good Evening Wales (BBC Radio Wales)

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Again, to make the sampling manageable, we chose one week in February (Monday 11-Friday 15 2008).<sup>12</sup> All material was recorded and the data was analysed at a later date by a Research Assistant.<sup>13</sup> In total 105 hours and 55 minutes of broadcast output was analysed.

In addition, an analysis of BBC News (formerly News 24) was also carried out. Because the use of 'UGC' depends so heavily on particular news stories (particularly breaking news), we designed a 24 hour sample of news over a 16 day period, recording 1.5 hours of programming each day. So on Day 1 (21<sup>st</sup> January 2008) the period between midnight and 1.30am was recorded. On Day 2 (22<sup>nd</sup> January 2008) the period of time 1.30am-3am was recorded. Weekends were not included in the sample (See footnote 5 for explanation).

The websites for each of these programmes, as well as the Have Your Say forum were also analysed using a qualitative technique (as quantitative techniques would not have yielded particularly interesting data). A full description of the websites and the different ways they use UGC is detailed in the appendix.

## Ipsos MORI Survey

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Ipsos MORI carried out the survey designed by the Cardiff research team between 29<sup>th</sup> November – 7<sup>th</sup> December 2007.

944 adults over 16 were interviewed. The data was weighted to the known British population profile, with 184 sample points across Britain. The interviews were conducted using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing in respondents' homes using the Ipsos

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<sup>12</sup> While weekend sampling would have been interesting, access to recording equipment was not possible at the weekends. Similarly 11 hours of potential broadcast material did not record successfully so could not be included in the sample.

<sup>13</sup> Because all coding related to the 'presence/absence' of UGC inter-coder reliability was not necessary.

MORI Capibus, which is an omnibus survey completed every week with a representative group of the British population, covering a number of different topics.

## Online Survey

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The Online Survey was designed to capture information from those people who contribute material to the BBC website. While online surveys suffer from the issue of self-selection the possible disadvantages of using an online survey were outweighed by the access it provided to those who do contribute material to the BBC (a hard group to reach by any other means.)

In total 695 people contributed to the online survey. The survey was linked to from the BBC website, and as part of an automatic reply on the yourpics@bbc.co.uk email address for almost 3 months (1<sup>st</sup> March until 20<sup>th</sup> May 2008). There was a promotional box on the [bbc.co.uk/england](http://bbc.co.uk/england) website, and on a selection of BBC Local homepages across England, as well as the homepage of the BBC Island Blogging project in Scotland. It was also promoted on the Have Your Say homepage. The overall breakdown is as follows:

- Scotland Island Blogging (01/03 - 08/03)
- Have Your Say auto-response (03/03 - 20/05)
- Promotion on [bbc.co.uk/england](http://bbc.co.uk/england) (20/03 - 21/03 and 21/04 for 1 week)
- Promotion on [bbc.co.uk/whereilive](http://bbc.co.uk/whereilive) (21/03 – 24/03 and 21/04 for 1 week)
- Across homepages on English BBC Local sites (25/03 – 20/05)
- Promotion on Have Your Say (25/03-27/03 & 29/04-1/05)
- Across BBC Local homepages in England (w/c 28/04)

## Focus Groups

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Twelve focus groups were carried out between March and May 2008. They were organised demographically in an attempt to supplement, and explore further the main findings from the quantitative survey.

Group 1	Year 1 Students	ABC1, 16-24, mixed gender
Group 2	Year 1 Students	ABC1, 16-24, mixed gender
Group 3	Jobseekers	C2DE, mixed age, mixed gender
Group 4	Day Centre	DE, 65+
Group 5	Cardiff Residents	C2DE, mixed ages
Group 6	Women's Institute Members	ABC1, 55+
Group 7	Environmental activists	Mixed class background, mixed age, mixed gender
Group 8	Lions Club	ABC2, 55+, mixed gender
Group 9	Final Year Students	ABC1, 15-14, mixed gender
Group 10	Coffee Morning, Gloucestershire	ABC1, 45-64, mixed gender
Group 11	BBC Digital Storytellers	Mixed class, mixed aged, mixed gender
Group 12	BBC UGC Contributors	(mixed class background, mixed age, mixed gender)

Ten of the focus groups were moderated and transcribed by Dr Andrew Williams and a further two by William Taylor. All participants were recruited from around Cardiff apart from one which took place in Gloucestershire.<sup>14</sup> Overwhelmingly participants had never contributed material to the BBC, apart from the final two groups which were deliberately designed to include people who had contributed. It should be noted that in some of the other groups, participants admitted they had contributed material, even though they had originally stated they had not on a pre-questionnaire.

The outline of the focus groups is included in the appendix but it included:

- Participants brainstorming the 'types' of 'UGC' they could remember and discussing their feelings about these different 'types'.
- Participants watching examples of UGC from BBC Breakfast, local regional news, reading Have Your Say message boards, selected BBC blogs and discussing radio phone-ins.
- Participants watching an actual news item from BBC Breakfast and being asked to come up with texts or emails that they might send in. As a group they had to discuss which three they would broadcast if they were the editor and to explain their choices. They then watched the original broadcast and watched which texts and emails were actually read out.

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<sup>14</sup> The Ipsos MORI survey demonstrated there were no significant differences by region, so it was therefore decided it was not necessary to organise focus groups in different parts of the country.

## 12 Main Research Headlines

1

The term User Generated Content is inappropriate and inadequate and should be replaced with Audience Material (p.9).

2

There are 5 main types of Audience Material, and the complexities are sometimes lost because of a reliance on the catch-all term 'UGC' (p.10).

3

Journalists and audiences display markedly different attitudes towards the five types of Audience Material (p.13).

4

Technology is changing the volume, ease and speed of gathering news material and sources, but it has not changed the reliance on traditional journalism practices (p.22).

5

Audience Material fulfils 6 roles within the BBC (p.24).

6

Nations and Regions have many excellent examples of good practice but not everyone is aware of these at Network level (p.26).

7

Overall there is support from the audience for the ways in which the BBC has been using Audience Material(p.30).

8

Specific calls to action are most useful for news gathering, and when eliciting high-quality relevant comment (p.31).

9

Only a small, select group of people submit Audience Material (p.32).

10

At times 'UGC' is treated as representative of the audience as a whole, although senior management is aware that this problematic and warns against the practice (p.33).

11

There are significant barriers to participation: digital divide; socio-economic background; technological know-how; lack of impetus; and negative perceptions held by the general audience about those who do contribute (p.36).

12

Focus Group participants suggested that there was no motivation to contribute because of the lack of a real-world end product or result (p.39).

## Contextualising the Headlines

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### The term User Generated Content is inappropriate and inadequate

The term 'UGC' is a problematic one. As one senior editor noted 'it's an ugly phrase'. Not all BBC journalists were aware of the term, and even if they were aware, many tried not to use it as they felt it inadequately describes the types of material the BBC receives or uses.

Concerns about the term 'UGC' stretch from senior editors to newly qualified journalists, and when the question was posed about how 'UGC' could be defined, everyone gave a different answer, underlining the absence of one clear BBC-wide definition

I think it would be wrong to assume that there's a pan-BBC policy as to how we do User Generated Content in these different things. People tend to get involved with particular initiatives and particular individuals.

Some were not sure how to answer:

I'm not sure we have a fixed definition of 'UGC'.

Well, to be honest with you, I'm not comfortable with the term User Generated Content. It's very clunky.

Others attempted answers which they admitted were off the top of their head:

[UGC is] the totality of information and comment that we receive from the public, that can be a contribution to our journalism.

I think it's any material or content; that might be pictures or video or it might simply be information, which is originated and generated by the public rather than by professional journalists.

Those who had most difficulty with the phrase were those who do not rely on the internet for content from the audience. As someone attached to Video Nation argued:

I think there are a lot of people in the BBC who've never felt completely comfortable with the label 'user-generated content' partly because the project itself pre-existed the Internet.

This argument that 'users' is a term which only applies to those who interact with the web was raised by different people.

Many people who did know what the term meant didn't like the term as they felt that it didn't accurately describe what it was, and it also failed to recognise the different 'types' of Audience Material which exist.

I just get a bit bothered by the whole UGC pot; the bandwagon we all seem to have jumped on which can be anything from an email to something which can be considered narrative. But they're not the same thing, you know.

Considering the term is not universally accepted, it seems sensible to attempt a change in overall terminology from 'UGC' to 'Audience Material'. In addition there is a need to acknowledge the different types of Audience Material being received and used by the BBC.

# 10

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There are 5 main types of Audience Material, and the complexities are sometimes lost because of the reliance on the catch-all term 'UGC'

Many of the senior editors interviewed for the research discussed the fact there are different types of Audience Material, but their typologies differed.

Peter Horrocks explained:

I've actually divided it into information, which includes text, video and audio, which is part of our journalism, and comment. Obviously, the comment can become something which can be a direct contribution to our journalism but its purpose is rather different.

Peter Rippon (Editor, Radio 4 PM, iPM, Broadcasting House, The World At One)

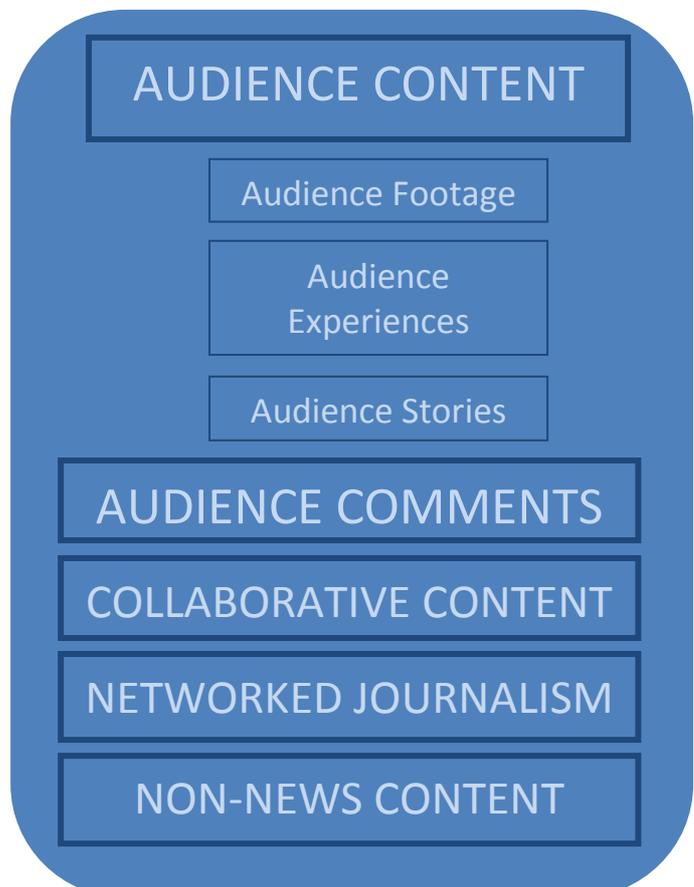
There are essentially three types of User Generated Content: there's the user generated content that allows users to express their own opinion and ventilate debate. There's the user generated content that is very much about delivering and supporting the journalism that we do. So, eye-witness reports, 'I've got the story, are you interested?' And then there's the kind of public insight journalism that they're doing in America more than here.

Richard Sambrook (Head BBC Global News):

I have four different categories: one is eye-witness material which may be stills or video, which is the showing an experience. And there's the kind of opinion which we've done for decades, such as radio phone-ins. We've always used material from the public or given a platform for opinions by the public, but we're getting a far greater quantity of it than ever before because of the technology. The third category is about

discovery: people break news on the web and on the net, and bloggers uncover stories which journalists haven't. The final category is what is known generally these days as networked journalism where you use the expertise of the public to lead or inform your journalism. If we can tap into that expertise and use it to inform our journalism, it will be better as a result. And that seems to me a rather exciting prospect if we can find the right ways of harnessing it.

There are different types of Audience Material, and it is necessary to consider each of these different types separately. This research demonstrates very clearly that: 1) audiences have different opinions about the different types, 2) journalists have different opinions about the different types, 3) different journalists use different types in different ways, 4) different types play different roles within the BBC, and 5) different types ultimately provide different opportunities and suffer from a variety of weaknesses. The different types of Audience Material can be considered using the following typology:



Within Audience Content, there are three main sub-categories: Audience Footage (breaking news photographs and videos), Audience Experiences (case studies contributed in response to a BBC news story), and Audience Stories (story tip-offs from the audience which are not on the BBC news agenda).

Audience Comments are opinions shared in response to a call to action, a radio phone-in, a presenter request on a television news programme, or a Have Your Say debate.

Collaborative Content refers to material which is produced by the audience, but with training and support from BBC journalists and producers. This could be a digital story, a Video Nation short film, or a radio piece produced by a Community reporter.

Networked journalism is a term coined by new media commentator Jeff Jarvis and 'takes into account the collaborative nature of journalism: professionals and amateurs working together to get the real story, linking to each other across brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, perspectives. It recognises the complex relationships that will make news. And it focuses on the process more than the product.'<sup>15</sup> The term is included here because it is being used by senior executives at the BBC to describe initiatives which explicitly attempt to tap into expert communities within the audience to improve the quality of journalistic output.

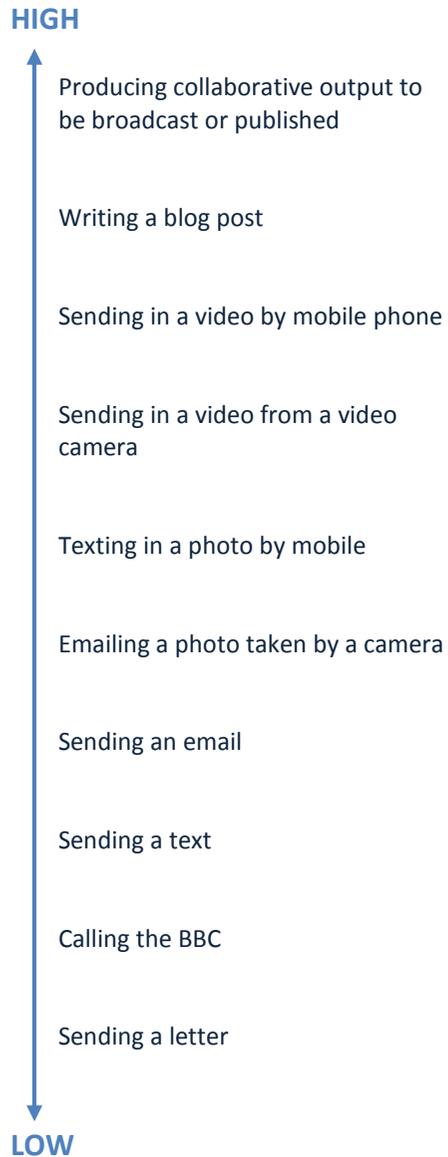
Non-news content refers to photographs of wildlife, scenic weather or community events. On the Where I Live sites, it would also refer to online restaurant reviews, recommendations for walks or local events of the sort commonly found on the BBC Local websites.

The following page demonstrates the tensions which exist between these different types of Audience Material.

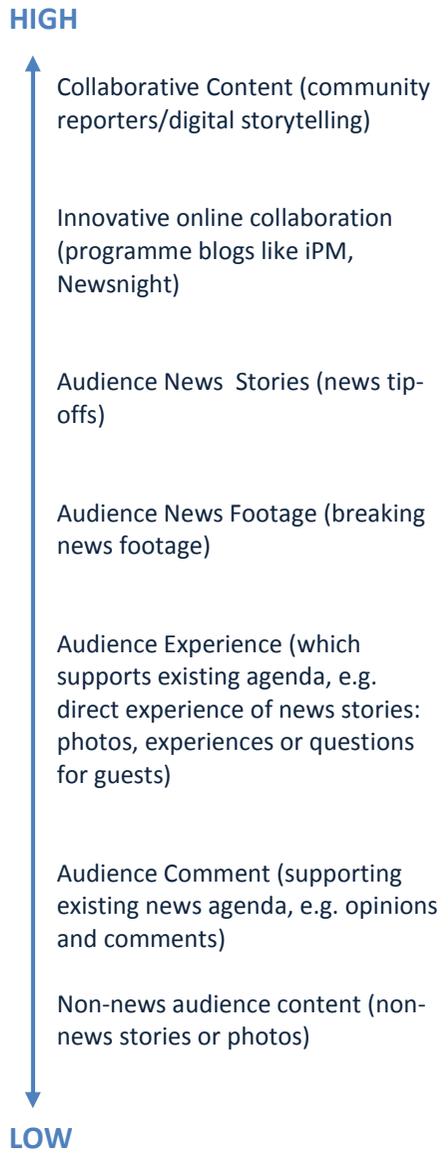
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<sup>15</sup> [www.buzzmachine.com/2006/07/05/networked-journalism/](http://www.buzzmachine.com/2006/07/05/networked-journalism/)

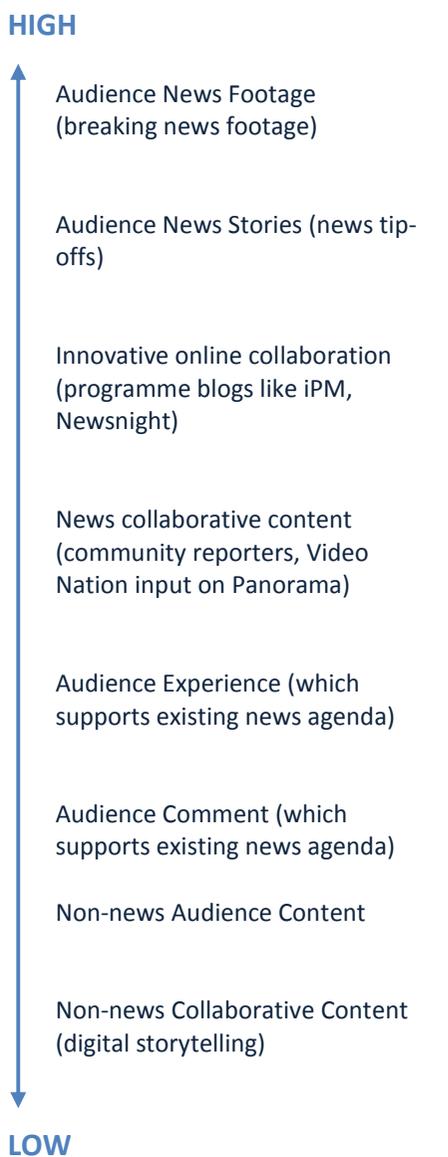
Axis 1  
Technological Hierarchy of 'UGC'



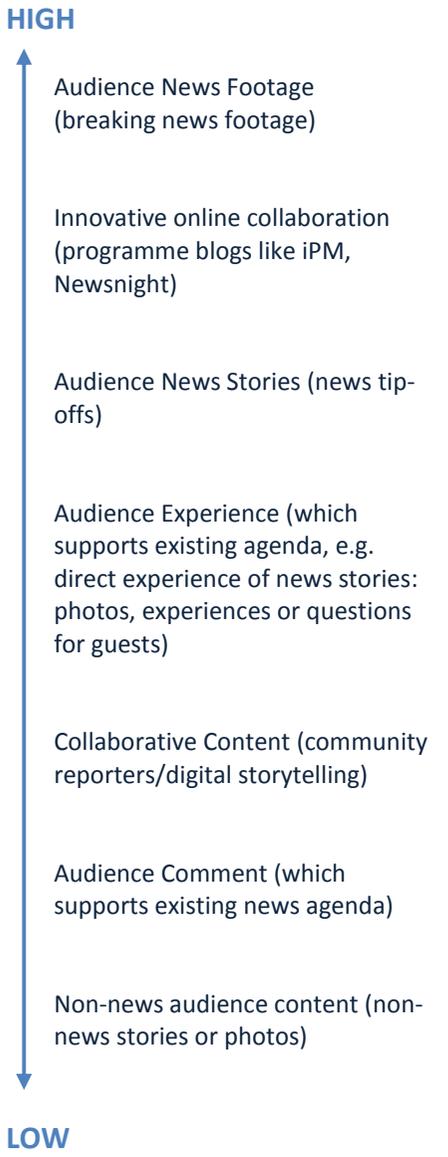
Axis 2  
Normative Hierarchy of 'UGC'



Axis 3  
Value to BBC News (measured by impact vs. cost)



Axis 4  
How Audience Values 'UGC'?



## Journalists and audiences display markedly different attitudes towards the five types of Audience Material

### Audience News Footage

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The audience is very positive about the use of footage submitted by the public for breaking news stories. Respondents felt that Audience Footage shot before journalists could arrive on the scene could only improve the quality of the news output.

The impact of the 'UGC' Hub in terms of the BBC's ability to broadcast and publish quality breaking news footage is without question. A 'UGC' Hub journalist told us how they were able to get footage, and eye witnesses onto different BBC outlets very quickly: 'when a big story breaks, like Glasgow airport; that is a fantastic opportunity to see the machine working and working well'.

While focus group respondents were overwhelmingly positive about breaking news footage, there were some concerns about quality, but respondents generally felt that any weakness in the material was balanced by the 'immediacy' and 'access' of the Audience Material.

Rose: I think that there's a trade-off, if you like, the trade-off for seeing something immediate through the eyes of a normal person. It's like seeing it through our eyes because that is what we would see if we were there. Of course it would have been nicer if a reporter was there as you would have seen more, but I think that's what we're prepared to give up for the immediacy and being able to see it as we would basically see it, rather than filtered through the eyes of a professional. (Focus Group 6)

There were concerns shared by some audience members that the excitement about audience footage meant that non-breaking news might be covered just because of unseen material. This concern was echoed

by some journalists, who suggested that that availability of audience material might skew judgements of news value.

I remember a story about a fire in a shop, which was run on a late bulletin when we were a bit tight for news. Somebody had filmed a fire in a shop on a camera phone, and we thought great. We used it. And then you look back and think, actually, maybe that wasn't good enough quality. If Lord Lucan rides Shergar into the city centre and we only have it on camera phone we would still use it. If it's a small shop fire, that gets put out after an hour, and nobody gets hurt and we have it on camera phone, is it really that newsworthy?

### Audience News Stories

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Scouring audience material for story tip-offs is a major part of the work done by journalists at the Hub, and was seen by many as an important pay-off for all of the time they spent moderating Have Your Say debates.

'UGC' Hub Broadcast Journalist: '[The Hub] is absolutely brilliant for generating stories. I would say that's one of the things it is best for. Telling you about a story you didn't know about or telling you something new about a story. We have a Suggest a Story inbox, and that is full of people e-mailing us and saying, 'did you know this was happening, because it's an outrage'. And the same rules apply. We have to ring them back or e-mail them and check it out, but we get a lot of stories that way...The 'UGC' stuff that comes into that inbox is absolute dynamite.

Despite these examples, overall, it was quite striking how few 'new' stories were being developed on the basis of audience contributions. This is perhaps unsurprising considering there are limited 'direct requests' for audiences to send in their stories. While our Content Analysis was not representative and cannot be generalised, it is worth noting that there were no direct requests for news stories on Network

news and regional news (BBC Wales was used as an example of Regional Radio), 3 requests on Network radio and 9 requests on BBC Wales (who have a regular 'Your Stories' segment on their early evening news). There were 'your story' suggestions on the Have your Say site, and on some programme websites, but overall, these requests for story suggestions and tip-offs were much less frequent than requests for Audience Comments.

Audiences want to be more involved in the news process. As the MORI survey demonstrated, 61% of the British public agree or strongly agree that it is good for the public to be involved with producing the news rather than leaving it to the journalists. The benefits to the audience were raised in some of the focus groups, particularly in terms of producing stories or footage which otherwise wouldn't have been uncovered.

Dane: I think there's a process here which is probably unstoppable. It's related to blogging, it's related to the technology that makes it possible for people on the ground to contribute a flow of information. In some places it has produced fabulous material from places where journalists couldn't go or perspectives that journalists would never get. (Focus Group 9)

Flo: I think also that lots of people want to get involved with the news. They don't want to feel that it's something apart from them. And seeing that we are all part of the news anyway, and it's our lives, whatever. I can understand when people feel like they might want to be contributing, and getting involved, and be part of it. (Focus Group 2)

There are many examples of good practice from BBC Wales in terms of building relationships with hard-to-reach communities. The results of these collaborations are quite striking. These relationships produce stories which would otherwise stay under the radar of the BBC and would probably remain untouched by the mainstream media. Also, because stories come directly

from communities, they are often more relevant to a wider range of audience groups.

### Collaborative Content

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Many audience members did not know about the different types of collaborative journalism which takes place and were therefore unable to comment on this type of Audience Material. The reason it is listed relatively highly on the Value to the Audience Axis is that those who did know what it was, and had had direct experience of it were extremely enthusiastic about the process, as well as the end product.

One of our focus groups was with people who had been involved in the BBC Wales Capture Wales Digital Storytelling project. The testimony of the participants in the focus group provided a glimpse of how such intervention-based participatory journalism can succeed in reaching groups (lower socio-economic groups, the elderly, minority ethnic groups etc) which are under-represented when it comes to more 'conventional' forms of Audience Material.

A number of group members had inspirational stories to tell about how their participation in the BBC's programme had changed their lives, and given them the confidence to succeed in areas they had previously thought impossible. One participant suffers from a degenerative illness and uses a wheelchair. He made a story which has now been viewed 10,000 times and has been useful to other sufferers of the illness. Another was a pensioner and housewife who had left school at 15 and had previously never learned any computer skills. Yet another had been out of work since breaking his neck in a car accident, but was spurred on by his digital storytelling experience to find successful paid work in the voluntary sector making digital stories and short video pieces with underprivileged children.

The experiences also made participants regard the BBC very warmly. It was commonplace throughout the focus groups to hear people from lower socio-economic groups talk about the BBC licence fee with thinly veiled

contempt, but June and Frank, two working class pensioners from Newport had different ideas:

June: You know, it makes me feel that the licence is worth it because we are involved. We've done a little bit for the BBC, so I think, oh, you know they are doing something for ordinary people. I mean, for me, like I say, if they can teach me to do that then they can teach anyone. Because I went there literally with no idea.

Frank: It's amazing the world that opens up when you get on the computer websites and whatnot.

June: That's what I liked about it, the [digital storytelling] team. They didn't sort of bully you. They sort of coaxed it out of me and I didn't feel intimidated or anything. They just were so clever.

Frank: I think what June is also trying to get across is that June is a housewife, aren't you June? Well, you are a housewife, I'm an old fogey, I'm 71, and yet they are still interested in people like myself and June. And I think it's terrific honestly. (Focus Group 8)

To date much of this collaborative content has produced 'non-news content', or content which has only appeared at the margins of news and current affairs output, for example the work done by Digital Storytelling or Video Nation teams. The challenge appears to be whether space can be made for this type of collaborative content in mainstream news and current affairs outlets.

There are some examples of journalist/audience collaborations around news and current affairs topics. One example is a pilot project between Video Nation and Panorama in which the Video Nation team worked with young people to try and generate content about the credit crunch and people's personal feelings about

their homes and how they are being affected more generally.

Although those who have participated in the digital storytelling workshops are very enthusiastic about the process, it still has a relatively low profile, particularly outside Wales, and in its current form is not designed for news and current affairs outlets.

Video Nation, started in 1993 is perhaps the most well-known example of collaborative content at the BBC. The films are shot by people and edited by the BBC, but overall control rests with the contributor. Significantly in recent years, in addition to its traditional slot on BBC2, Video Nation has been commissioned to produce films which would fit into larger BBC projects and seasons.

One of these initiatives was a series of films with white working class people as part of BBC2's White Season. Another was a series of 50 films produced with different Chinese communities which have been shown on big screens across the country to mark the Olympics Games. In terms of the potential opportunities for BBC journalism, Video Nation has worked with Panorama to produce films by young people talking about the ways in which the credit crunch is affecting their lives.

Although Video Nation is careful to define itself as documentary, there appear to be interesting ways in which it can be incorporated into current affairs programming.

Another journalism related example of collaborative content is School Report, an annual event which encourages 11- to 14-year-olds to engage with the news (through collaboration between schools and the BBC) by helping them make their own news reports for real audiences. As Helen Shreve, the Editor and Project Leader for School Report explains: 'We're about trying to get kids and teachers to think about what's the story, what audience they're appealing to, how to tell their

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story in an appealing way, and how to do it with a real deadline.'

The major drawback of these types of collaborations is the cost and for this reason such initiatives are still relatively rare. One staff member journalist noted that the digital story model seemed to require extensive input from BBC staff, and suggested that the value of such schemes should be gauged by balancing the production time and cost against the benefits of the skills transferred, the experience of the contributor, and the usage of the figures for the material produced. It was suggested that the results of this equation be compared with the costs and benefits of alternative radio, TV or new media content.

Despite much of the rhetoric that has surrounded the growth of 'UGC' which implies it has democratised the production of news and led to collaboration between the public and journalists, most of the examples of news-related 'UGC' we encountered involved little more than the straightforward 'use' of audience material by journalists. Most news 'UGC', is little more than a novel alternative source of raw material among many. As one journalist stressed, newsrooms could be doing more to encourage audience members to have more impact on the final product.

When a newsroom gets a tip-off they might be interested in offering that person the time to go out and record some material themselves, or to go out and record some new audio and broadcast that on the radio, or to give them a camera and ask them to go out and shoot their own story... That happens less often in general newsrooms because it's so labour intensive, but that is the ultimate BBC version of 'UGC' because it gives so much control to the audience member. I don't think there are other news organisations which offer that kind of guidance in terms of production, that kind of educational value.

One possible solution, and this would need to be a long term strategy, is for the training of potential citizen

journalists, perhaps linked to existing groups or organisations (community media groups, FE and HE institutions, etc) who could continue the training, so BBC journalists wouldn't have to be continuously directly involved in helping to create output. Examples of these types of initiatives can be found in the work of BBC Wales' Communities Editor, Gwenda Richards, who is leading a team responsible for a number of different initiatives which facilitate outreach with the wider audience, such as Community Reporters, the radio programme 'The View from Here' and the multimedia project 'In the Frame'. Similarly in other local newsrooms such as at BBC London, there is a 'UGC' producer whose remit is to encourage innovative relationships with the audience, particularly hard to reach communities. Their work demonstrates that there are other ways to interact with the audience and to encourage the audience to provide useful and relevant content and feedback.

As long as the result of the collaboration is of high quality, the general audience is enthusiastic about having a greater role in the production of the news. And for those who take part in the collaborations the results are undeniable. For some the effects are literally life changing. It is also a valuable way to properly engage with communities which otherwise remain almost entirely unrepresented by the mainstream media, and which, as our MORI survey shows, are very unlikely to submit news related audience content in its most common forms.

## Audience Experience

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Audiences are generally positive about the use of direct experiences from the public to add to an existing news package or current affairs discussion. They were more positive about comment based content relating to experiences of a news event, compared to purely opinion based comments. The online survey (which is limited by the self-selected sample and focused on online interactions) showed that in their last interaction with the BBC 13% had contacted the organisation with an account of an experience or story suggestion (11% with an eyewitness photograph and 2% with an idea for a news story) while 51% had submitted an opinion or comment.

The Ipsos MORI survey showed that only 3% of the British public had contacted a news organisation to expose or tell a story (14% of those who had contributed anything to a news organisation). In comparison, 10% of the British population (and 42% of those who had contributed anything) had contacted a news organisation in response to something they heard or saw on the news (it should be noted this could have been reacting to a story with an opinion or a direct experience).

Journalists were aware of the different types of Audience Material they might receive, and there is clearly a hierarchy in terms of the benefits of the different types. Finding audience members with direct experience of a story was a major aim of the Hub journalists.

One explained the best way to get case studies of direct experience is to create a post form after an online story. 'Barely a day goes by when a post does not give us a very good lead'.

There are two different ways of looking at the debates. For the 'Have Your Say' side of the operation, of course, everything is good quality, because the whole purpose of that is to give

people a chance to have their say as they would on any other chat forum that is on the Internet. But from a 'UGC' perspective, we are obviously looking for a very different kind of involvement, because we are looking for direct experiences of stories which we can use in different news outlets.

A journalist from the 'UGC' Hub provided a detailed explanation of how an email from a British man living in Greece during the fires last summer provided a wealth of different material. He offered eye-witness photos and was willing to talk about the photos for News 24 as well as local radio (thereby offering a local perspective on an international story). He also agreed to write an online diary about his experiences as the fires progressed, and the journalist was also able to go back to him 6 weeks later to do a follow up story.

Journalists perceive a hierarchy between experience and opinion, and tend to privilege direct experience over opinion where possible. This is echoed in the views of many audience members.

Glenda: I think I prefer stories to opinions. Like, if they'd been talking about domestic politics, even though it's serious it would still be interesting to hear people's experiences and stories of hospitals and stuff, rather than just their opinions. Because then that's just like the Have Your Say thing again. (Focus Group 1)

Because of the high news value attached by journalists to audience material associated with direct experience of a story, and the popularity of such material with audiences, it seems reasonable to invest more time and resources into encouraging audience members to submit experiences rather than comments. Comments do have worth and they will always exist on radio call-ins, blogs and message boards. But currently, given the importance both journalists and audiences attach to audience content based on informed opinion and accounts rooted in direct experience, this kind of content is not encouraged or elicited enough

## Networked Journalism

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Networked journalism is the most underdeveloped type of 'UGC' at the BBC, and is happening very infrequently, but as Richard Sambrook explains, it offers a great deal of potential if harnessed correctly. Radio 4's iPM blog is an example of the ways in which networked journalism can be used effectively.

The US provides a number of interesting potential models, which have been made successful by National Public Radio (NPR) and encouraged by the Public Journalism movement which has been active in the US since the early 1990s, and attempts to embed grassroots journalism within mainstream media outlets.

The editor of iPM, Peter Rippon, draws on these US examples when he discusses the success of the iPM blog.

There's an NPR special that's doing very well in the US where you actively call communities of citizens and hold public meetings. I think we should be leading the way in terms of grassroots democratic journalism and I don't think we are. It's about how we could step up to that level.

iPM's strength is that it has developed a loyalty from its audience and interested groups, which, when asked, provide experiences and expertise related to a particular story. Peter Rippon explained how networked journalism can work. Through an email from a listener, they had uncovered an unsettling medical practice whereby families were having to pay quite a substantial amount of money to doctors in order for bodies to be released from hospital for cremation. By searching medical blogs they were able to find information about this practice, which is known amongst the medical community as 'ash cash'. By seeking expert opinions from doctors they were able to do a strong piece on the topic.

It's not us being advocates but if we apply our journalistic skills, you can just mould these things into really good pieces of journalism.

Networked journalism can empower the audience in direct ways. Using a grassroots, public journalism-influenced, model which emphasises local meetings and community reporters, it can reconnect mainstream media with the local communities. Or, when used in the ways iPM have demonstrated, by connecting with expert communities within the blogosphere, it can empower audience members with particular specialist knowledge or experiences to become directly involved in the research and production of a news story or item.

The strength of the BBC is its international recognition and audience. For every story, there are opinions and experiences from across the globe. This gives the BBC a unique opportunity. As Steve Herrmann describes

One other thing that's helped us hugely is the quality and spread of our audience. We've got a very international audience. Anywhere something happens, pretty much, we will find somebody. Somebody will contact us. We will put a form on a story, however remote a place and unlikely it sounds, and we'll get something back. And that's of real value to the rest of the audience. What we're actually doing is... acting as a kind of megaphone and getting these people who contact us and reflecting back out... to the rest of the five-and-a-half million users what's going on there and what they're saying.

Many of the senior journalists interviewed for this research talked enthusiastically about the possibilities provided by Networked Journalism. It would require a change of emphasis, and work on developing relationships with key communities of expertise within the audience, particularly the blogosphere, but the advantages in terms of improving the quality of the output are clear.

## Non-news Audience Content

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The online survey emphasised that a number of BBC audience members have sent in non-news photographs and they enjoy doing that. 27% of the 686 people who answered the question about the last type of submission they had made to the BBC said they had sent in a non-news photo. This was the second-most common reason for contacting the BBC for these respondents (52% said they had made a comment in response to a BBC news story or debate).

Most older audience members in the focus groups enjoyed non-news content, with many commenting that it provided a welcome relief from the diet of 'negative' news.

Josh: It just takes you away from all of the political strife, and the disasters, and all the problems that you hear about. It just brings you back into a lighter world for a minute. [...] As somebody said earlier on, the only news you hear about is bad news. That's all we get. And we do need to know about it. But we also need to realise, hang on a sec, it's a great world out there. It's a beautiful place. And a few photographs of that is a good thing.

I think it maybe suggests that programme makers and the newsreaders are in touch with their viewers. When they show stuff like the photos of people's February mornings or whatever, I think it shows that you are in touch with your viewers and what your viewers are up to. (Group 4)

These views however were often not shared by younger members of the audience. Detractors were vociferous in their criticism, seeing non-news photographs as: 'pointless' and 'boring'; often of poor quality; insubstantial 'filler' material; evidence of dumbing down; and often presented in a patronising way which detracts from the seriousness of the news items which precedes and follows them on programmes such as BBC Breakfast.

Becca: It just seems like filler.

Charles: What it made me think of is, you know in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*? They played soothing music when they are giving the inmates their medication. They calm the mental patients into a hypnotic stupor by playing this soothing music. Pictures like that, nice pictures of sunsets, always make me think of that. (Focus Group 2)

Others felt non-news photographs were purely about 'customer relations':

Dane: To me it's about a sort of, rather tokenistic, rather patronising 'we want your input'. They don't really, I don't think. I think it's a sort of marketing. Okay, if you had a fantastic photo then great. But to me these photos aren't interesting. There is nothing about them that merits them being on the screen. By putting these photos up it creates a good kind of customer relations. I don't know. I don't particularly like it. And the whole tone is very patronising. 'Oh, what a lovely sunset'. You know? (Focus Group 9)

A number of people disapproved of non-news photographs being broadcast on programmes which were explicitly concerned with presenting the news, but were quite happy to encounter them in other contexts (such as on BBC Local websites, or in weather bulletins):

Helen: If I want to see pictures I'll go and find them... I go in my own time to look at them. When I see it on TV, it's almost like they are saying you should be interested in this. I don't know, it just sort of grates on me. (Focus Group 9)

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## Audience Comment

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This was the main way audiences had contributed to the BBC. For 52% of the online survey respondents it was the reason they had last contacted the BBC. Although the same question was not asked on the MORI survey, there was a question about motivations for contacting the BBC, and 42% said they had contacted a news organisation in response to something they had heard or seen on the news.

There is an antipathy shared by a number of focus group participants towards the publication or broadcast of opinion-based 'UGC' from people who are not directly affected by a story and/or have no real expertise in the area covered. The uninformed and often inarticulate nature of much of this user generated comment is seen as a de-motivating factor.

Charles: I'm generally not inclined to do so with mainstream news stories because I fail to see how I'm qualified to do that. Like, if it's about the budget or something, you know, I'm not seriously going to have an informed opinion about that. Anything that I say would just be no more than you would get from a conversation with your friends. I don't see the point. [...]99% of the people who call up or e-mail really don't add anything new to the debate. They just say something incredibly opinionated about the issue without saying how it affects them, and without sounding terribly informed about anything. [...] I think that maybe the kind of people who debate on these programmes would proportionally be more likely to be the kind of people who don't realise that they know f\*\*k-all about what they're talking about. I just think that on these things it is disproportionately people who are opinionated without having much to base their opinions on. (Focus Group 2)

Within the focus groups, there was discussion about attempting to dissuade comments from uninformed contributors.

Tim: They constantly ask us for our views, it is as if they don't care who you were or what our specialisms are in, they just want views for the sake of having views.

David: I think it would improve things if they stopped saying on BBC news, 'whatever your views, we want to hear them' to 'if you know something about it or having actually been directly affected by the event then get in contact with us'.

Tim: Yeah it seems like they don't care, they just want audience views for the sake of it. (Focus Group 11)

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the Focus Groups was the perceptions of those who did contribute comments and opinions. One of the perceptions is that people submit comments because they 'like the sound of their own voice'.

Andrew: By responding to these requests for UGC, you are really saying, 'I think I have something worthy to say on the topic', when really, most of the UGC opinions we hear are not that great – I wouldn't want to associate myself with those people by doing the same thing as them. (Focus Group 12)

Similarly focus group participants felt those who did contribute were publicity seekers.

Bobby: This is a fairly cynical point of view, but I think you could see it as a bit of a platform for self-promotion. You know, like get yourself on TV. Which is also maybe why it wouldn't occur to a lot of people to do it. If you did film or photograph something like this it would probably be more of a personal record. Like you are going to keep it for your friends and family to show them, rather than show it to the entire nation.

Glenda: Yeah, my friend fancies himself as a bit of an amateur photographer. He would be the kind of person that would do this because he thinks his pictures are amazing. He'd be like, he'd think that people would want to see them, and he would send them in. I kind of only imagine that kind of person doing it to be honest.

Sarah: The eyewitness stuff is like an opportunity to moan, as well. Maybe they feel a bit more validated, like people are listening to them and stuff. I can see why somebody would do that. If you are really angry about something. You're like, I'll send this to the BBC and then people will listen to me. (Focus Group 1)

To compare these perceptions with the views of those who do contribute, only 21% of those surveyed for the nationally representative MORI survey, included the response 'because my input is interesting/useful' as at least one of the explanations for submitting material (it should be noted that there may have been an element of survey bias here with people not wanting to appear self-important). 39% of online respondents said the same.

The value of the Have Your Say comments is outlined by Peter Horrocks:

It obviously had some benefit in its own right; the benefits that the user receives from seeing their comment published, but far more important than that is the value in providing some kind of a way of aligning or assessing the audience's view of a subject and potentially, where appropriate aligning our journalism to that. I don't mean necessarily making it identical but using that as an influence in our journalism.

As Peter Horrocks emphasised, the future of these types of debates is currently at an important crossroads.

An important question is whether we are just in passive mode in terms of receiving information from web users or whether we are more proactive in terms of soliciting or seeking out information.

Peter Horrocks provided an example of how the audience influenced the development of a story.

We were doing a story on a regional government crack down on pornographic images. It was likely to be a very straightforward, populist measure and I was quite struck by a sudden kind of strength of response from the audience saying, 'Hang on. It's all simulated violence. It's amongst consenting adults' and so on. There's a reasonable point of view there and that wasn't something we took into account and we did subsequently include that in our piece for the Ten O'Clock News. So, those quite unusual, inspiring contributions, I think can be helpful in kind of broadening the editorial perspective.

The 'UGC' Hub journalists felt Have Your Say was a positive space for audience members from across the world to share their views and ideas. The numbers of people contributed to the Hub cannot be ignored.

On a really popular debate we will get over 10,000 messages in the space of one day. The Shilpa Shetty story from Celebrity Big Brother was one of our biggest debates of the year. By the end of that I think we had nearly 30,000 messages, of which there were several thousand which we never got through.

Have Your Say clearly acts as an important newsgathering tool:

I would imagine if you had published say 1000 messages on one story, you may have perhaps 50

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to 100 of them read out as messages on various different outlets whether it's Five Live or News 24. Likewise, out of 1000 messages you may get around a couple of dozen case studies that could be used which we pass on to programmes. So the ones which actually get on air would be perhaps half of that.

The way it allows journalists to access people in hard to reach countries is also significant.

As a producer when you're trying to turn a programme around in three hours, trying to get a normal person from Sierra Leone can be problematic, especially when the phones are so disastrously difficult. This way, with a little bit more time, we can see the thing coming up, we can get a post form up on related story and we have time to talk it through with these people and if there is a story you can get some really good stuff.

It also provides an emotional impact which BBC journalists couldn't have previously included themselves.

With some of the bigger stories now, it's useful for UGC comments to go ahead of a big-hitting political interview. The politician can't just say, well that's your opinion John, but I think X, Y, and Z. But if you have the voice of a mother whose son has been killed in Basra, or an ex-soldier who's had a horrific experience in Basra and you ask the same question of that politician he has to deal with it differently. And so it gives an additional legitimacy to questions they may already want to ask. So that's always useful as well.

There was frustration expressed about how quickly discussions could turn to unrelated topics.

Most of our debates are on contentious subjects. That's why they are debates. So tempers can run

high and it's easy for people to break house rules and we've got an obligation there to make sure those things aren't published.

Ultimately, as Peter Horrocks explains, there is a great deal of value to be gained from these comments, but strategies need to be devised which allow that value to be harnessed most efficiently.

If we can free up effort from simply processing large volumes of opinion and obtain extra investment, our intention will be to enhance our efforts in getting real journalistic value out of this material. It can clearly widen our agenda and our knowledge of what is happening. It can also enhance the level of expertise from members of the public that is present in our journalism and on our airwaves. Members of the audience who really know what they are talking about play a vital role in keeping our journalism up to the mark.

Technology is changing the volume, ease and speed of gathering news material and sources, but it has not changed the reliance on traditional journalism practices

This is a simple but significant conclusion. Despite 'UGC' being described by some commentators and practitioners as a revolution in journalism practice, this research has demonstrated that rather than changing the way most journalists work, Audience Comments, Audience Content and Audience Stories are firmly embedded within the newsgathering process, and in most cases are being used as just another journalistic source. 'UGC', to most news journalists in the BBC, is usually characterised as one source of information to be processed among many. It is the raw material that gets turned into journalistic output. Of course, technology has sped up the process of garnering information from the public considerably. But whether it is a member of the audience emailing information about a breaking news story, providing eye-witness footage, or

offering comments about a story, these relationships with the audience have always existed.

Most BBC journalists frame their accounts of working with UGC in terms of the roles that have always made up traditional journalism practice, rather than as a radically new way of doing the job. For example, they frequently mentioned the need to apply traditional journalistic techniques (i.e. ensuring authenticity, checking content, and maintaining impartiality, etc) when using material from the audience.

This emphasis on fostering and preserving traditional journalistic roles and values was often expressed as a wish to act as a gatekeeper, ensuring that non-professional audience content does not affect the quality of news. This wish was echoed in our audience research. 57% of the general public said they were in favour of material being vetted by journalists 'in order to maintain the quality of the news'. The proportion of our online survey of BBC website contributors was even higher, with 67% of those polled said they thought journalists should act in this 'quality-control' role.

'UGC' is often characterised as a democratising force, allowing the audience to have an input in news production which erodes the traditional distinctions between producers and consumers of the news. This research, however, suggests that in the context of the BBC the pool of contributors is still small, and there are significant barriers (technological, socio-economic, etc) which might prevent 'UGC' from ever becoming a truly inclusive phenomenon.

There are certain types of Audience Material (Collaborative Content and Networked Journalism) which have the potential to significantly revolutionise journalism. In some sectors of the contemporary mediasphere (blogging, social networking, and other social media) it is not an exaggeration to talk of the public as 'the people formerly known as the audience', (as one social networking enthusiast at the BBC referred

to the audience). The potential of such a democratisation of the media needs to be championed, and these formats need to be further harnessed by the BBC .

This process has already begun, and the BBC is planning to embrace such social media. For instance in the summer of 2008 it published an internal 'Social Media Strategy' looking into the further potential of just such developments. At the moment, though, for most news journalists there has been no radical upheaval in the way they work, and no great change in the structural roles played by traditional producers and consumers of the news.

## Audience Material fulfils 6 roles within the BBC

1. Finding **news sources** (within existing agenda, e.g. looking for case studies and sources)
2. Generating **news stories** from tip offs (breaking news footage, new story ideas)
3. Providing space for **public discussion and debate**
4. Strengthening the **relationship with the audience**
5. Finding material for **non-news<sup>16</sup>** segments
6. **Audience empowerment** and skill development

The following table demonstrates the relationship between the different types of Audience Material and the roles they play. It shows the current role each type of Audience Material is playing, but it also suggests how, if used differently, some types of Audience Material could provide the BBC with different benefits.

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<sup>16</sup> We imply no value judgment attached to the term 'non-news', but is being used to differentiate between photographs not related to any news event (for example family pets, the weather etc) and photographs with a specific news focus (for example eye witness photographs of breaking news stories).

		Audience Material Roles			
		<i>Current Role</i>	<i>Role it could be playing</i>	<i>Role it is being perceived as playing</i>	<i>Role it shouldn't be used for</i>
Audience Contribution Types (in order of audience preference)	<i>Audience News Footage</i>	News stories			
	<i>Audience News Stories</i>	News stories			
	<i>Collaborative Content</i>	Audience empowerment & skill development	News stories		
		Strengthening relationship with audience	News sources		
		Non-news content			
	<i>Audience Experience</i>	Hard news sources			
	<i>Non-news Audience Content</i>	Non-news content			
	<i>Audience Comment</i>	Providing space for public discussion and debate		Strengthening relationship with audience ( <i>but comments which are not based on direct experience are not very popular with audiences because of concerns about self-selection</i> )	Indicator of audience opinion ( <i>this is inappropriate because of the level of self-selection and demographic make-up of contributors</i> )
				News sources ( <i>trawling through emails and texts for possible sources is tremendously resource intensive</i> )	
	<i>Networked journalism</i>	Strengthening relationship with audience			
Providing space for public discussion and debate					

## Nations and Regions have many excellent examples of good practice but not everyone is aware of these at Network level

There are excellent examples of good practice taking place, both in terms of Collaborative Content and Audience News Stories. Newsrooms in the Nations and Regions, often by necessity, already have strong relationships with their audience when it comes to traditional 'UGC' formats such as radio phone-ins. But during the research several examples of more innovative practice were encountered, especially in terms of content production, which involve journalists collaborating with the public in ways which extend beyond basic newsgathering. There are a significant number of noteworthy and innovative uses of collaborative/participatory 'UGC' in the Nations and Regions that should be celebrated and encouraged.

It is important to acknowledge that there are cross organisational strategies relating to 'UGC' which position audience-facing campaigns for events such as Springwatch at a regional level, in order to take advantage of closer relationships with audiences. There are also a number of examples of good practice in regional newsrooms that not everyone is aware of at the Network level. Many of these could be replicated across the organisation. We believe it is important that BBC News executives do not overlook the valuable resources that exist in the Nations and Regions, both in terms of existing and previously existing projects that might be used as models of good practice for future national initiatives, and the experience of staff who have worked on successful participatory journalism projects for a number of years already.

Some examples we encountered in newsrooms across the country include: Audience Team Journalists gathering and eliciting UGC in hard-to-reach areas on community buses and through the use of open centres; television journalists at BBC Devon issuing members of the public affected by news stories with video cameras to shoot their own video diaries; radio journalists in Yorkshire using a comparable format to create audio

diaries using the E-10 audio recorder; CSV Action Producers at Radio Sheffield eliciting UGC from people affected by the 2007 summer floods at the same time as they organised the relief effort to help flooded residents; and BBC internet journalists working on dedicated 'UGC' projects such as teaching young people how to shoot and edit their own news packages on mobile phones, and facilitating their broadcast on BBC Local web spaces.

In this section of the report we outline in detail some examples of good practice observed during our research at BBC Wales. We cannot provide an exhaustive list of all of the participatory media projects from BBC newsrooms in the UK, That would be impossible based on data gathered from such a small selection of newsrooms. However, our list does suggest numerous and diverse instances of audience participation which can lead to the minimisation of what some BBC news editors refer to as 'air-conditioned journalism', and an increase in the production of content in which, to different degrees, editorial control over content-production is ceded to members of the public.

### *BBC Wales Today – Your Stories*

One interesting instance from our content analysis was broadcast by BBC Wales on *Wales Today* in February 2008. On Monday 11<sup>th</sup> February, the programme, as part of their permanent 'Your Stories' section on the programme which appears at the end of the broadcast, explained that they had received a call from a viewer in rural mid-Wales complaining about the lack of Broadband provision in his village. The presenters asked viewers to contact them if they were suffering with similar problems. On Tuesday's programme, the presenters explained how many calls they had received and there was a 5 minute package from two locations, and a special feature after the package where more comments were read out. On Wednesday, the programme had an interview with OfCom Wales and an Assembly Minister. On Thursday, the programme broadcast a 7 minute segment about how other viewers had solved their Broadband problem through innovative uses of technology.

There are many elements of this story that are positive from an audience perspective: a) the fact that this story originated from an audience suggestion, b) the fact that it was given such prominence and had so many resources dedicated to the story and c) the fact that the projection of the story involved attempting to find solutions to the problem. A significant factor in the success of this particular example could be the strong links the BBC Wales Today programme has with its audience, through the fact that 'Your Stories' has been embedded in the nightly broadcast.

### BBC Wales' 'Here For You' Project

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Aspects of this project loosely resemble the 'public journalism' mode of community-engaged news reporting which emphasise the importance of civic involvement in the journalistic process based on discussions and consultation between journalists and the audiences they serve.

The purpose of the project, according to Gwenda Richards, Communities Editor at BBC Wales, was to 'to get closer to the audiences, to open doors to the BBC and to make voices of ordinary people heard'.

We set up an advisory board made up of people from the community who represent different areas, and interests, and they run the meetings. It's as much their meeting with us as it is us driving it. They'll point us in a direction in terms of what stories, what issues are coming up, what their grudges are, and what kind of things they'd like to see the BBC do.

The process is not simply one-way, with members of the public feeding ideas to the journalists, however. A lot of work is also done educating and informing the public about what kinds of stories and material would be useful to different sectors and departments within BBC Wales. A two-way consultation process is instituted that involves true collaboration between BBC journalists and the audience.

### Digital Storytelling

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Capture Wales was an interventionist media project which aimed to promote digital literacy and self-expression, and which was committed to the idea that creative control over each multimedia digital story should be retained by the individual member of the public. Intervention and instruction from trained journalists was limited to skilful light-touch facilitation methods in intensive workshops usually lasting one week, and often based in hard-to-reach areas with high levels of social and economic deprivation.

The success of this 'UGC' venture is well documented, and while it is not a specifically news-oriented project, digital stories have been incorporated into news and current affairs output in a number of different ways. We also feel that with some adaptation, and after careful consideration, aspects of the digital storytelling model could be used to encourage audience members to produce more explicitly news and current affairs-related material within the context of specifically designed initiatives.

The advantages of such a model would be plentiful, but the main ones include:

- 1) It could allow the BBC to counter the potential criticism that the way it views news-related 'UGC' is centred too much around what it can get from the public (in terms of news gathering) rather than allowing the audience to become truly involved in influencing the content of news and current affairs output in innovative and creative ways;
- 2) It would provide the opportunity to work with the public in the creation of news stories and in the process impart and spread knowledge about the professional and technical skills needed to produce news material;
- 3) If done with such an outcome in mind, such projects enable the dissemination of journalistic skills among the general public, leading to

- 4) higher-quality independent submissions of 'UGC' in the future; and
- 5) Finally, such targeted outreach initiatives could offer a true public-service, by ensuring that social groups who do not take part in the 'UGC conversation' as much as others can be represented (the elderly, the working class, those who are not already socially or politically active, etc).

As stated earlier, there is some resistance to such collaborative projects, but a potential cause of this is the use of the term 'UGC' which has become a catch-all definition for any material either directly or indirectly produced by the audience.

The term is muddying the waters, with the same term being used to describe comments left on the Have your Say website and direct community outreach projects, types of interaction which clearly serve a number of different purposes. As one senior producer argued,

I think it would be very narrow-minded if we only saw user generated content as a way of supporting our news agenda. That's my personal view as there are so many other rich sources out there.

They continued:

The thing that I really love about Video Nation and Digital Storytelling is the surprise element. So you're not telling someone, 'Go out and find a story about the closing of the local primary school.' You're actually uncovering little glimpses into the history and current culture of a community. It's often really surprising. No journalist would ever report or ask the question because we wouldn't have known that it was there in the first place.

The benefits of community outreach are numerous: engaging and gaining the trust of communities who are not traditional BBC audiences, building the confidence and empowering individual audience members through

skills training, and producing highly personalised, emotive material which can be broadcast or published. As someone involved heavily with Video Nation argued, determined outreach initiatives are the most powerful tools for persuading certain communities to engage with the BBC.

What we do with Video Nation specifically, is to go out and do projects with parts of the community that aren't the audience, or at least may not be the audience. They wouldn't be the people who would normally pick up the keyboard and send an email. As a result their communities are not very much heard from.

The cost issues associated with collaborative journalism of this nature are undoubtedly a large barrier to more widespread implementation of similar media outreach projects. An AHRC/BBC-funded knowledge exchange research programme is currently underway looking at how the digital storytelling form will develop, and one of its areas of interest is how it can be made less resource-intensive. One way of keeping the costs incurred by such projects to a minimum might be to work in partnership with existing grass-roots community media, and other organisations. The pilot 2006 BBC local television project in the West Midlands, for example, worked with local FE and HE media education departments and community media groups such as the Rural Media Company in order to find audience content to air in its news bulletins.

### Community Reporters

BBC Radio Wales has a network of 31 Community Reporters, largely untrained members of the public, who record raw audio footage that gets edited together into packages by a Community Team responsible for working with them. These packages are then broadcast on a number of different outlets across the station, including the high-profile morning show with Jamie Owen and the afternoon magazine show with Roy Noble. It is also common for community reporters to write stories for the Welsh BBC Local sites.

The community reporters receive basic training in the use of recording equipment, the vocabulary and conventions of radio production, and some tips on how and what to record to make a good radio piece, but a lot of the learning is inductive, and gets carried out on the job.

The reporters themselves are motivated by a desire to influence local news provision. As one explained:

In terms of motivation, I've always loved radio, I do love radio, and you do find yourself listening to things and thinking, how boring is that? I can think of a lot more interesting things to put on the radio that matter. And of course I'd better put my money where my mouth is, as it were. I'm also quite dedicated to my local area really. I live there, it's my village. You know? I live there, and I enjoyed it, and love living there. And it's been a chance to get some positive things on the radio about my area, so there was quite a selfish interest in that sense. And the final thing is it's a great excuse to go and talk to interesting people.

At present the reporters do not usually report on 'hard news', and are instead encouraged to cover human- and community-interest stories. Given adequate supervision and collaboration, however, there is no reason why such a model would not work in the provision of hard news.

### 'In the Frame'

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'In the Frame' is a multimedia outreach project run by BBC Wales that has worked with a number of different 'hard to reach' groups who would not normally submit content to the BBC. The growing list of participants so far includes Traveller Children in Newport, groups of young 'street' children across the South Wales Valleys, young Welsh homeless people, and elderly attendees of the University of the Third Age in Bridgend.

One of the journalists who has worked on 'In the Frame' explained:

It's about giving people a method by using new technology to be able to express themselves. It's about using their own photography and mixing it with their own voices into a short film, but with them in control. And it's voices you don't usually get in the media talking in their own words. It's an active effort to try and get more voices into the media that maybe never would have otherwise been there.

Whilst self-expression and self-empowerment is an important aspect of the process, there is also human interest news value to many of the pieces recorded.

You get a fresh slant on life as well. With 'In the Frame' I was told to try and do something before the elections with a group of young people. Rather than giving them themes I gave them a task. The task was, 'if you had the power and you were an AM [Welsh Assembly Member] what would you do, what would you change in your area if you could change one thing?' That project was quite interesting because it did involve a news topic. Then the news took it up and got the Assembly Member to go to a school that had been criticised by one of the young people.

The key to making these kinds of collaborative community outreach projects successful is to demonstrate the ways in which they overlap with traditional forms of journalism, and contribute significantly in terms of media literacy and audience training. As Richard Sambrook argues in another context:

When you're enabling people and giving them the skills and the technology and the media literacy to be able to contribute to the vast medium in some way, that's where the overlap with journalism lies. That's where one can support the other.

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ugc@thebbc

Those journalists who work directly with the community to produce material are entirely enthusiastic about, and very proud of, the quality of the output. As more of these initiatives are encouraged (perhaps in the context of BBC Local's proposed future focus on UGC) more journalists may be encouraged by the results. As Hugh Berlyn explained,

During the local TV pilot we ran at the West Midlands a couple of months ago, we were actively encouraging schools and organisations and communities to create materials of their own and a lot of it was extraordinarily good. Some of it was excellent. Some of it, by the nature of 'UGC', was rather a bit rough around the edges but that actually, in some ways, made it more charming.

## Overall there is support from the audience for the ways in which the BBC has been using Audience Material

According to our MORI survey, which was nationally representative but did not ask specifically about the BBC, and the online survey on the BBC website which wasn't representative but captured data on those audience members who do submit material to the BBC, there is positive feeling about the ways in which Audience Material is being used. The following table shows the responses for each question. The percentages are the total number of people who responded that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statements.

	MORI	BBC online survey
<b>It is a good thing that news organisations are using material sent in by the public now more than they used to</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>88%</b>
<b>News material produced by professional journalists is more trustworthy than material sent in by the public</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>It is good for the public to be involved with producing the news rather than leaving it to the journalists</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>74%</b>
<b>Material sent in by the public should always be vetted by journalists in order to maintain the quality of the news</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>67%</b>

Particularly noteworthy is the issue of trust with those who did submit clearly feeling less trusting of the material produced by journalists. It is difficult to gauge, particularly with the online survey, whether those audience members are motivated by a belief that BBC journalists are not trustworthy (although the survey did not stipulate BBC journalists in particular) or because they are justifying their own engagement.

Also noteworthy is the clear support for journalists vetting material, particularly from people who submit to the BBC. More so than the general public, they want their material vetted and checked. This clearly supports the BBC model of 'UGC' where moderation and a strong 'gatekeeper' role relating to quality- and authenticity-control is central to the way it has been used so far.

There is also some support for BBC online forums, from people who aren't users, but who believe providing a space for discussion and debate should be part of the remit of the BBC.

Dave, a young student from Focus Group 1 also applauded the democratic impulse behind the site's existence:

Dave: I think it's good that whether you're the Queen, or whether you're a student, you've got the same opportunity to put your opinion out there. And it's not just like the studio where they only have high profile people. This is your opportunity, no matter who you are, to get your opinion out there, and to get to become part of it if you like. (Focus Group 1)

These views were a minority of those expressed by the focus group participants. The majority expressed negative opinions about Have Your Say:

Tim: See, I don't go to the news to write my opinion, I go to the news to find out what is going on in the world, but maybe I am just set in my ways and I haven't been brought up on blogging and all that stuff. I see BBC News like an online newspaper that is updated quicker. I may talk to my friends about what I read, but I still won't write on a wall about it. I don't think that Joe Blogs' opinions add anything to articles. (Focus Group 11).

Dick: I do find that they Have Your Say, the big thing... you must get lost in it. How can you navigate around that? How do you pull anything out of that? It's just too much. [...] There's this thing that goes something like, because it's on the Internet you have to have it. Because that's what people expect from the Internet. That's what you do with the Internet. So I think the BBC had to have it, but they didn't have to manage it this kind of way. The scale of it makes it kind of pointless, for me. (Focus Group 7).

Maggie: I really don't see [the point of Have Your Say]. Don't you feel that we pay our licence fee, and we don't use this. I don't want to. It's a cost issue. If you buy a paper you pay your own money and you get your own paper, and you

read it. I pay my licence fee and I'm not sure that I want to be paying for this service. [...] I don't have to buy a paper, but I have to buy a television licence. I have to buy a television licence and I don't want my money going into something like this which I don't use, and I don't want to use. (Focus Group 10).

Negative comments about Have Your Say ranged in topic: some focus group participants expressed surprise that anyone would feel motivated to comment, others felt the site required too much technological know-how to navigate, and others were disappointed there wasn't any real-world end product. Many also held negative perceptions about those who did contribute and did not want to be associated with that group of people (see p.39)

Specific calls to action are most useful for news gathering, and when eliciting high-quality relevant comment

Audiences felt that they were asked for material too often. This was supported by the Content Analysis which showed how frequently requests for material are being made, and how they tend to be general requests rather than specific or directed calls to action. Of the 91 requests monitored in the week of content analysis, 56 asked for general comments, 12 were for story suggestions, 14 were for questions for guests and 10 were for photographs. Directed requests happen most frequently as post-forms at the end of online stories. Journalists frequently discussed with us how successful these directed requests could be, but emphasised the needs to make specific calls to action.

Many journalists emphasised how specific calls to action needed to be in order to obtain usable material.

Generally a post form is very, very good at getting targeted case studies. Most people will tell you that. Even sometimes on quite obscure subjects. Every day it's used well. Barely a day goes by when a post does not give us a very good lead.

Interviews with senior editors and executives demonstrated very clearly how managing large volumes of 'UGC', much of it of little editorial value, is a significant concern for the organisation.

Richard Sambrook considers volume to be one of the key disadvantages of 'UGC'.

On a big story, an organization like the BBC gets swamped and you simply know there may be things you may be missing. And it takes a huge amount of time and resources to handle what comes in. And there's a real resource issue around that.

Steve Herrmann: I think we're still developing our strategies about [managing volume]. Some of it is about technology. The ability to sift through things and publish them quickly, and present them in interesting, engaging ways... because it's also an issue... simply about quantity... If you get 15 thousand emails a day about something, even if you can publish them all instantaneously, there's a secondary question about the editorial value of 15 thousand things whatever they are. How can the audience find the value. So what you're doing is an editorial function to help the audience find the best things. There are technological solutions that we are looking at which people across the web are working on around audience recommendation and tagging where the audience helps us to work our way through those quantities. And that's something we're already doing and we'd like to refine.

### Only a small, select group of people submit Audience Material

23% of the British public has sent in material to a news organisation. 17% stated they had sent material to a newspaper, 9% to a radio programme discussing news and current affairs, 7% to a TV programme discussing news and current affairs and just 4% to a dedicated news website.

Also, while it is true that the Have Your Say site receives thousands of comments, it is important to remember they are largely from a limited sub-section of society.

The Ipsos MORI survey demonstrated that the typical profile of a contributor to any news organisation is: white (97%), male (54%), between 55 and 59 (31%) employed full-time (34%), and a non-manual worker (36%).

The typical profile of a contributor to the BBC via the website is: male (67%) between 45 and 54 (24%), employed full time (49%), as a middle-manager or professional (23%).

BBC journalists were often candid about their ignorance of the type of people who contribute material (many citing lack of research on the topic). Many journalists felt confident that those who write in are diverse and represented their audience, but when prompted to explain why they couldn't produce any hard evidence to support this hunch.

There was a general feeling however that the numbers of people submitting were growing exponentially and would continue to do so. This was expressed at all levels of the organisation. Our qualitative research suggests, however, that there are significant barriers to participation in terms of access to technology and socio-economic factors (see p.36). (Interestingly, our survey data did not indicate these as significant factors with only 3% surveyed citing cost as a disincentive, and 3% stating they 'didn't know how'. Social desirability probably played a part here with people not wanting to admit cost or ignorance was preventing them from participating).

Focus group participants had strong negative perceptions about the kind of people who contribute, and most participants also admitted that contributing 'UGC' would not be something they would consider. The MORI survey also demonstrated that 22% of respondents stated they had a 'lack of interest in contributing', 18% said 'they couldn't be bothered', 12% said they 'didn't have time' and 9% said 'they didn't have anything interesting to say'. (Respondents were allowed multiple responses).

As one BBC journalist noted, there is perhaps only a limited number of people who could ever potentially be a contributor of material.

Most people have something interesting to say. They might not necessarily want to show it to the BBC. They might be just quite happy to talk about it over a pint at the pub because that's where they're comfortable. This notion that everybody wants to contribute to the BBC... my instinct tells me we're a bit optimistic.

At times 'UGC' is treated as representative of the audience as a whole, although senior management is aware that this problematic and warns against the practice

Audience Comments are sometimes being used as an indicator of audience opinion. Individual presenters implicitly (and at rare times explicitly) use the comments as a gauge of audience opinion about a particular story. There were examples from the content analysis, as well as newsroom observations when presenters suggested that emails or texts reflected the views of the whole audience. Comments such as these were commonplace:

We've had lots and lots of emails. I want to read a few of them as they really give a sense of what people are thinking;

The audience seems very divided by the look of the texts and emails we've received.

We've received lots and lots of emails on this subject, and this is what you've told us.

On many occasions, presenters stressed the high volume of emails they had received, which implicitly suggests representativeness is not a concern. Because there are lots of responses, it is implied, they simply must tell us something about public opinion on a subject. This attitude was echoed in the language of many behind-the-scenes journalists. However, even an inbox of 900 emails is a very small percentage of the overall audience, and as this research has shown, is very likely to be made up of a specific sub-section of the audience.

Each morning a summary of the 'UGC' Hub comments is emailed to all newsrooms as a way of sharing which debates are receiving most traffic and the types of comments being received. In addition the website statistics in terms of most read and emailed stories are shared. In interviews with journalists, it was clear that these two 'services' were treated with personal interest but they were wary about allowing it to influence the news agenda, because of an awareness that the BBC should not be driven by populist forces.

From observations and interviews, it is clear that editors and senior news executives are also aware of the dangerous temptation of the news agenda being influenced by Hub comments or website statistics. This needs to be stressed, however, as some junior journalists were more likely to consider these comments as evidence of audience engagement with particular stories. There were a number of comments about the daily email from the 'UGC' Hub allowing journalists to get a sense of what people were thinking outside the 'White City bubble': 'It is important to hear what the audience thinks, as TV centre is really a news bubble and you forget what else is going on out there.'

It's important to get the audience perspective and it's great to see it so quickly. We can find out whether the audience likes or dislikes the way we are covering a story. The debates are just good to gauge people's attitudes and you get a very quick sense of what people think about stories.

There were journalists who expressed concern about using audience material as a gauge of public opinion.

When you look at the debate on Have Your Say website there is every danger that reading that you would think that is the general view, if you read two or three pages of comments, that you might think that represented public opinion. But of course, you just cannot say that, because it is a self-selecting sample. But as for people who send an e-mail to tell us something is happening, or people who send in a photograph, my feeling is that that is just an ever widening group of people who realise that it is an option. The people who get in touch with 'UGC' are the people who care, and the people who are more likely to have an axe to grind. So you may get some good content, but you are also going to get lots of people who have a vested interest in what actually happens and the outcome of the story.

One journalist was concerned 'UGC' was being embraced without necessary consideration of the issue of representativeness. She argued that it would be very easy to compare audience comments with scientific measurements of public opinion. She then went on to emphasise the need to use traditional journalistic tools when dealing with Audience Material. The best approach would be to encourage journalists to look for thoughtful or surprising views and opinions. In other words 'to be journalistic' with the material, as they would with any other source.

When senior editors and managers were prompted on the subject, all expressed concern that 'UGC' could be used as a surrogate for public opinion.

Richard Sambrook: I think that there's a risk there and I think that you have to make sure that your editorial processes are robust. One of the things that happened with digital technology in the early days of interactive television, for example, was that Sky, and indeed ourselves, would run these polls'. You know 'Boris for King of London, vote now' and they're completely unrepresentative and they don't mean anything. I stopped them because I said it's a silly use of technology and has absolutely no editorial value at all. So you do have to continually challenge yourself about how you're using the technology and what you're taking from the material that's being submitted. And you're right people start to think that's public opinion. They're wrong. But that's simply about having a robust editorial process in place.

Pete Clifton, Head of Editorial Development for Multimedia, shared similar views:

Yes I would be very alarmed if there were clear examples of us changing the thrust of one of our stories on the back of a heavy response to a debate that we were carrying on the site. If there was a really, significantly high response to an issue it would be fine to reflect some of the comments that we've had to indicate that it's been a highly used debate, but to say that this is the pulse of the nation is absolutely not what we'd like to suggest.

He also admitted that the numbers of contributors are a small proportion of the overall audience, but it doesn't feel that way when faced with the everyday volume:

I suppose if you look at the proportion compared to our overall audience, it is very small. It doesn't feel like that when you see the amount that we have to handle each day.

The audience was also aware of this issue of self-selection, perhaps even more than many journalists interviewed for the research.

Midge: It's only certain types of people who contribute and recommend, but they are presenting it as if this is what the public think, but it's people who have the time and the inclination to go on these sites and rant. And again, like you [other focus group participants] were saying, it's quite easily manipulated. If you spend the whole day recommending the right ones, and commenting, and you can totally swing this site for showing what the public thinks.

Akash: The BBC is trying to set up an agenda created by members of the public through this sort of medium instead of using their own editorial skills... in the old days, in the past, before the advent of the Internet they chose what subjects to cover, when to cover them, how to cover, how long, and all the rest of it. But now because of this medium this is giving them clues. This subject is popular, so we'd better put up something on the news about it. Or make a programme about it... (Focus Group 3).

Charles: The kind of people who are likely to make the effort to go on something and post [...] are not likely to be a representative sample of the entire population. There are often people with extreme political persuasions willing to invest more time and effort to ensure that their views are disproportionately heard. I think the vast majority of people, you know the moderates, don't have much of an opinion on most issues. The idea that [bulletin boards] represent some sort of straw poll of public opinion is just not valid. (Focus Group 2)

An analogous doubt about the 'representative' nature of this site is expressed by Davey in Focus Group 5 and Sarah in Focus Group 1:

Davey: That's a lot of stuff to get through if you want to read it all. And there is a difficulty there,

isn't there? It is not representative of the population at large. It's very significantly not representative. [...] I'd say the demographics are such that it's just not known to the large number of people from different backgrounds. The results from that possibly aren't a realistic representation of real thought. (Focus Group 5)

There are significant barriers to participation: digital divide; socio-economic background; technological know-how; lack of impetus; and negative perceptions held by the general audience about those who do contribute

This research has demonstrated there are a number of issues which are preventing audience members from contributing. There are economic barriers as suggested by the impact of social class on likelihood to contribute. There are also structural barriers such as the Digital Divide, which results in significant numbers of people not having access to broadband connections, or having the financial means to contribute. There are also barriers in terms of know-how, both in terms of how to write an email or send a digital photograph, but also how to send information to the right place at the BBC. Perhaps more importantly, in terms of BBC policy, are psychological barriers. One is lack of impetus, and the fact that many people admitted that contacting a news organisation or contributing material would be the last thing on their mind. The second, and this was a strongly held belief, was the fact that a majority of the focus group participants held a negative attitude towards those who do contribute. (It should be acknowledged that the negative attitudes were directed at those who send in opinion based comments rather than other sorts of Audience Material. Significantly the focus group participants stated that they did not want to be associated with this group because of these negative connotations, and therefore did not want to contribute.

### Socio-economic Class

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The MORI survey demonstrates the impact of class on whether audience members submit material. 34% of high level managers and professionals, and middle-managers and professionals had submitted some form of Audience Material compared with 12% of The two lowest social classes (manual workers and the unwaged).

This correlates with household income. 32% of people who had a household income over £40,000 had submitted material, compared with 19% of those with a household income under £10,000. There is resistance to, and lack of understanding about, the role of Audience Material (especially audience comment online) from certain sections of the audience, particularly older audiences and those from lower socio-economic classes.

One journalist we interviewed openly discussed how little the BBC knows about the demographic make-up of those who contribute and what that could mean. She suggested there may be an unintended anti-democratic effect of using large amounts of 'UGC'. It will, she implied, necessarily favour the educated, the articulate and the better off. This is natural given the fact that so much of the 'UGC' elicited from the public is done using computers and expensive electronic equipment, and that the text-based 'UGC' found most useful by journalists is the material which is already well-constructed, pithy, and of high editorial quality.

### Digital Divide

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In terms of the digital divide, the MORI survey didn't ask specifically about technology ownership, but it is striking that of the 695 people who responded to the online survey, 94% had a broadband connection at home. This is significantly above the national average of just over half of British households (55%) which have a broadband connection (65% have some type of access

to the internet). While the number of households with broadband connections is rising, the digital divide is still a factor. Significantly 69% of AB respondents had broadband compared with 34% of DEs. 88% of ABs own a PC compared with 47% of DEs. 80% of households which earn more than £30,000 have broadband access compared with 24% of those who earn less than £11,500<sup>17</sup>.

### Technological Know-How

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Despite general appreciation of audience content, many people in the focus groups do not see themselves as potential contributors because: there is widespread ignorance about how to contact the BBC (by phone, text or e-mail); certain demographic groups lack the technical ability and confidence in their use of technology such as computers, digital cameras, and mobile phones; the last thing they would think about doing when faced with an extra-ordinary event would be filming or photographing it; and they often assume that somebody else would have done that already.

In our general survey of the population only 4% of the public listed 'not knowing how' to send material in to a news organisation as a reason for not being 'UGC'-active. Despite this the focus groups revealed a widespread and concerning ignorance about how to contact or send content to the BBC (by phone, text, or e-mail).

It was common to hear people of all ages and demographic backgrounds declaring that even if they did want to send in material to the BBC they would not know how to go about it. Younger people were less likely to mention this as a barrier to contributing, and they were also more likely to come up with easy solutions to this problem. Dora, a regular bulletin-board contributor, was quick to come up with a suggestion for easily obtaining the correct phone number to contact the BBC with a news story tip-off, for example:

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<sup>17</sup> Ofcom Annual Report 07/08

Julian: The chap who sent in the footage of the fire in Camden, how did he know the number to phone at that moment?

Dora: He probably rang a friend and a friend looked it up on the Internet. (Focus Group 9)

Those over the age of 55, however, were the most likely to mention this accessibility problem as an obstacle to submitting content:

Virginia: I don't have a camera, but if I did I wouldn't really know where to send it. (Focus Group 9)

Bertha: I wouldn't know where to ring.

Daisy: I wouldn't either.

Bertha: I mean, it's as simple as that. I just wouldn't know how to contact... you know, if it's got to be done immediately... I mean, this guy at the scene of the fire, how did he know? Did he have the number to hand?

Emma: Well I guess he must have. (Focus Group 6)

Rose: I wouldn't, no

Mary: I wouldn't know where to start on doing it

Andrew: I would, but I wouldn't have a clue how to get it to the BBC. (Focus Group 12)

Maggie: There's no way I could see myself doing that. I wouldn't know where to send it. (Focus Group 10)

A significant finding is that this problem was not limited to older participants. A number of young people who were active contributors of news-related material talked about the problems they had finding the correct local contact details even after they had already decided to contribute material. The following exchange between Julian (45-54, C1) and Vince (35-44, C1) is a case in point:

Julian: I found it really hard to get the right person to contact to send something to BBC Wales to put my idea through. I couldn't remember the link on Wales Today. They always say if you have a story then e-mail it to us at... well I hadn't written down, so I thought I'd just send it in. So I went on the website and I tried to find it, and ended up on Have Your Say nationally, and I thought, that's not the right one. And I was trying desperately... and in the end I thought that I'll have to wait until tonight to see what they say because it wasn't easy to actually put your idea through. And in the end I found a link which was just contact the newsroom. So I just did that. I thought they make this big point on Wales Today about 'have you got a story that you want to talk about? But on the actual website there's nothing there to take you to it, for you to actually put your idea forward. And I found that very off putting

Vince: I had exactly the same experience a few weeks ago. I was covering a fire in Barry. A recycling centre went up in smoke. And I took all these photographs, and was thinking where the hell do I send them? I go onto the BBC News site, and as you say I was clicking on all of these different links and none of them seemed like the right one. I was trying to get quick access trying to get this information where it needs to be and it took a while to get there. It wasn't straightforward. Far, far from it. I eventually found an e-mail address. But sometimes you just want a phone number so you can speak to a human and ask where you should go. I just wanted a number, or whatever to get into the news desk and say, look, I've got this story... you know. It could be a lot quicker and a lot slicker to get in there. (Focus Group 9)

One BBC journalist was particularly concerned about the ways in which the impact of the digital divide was not being considered frequently enough. When he was asked if he thought there was a specific type of person who submits user generated content, he answered:

I would say that the people who submit, almost certainly have to have some sort of technical aptitude. We forget, because we use computers all day long, that it might be quite a big deal for someone to take a picture with a digital camera and upload it onto a computer and then e-mail it over the internet to BBC News. So I think that they would have to be a certain degree of web literacy, shall we say, that these people would have to possess otherwise they would not be able to contribute

Basic technological know-how was raised by a number of focus group participants. Many were concerned about where to send material in to the BBC as much as how to take digital photos in the first place. This was particularly the case with older audience members, but was not limited to them.

#### Lack of Impetus to Contribute

There was also the issue of what might be termed a particular 'mind-set'. Many people raised the idea that they would never send in material simply because the idea would never occur to them.

Dave: Even if I was at the end of the world I don't think I would video it and send it in to the BBC.

Laura: I don't think it would occur to me if my bus was being flooded to get out my camera and start filming. I think I would be more concerned with other things. I don't think I would.

Researcher: Glenda would you do this stuff?

Glenda: Maybe if I was the only person around, and if there was something happening right there and then I would, but otherwise

probably not. It would not really occur to me.

Brenda: I don't think it would occur to me at all really. Even though I find it really interesting, it's a complete contradiction actually, I find it interesting to watch but... for example if I saw a terrorist attack I would just want to get out of there as quickly as possible. I wouldn't think to stop and start filming. No, I wouldn't I don't think. (Focus Group 1)

This marked antipathy among many focus group participants from all demographic groups is echoed in the small numbers of the British public who claim they would act as 'citizen reporters' when faced with a newsworthy incident. Respondents were asked what they would do if they witnessed a large factory fire and knew the emergency services had been called. Out of a range of possible responses only 5% said they would contact the media to let them know what's going on. A further 14% *would* take a photo but only 6% said they would send the photo to a news organisation. The remaining 8% would take a photo but *not send* it to a news organisation.

Journalists also raised the possibility that audience members might assume someone else had sent in something:

I think there's an interesting difference between people's readiness to contact the BBC for this sort of thing, and their ability, their willingness to contact commercial broadcasters. There's sort of an assumption that the BBC always knows.

This was echoed in the words of some focus group participants.

## Negative Perceptions by the General Audience about those who do contribute

Focus group participants had a definite idea about the type of people who are sending in material, and these perceptions tended to be negative. This is important because these perceptions appear to be a genuine barrier to other people submitting material.

Andrew: By responding to these results for 'UGC', you are really saying, 'I think I have something worthy to say on the topic', when really, most of the 'UGC' opinions we hear are not that great – I wouldn't want to associate myself with those people by doing the same thing as them. (Focus Group 12)

They were framed as either uninformed and/or inarticulate, publicity seekers holding extreme opinions.

Emma: Most of the people, in my perception anyway, most of the people who would ring in are the ones who do it because they are the extremists. I don't think the moderate masses tend to text or phone in or do these things. I think they just sit there thinking it's ridiculous. Whereas you get every loony toon or extremist contacting them all the time. [...] But most normal people would have better things to do. (Focus Group 6)

Flo: I think there is a sense that maybe these are people that nobody in the real world would listen to, therefore they feel compelled to say it somewhere, and so they say it on the Internet (Focus Group 2).

In the focus groups it was very common for participants to distance themselves from people who did submit material. 'Normalising' participation should be a key concern for the BBC, if the aim is to broaden the number and types of people submitting content.

Focus group participants suggested that there was no motivation to contribute because of the lack of a real-world end product or result

Comments seemed to suggest that because no-one

powerful or influential was thought to be reading or listening to the comments, there was no point in taking part. This was particularly the case with younger members of focus groups, but many older participants echoed this sentiment.

Denise: But you know, we are e-mailing friends aren't we? So if we did want to make a political point on one of these sites we could do it very easily.

Adrian: Yeah, but to whom?

Josh: Exactly, what for? It just goes out into the ether.

Maggie: It's just so faceless. That's what I don't like about it.

Josh: I don't see the point. (Focus Group 10)

Richard: But what happens to all the information, though?

Sian: You think that unless something gets done about it...

Richard: It would be nice if the government looks at the messages and took them on board, then something actually happens. (Focus Group 3)

Richard: Whatever I write in about the budget isn't going to change what our money gets spent on, is it at the end of the day? That's just a waste of space to me. If I knew that my information was

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going to go to the House of Commons , then I can see the point of commenting. But when you just comment, and just put your opinion into a computer like that there's no point...If you put something on there about paying road tax, or paying for the police, putting it up there isn't going to make no difference is it? You still got to

pay it. You're just putting your opinion down on paper, so what's the point? It's like writing it down in a letter and then posting it to nobody.  
(Focus Group 3)

These responses were unexpected but clearly suggest potential participants are put off by the perceived lack of real-world influence.

On the MORI survey, participants were asked for their reasons for not submitting material. The choices were 1) lack of interest in contributing (30%), 2) couldn't be bothered (24%), 3) don't have time (18%), 4) don't have anything interesting to say (11%), 5) not sure how (4%), 6) prefer to leave it to the journalists (4%), 7) don't think they'd use my contribution (4%), 8) worried that it might cost money (3%), 9) don't consume news or current affairs (3%).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Unfortunately, as the Mori survey was carried out before the focus group research we unable to explore the possibility that audiences might be disheartened by not believing their participation would have any real world effects.

## Conclusions

The incorporation of Audience Material into journalism is not new. Letters to the editor, radio call-ins and the use of vox pops on television news have a long history.

The rapid technological developments of domestic broadband and cheap mobile phones have provided even greater, and equally importantly, faster opportunities for audiences to provide immediate feedback, as well as breaking news footage and tip-offs to news organisations.

While there are many questions to ask about these developments, as Richard Sambrook points out,

It's here to stay. It's assimilated into news gathering processes and conventions of news coverage. Technology will continue to evolve and more of it is going to be simpler and easier to do, I think. But the big jump we've made.

This report has highlighted a number of issues relating to how BBC journalists view and work with Audience Material: the role it plays in terms of newsgathering; concerns about authenticity; and the difficulties faced in terms of encouraging the submission of the most appropriate kinds of material.

## Nothing New? Relying on Traditional Journalistic Techniques

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Ultimately the vast majority of the journalists interviewed for this research articulated their approach to working with 'UGC' using the lens of traditional journalistic techniques and values. For most news journalists at the BBC, 'UGC' refers almost exclusively to what we identify in our typology as Audience Content (audience footage, audience experiences, and audience stories).

Interviews with, and observation of journalists demonstrated that most are aware on a daily basis of the need to 'filter everything through the BBC journalism lens', and if this is done properly there should be no concerns about authenticity, reliability, and representativeness. As Hugh Berlyn argues, technology might have changed, but the fundamental tenets of journalism have not.

Journalists still have to do the good old fashioned news-gathering job of checking out sources, getting out there, getting the story themselves and then using the 'UGC' material as added value, as extra stuff that can help them do their job but not do the job for them.

Peter Rippon articulated similar views:

We have to apply the same things we do in all our non-User Generated Content journalism: to use our own wits to decide whether we think the story that we are developing with User Generated Content's help is going to be the kind of story that would interest our wider audience.

These attitudes are unsurprising considering BBC journalists' determination to preserve the quality of its news output, through its emphasis on ensuring authenticity and maintaining the trust of the audience in the face of increasing use of material that is, ultimately produced by unqualified professionals. There is evidence too, that the audience attaches great

importance to the professional journalist's role as editorial filter vetting Audience Content in order to sustain the quality of the news.

However, the over-riding and widespread view among journalists that 'UGC' is no more than grist to the editorial mill, another source of raw-material among many to be processed by them into journalistic news output might limit the possibilities offered by certain kinds of Audience Material.

### 'UGC' at the BBC: The Future

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Three years after 'UGC' in news really gained momentum with the 7/7 bombings, the hype surrounding 'UGC' is subsiding, and the BBC is currently deliberating how best to move forward in its treatment and use of Audience Material. From the research conducted over the past twelve months, it seems appropriate to suggest that BBC Journalism should disentangle the 5 types of Audience Material available, and develop strategies for dealing with each; separately where appropriate.

Securing and using high-quality Audience Content (breaking news footage, audience experiences and audience generated new stories) will continue to be a high priority for BBC news journalists throughout the Corporation. This research has found that such material, with some caveats, is valued by a large cross section of the audience. As the increasing volume of audio visual material sent to the BBC over the last decade attests, continued widening access to relevant technology will probably mean that this area of audience content provision will continue to grow.

Conversations at the highest editorial levels are now underway about how best to provide space for the expression, publication, and broadcast of Audience Comment, given the extremely resource-intensive nature, and perhaps limited editorial value, of hosting

and moderating public debate. The findings of this research relating to audience attitudes to this kind of material will no doubt feed into these continuing discussions.

The role of non-news content should not be ignored. This research has shown that while only 4% of the British public had used a news related website, higher numbers of people had contributed to non-news sites (18% had contributed to a social networking site, 11% had contributed to another debate website like a non-news blog or bulletin board and 7% contributed to video or photo sharing site). This research showed that people contribute when they are passionate about a subject and/or feel confident enough about a subject to contribute. Topics such as weather and sport are levellers - everyone has an opinion. While the broadcasting of non-news photographs (such as photographs of sunsets or community events) received mixed reviews, they appear to play a role in engaging with certain parts of the audience in certain editorial contexts but not in others, and could play a part in building confidence and technological know-how in people who would otherwise be unlikely to contribute to material related to hard news.

In conclusion, we would like to focus in more depth on two specific areas which we believe offer opportunities to the BBC which have so far been under-explored: collaborative content and networked journalism. Despite the apparently democratising nature of news-related Audience Material, participation is still dominated by people from the upper socio-economic groups. We believe that as part of its public-service remit the BBC could proactively seek out participation in communities and groups which traditionally remain under the radar of mainstream media.

One way of doing this might be to draw on and adapt the rich store of experience the BBC has of collaborative content outside of news and current affairs output. As Karen Lewis, who was an original producer for the digital storytelling project Capture Wales explains, only

by working with these 'silent communities' do stories appear, which otherwise would have been ignored.

I certainly always had an eye to working with socially displaced people who are not mainstream, middle-class web users. It's really, really worth touching those people. The thing that I really love about Video Nation and Digital Storytelling is the surprise element. You're not telling someone, 'Go out and find a story about the closing of the local primary school.' You're actually uncovering little glimpses into the current culture and life of Wales. No journalist would ever report or ask the question because we wouldn't have known that it was there in the first place.

The recent developments in terms of using Video Nation to support major BBC series such as BBC2's White season, and to provide content for mainstream current affairs programmes such as Panorama shows how these types of collaborative productions do not have to be considered purely non-news initiatives.

The second area for focus should be networked journalism which was raised a number of times in interviews with senior producers and editors. This quote from Peter Rippon (editor of Radio 4's iPM) emphasises the quality of information and expertise available on the internet:

The web has allowed the creation of all sorts of really interesting communities around certain issues, skills, and expertise. What I'd like to get to would be on any particular story, we will put the email online, we would invite our community of ready-made experts who have agreed to be on our email list to discuss the story by pinging something to them. They would then discuss the issues in front of everybody so that everybody can see, and you develop a sort of discussion online that eventually becomes part of whatever we do on air.

Networked journalism uses as a foundation the idea that 'the audience knows more than you' and this model has growing support. Richard Sambrook talked to us about the opportunities presented by networked journalism, or 'slower cooking journalism' which takes advantage of '...a series of niches, a series of communities of interests.' He went on,

I think the exciting bit is how we could get our networked journalism to really work, because that is a very new territory. That really is audience-focused in terms of how you develop and drive your journalism. And nobody has really quite cracked it yet. I'm sure we will sooner or later. We're not quite there yet. So that's the kind of interesting and exciting area. We have to go experimenting and playing with it until we find a way of doing it.

This represents a significant move away from the traditional relationship between journalist and audience member, producer and consumer of the news, and will require a shift in attitude among BBC journalists. However, the quality of news output can only improve by harnessing communities of interest and expertise which already exist, both off and online.

### Re-evaluation of traditional journalistic values

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For eyewitness material, Have Your Say debates and radio call-ins, the preservation of the strong gatekeeper role still makes sense and is necessary to maintain high standards of journalism. But if the BBC is going to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by Audience Material, there will need to be an acknowledgement that the journalist's role as gatekeeper will be eroded by some forms of Audience Material. In collaborative and networked journalism the audience member is not just another source of editorial material, they are a partner in the editorial process. The current hierarchy which exists between producers and consumers of news will be necessarily challenged, and control of the end product will have to be ceded somewhat as old media values meet, blend and, at times, clash with new



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media values. We believe this could be a good thing, and should lead to a news agenda which more accurately reflects the interests and concerns of the audience, a wider range of people submitting material and engaging with BBC output, increased levels of media literacy, and the embedding of journalism skills which should improve the quality of Audience Material received overall.

This report has provided an overview of current practices for using Audience Material at the BBC. It has also detailed quantitative and qualitative audience research, which provides the first evidence on who is contributing material and the views of those who do not contribute. We finish with 10 recommendations, all of which are directly derived from the data, and are intended to improve the ways in which the BBC to date has called 'UGC'. It will hopefully provide a foundation for conversations at the BBC about future strategies for using and eliciting Audience Material.

## Recommendations

1. Within the BBC the roles of Audience Material needs to be made clearer.
2. The fact that there are different types of Audience Material needs to be acknowledged.
3. Audience Material should never be used as a way of assessing audience or public opinion.
4. The fact that Audience Material should not be used as an opinion barometer is recognised at a senior level. However methods need to be developed to ensure journalists and presenters are not tempted to use comments as a measure of audience or public opinion.
5. There is a need to reach out to lower socio-economic status communities:
  - a. More collaborative projects (find less resource-intensive ways of working in communities);
  - b. Encourage ideas for news stories: show how covering stories can make a difference;
  - c. Change negative audience perceptions of those who do submit material.
6. Make it clearer how to send material to the BBC (particularly regarding confusion about the regions and network).
7. Show benefits to the audience of the BBC using Audience Material to dispel the idea that it is 'cheap filler'. Examples could include: highlighting how news stories generated by the audience have resulted in investigations which might otherwise not have happened; demonstrating how new stories generated by the audience impacted awareness of a particular problem at a policy level; or showing how Audience Footage can significantly improve the telling of a news story.
8. Change emphasis from Audience Comments to Audience Content (direct experiences, audio-visual material or specific expertise).
9. Make fewer requests and target requests more carefully. Encourage story ideas and information based on direct experience or expertise.
10. Individual programmes should have individual Audience Material policies, based on tailored audience research. Audiences have varying levels of enthusiasm for different types of Audience Material.

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## Key Findings

The following sections outline the key findings from each of the five studies. Understandably, each study produced a large amount of data, and this is available from the authors. We recommend you browse these documents as they provide much more analysis and in-depth explanation of the two audience surveys, the focus groups, the newsroom observations and the content analysis.

### KEY FINDINGS FROM THE IPSOS MORI SURVEY

#### Awareness

66% of respondents had seen, read or heard some form of 'UGC'

Radio phone-in comments were the most well-known form of interaction (45%) along with vox pops (24%) (this is despite the survey interviewer clearly explaining that vox pops are 'where members of the public are stopped in the street and asked their opinion by journalists'). Of note, 38% of respondents said they had seen videos shot by the public shown in news broadcasts.

#### News Participation

23% of respondents said they had contacted a news organisation

72% said they had never contacted a news organisation. 17% of respondents had sent material to a newspaper, 9% to a radio phone-in, 7% to a TV programme, and 4% to dedicated news website.

#### Non-news Participation

42% of respondents had contributed to non-news formats

42% had done at least one of the following: voted on reality TV show (24%); contributed to a social networking site (18%); contributed to another debate website like a non-news blog or bulletin board (11%); contacted an entertainment or sports programme (7%); contributed to video/photo sharing site (7%).

#### Motivations for sending material

Most respondents said they were responding to something they had heard or seen on the news

42% said they had responded to something they had heard or seen on the news; 34% wanted to bring a particular issue to people's attention; 25% to publicise an event they were involved with; 19% because they thought people would find their contributions interesting; 16% because they enjoy participating in debates with others; 14% wanted to expose or tell a story; 11% said they enjoyed writing or taking photographs. Of note, only 9% mentioned that they thought news organisations value contributions from the public and only 4% mentioned the possibility of making money as a motivation.

#### Reasons for not submitting material

68% respondents gave some sort of explanation related to not having time or not being bothered

11% said they didn't believe they had anything interesting to say. 4% said they didn't think the news organisation would use their material and 3% said they would rather leave journalism to journalists. 3% thought it would cost them money.

### Attitudes to 'UGC'

Respondents were supportive of the audience having a role in news output

- 1) Respondents held mixed opinions about whether 'news material produced by professional journalists is more trustworthy than material sent in by the public'. 29% agreed and 33% disagreed. (38% had no opinion or 'didn't know').
- 2) Respondents were in favour of the public being involved in producing the news rather than 'just leaving it to journalists'. 61% agreed and 14% disagreed. (26% had no opinion or 'didn't know').
- 3) Respondents were also in favour of material being vetted by journalists 'in order to maintain the quality of the news'. 57% agreed and 6% disagreed. (26% had no opinion or 'didn't know').
- 4) Respondent were also in favour of 'news organisations using material sent in by the public more now than they used to'. 71% agreed and 6% disagreed. (24% had no opinion or 'didn't know').

### Citizen Reporting

Respondents were not very willing to send material for breaking news stories

If a respondent was faced with a large fire and knew the emergency services had been called, only 5% would contact the media to let them know what was going on. A further 14% *would* take a photo but only 6% would send the photo to a news organisation, and the remaining 8% would take a photo but *not send* it to a news organisation.

The following table demonstrates the relationship between social class and awareness of 'UGC'. (See footnote below for explanation of social class groupings.<sup>20</sup>)

Class	Aware of at least one form of Audience Material
A	91%
B	79%
C1	70%
C2	59%
D	49%
E	40%
Total	601

There is also a slightly less strong, but still statistically significant relationship between social class and whether someone has submitted any form of 'UGC'

Class	Submission of at least one form of Audience Material
A	34%
B	34%
C1	28%
C2	19%
D	13%
E	11%
Total	218

<sup>20</sup> A = Higher management, administrative or professional, B= middle management, administrative or professional, C1= Junior management, administrative or professional, C2 = Skilled manual worker, D= semi and unskilled manual worker, E= unwaged

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In terms of likelihood of becoming a citizen reporter<sup>21</sup>, there is no relationship between social class and likelihood of taking a photograph, but a clear pattern in terms of sending the photo to a news organisation. 16% of people in the upper professional class would take a photo and send it to a news organisation compared with 4-7% of people in the other social classes.

Class	Would contact the media about a breaking news story	Would take a photo of a breaking news story and send it to the media
A	16%	16%
B	4%	5%
C1	4%	7%
C2	5%	5%
D	4%	4%
E	5%	5%
Total	43	55

## Impact of Activist Tendencies

There is a very strong relationship between activist tendencies and 'UGC'

In terms of awareness, 92% of 'activists'<sup>22</sup> were aware

<sup>21</sup> We measured likelihood to become a citizen reporter by asking the following question: Imagine you're on a quiet road near a town centre and see a large fire break out in a nearby factory. There's an explosion and flames shoot up creating billowing smoke. Assuming you've phoned the emergency services, which, if any, of the following actions would you do a) stay around to see if you could help b) move away from the scene c) contact a friend to tell them d) contact a news organisation e) take a photo f) take a photo and send it to a news organisation g) none of the above

<sup>22</sup> Respondents were defined as activists if they had done three or more of the following: presented views to a local councillor, written a letter to a newspaper, urged someone outside of the family to vote, urged someone to get in touch with a councillor, been an officer of an organisation, stood for

of at least one form of 'UGC' (compared to 58% of non-activists), and 78% of activists had contacted a news media organisation at some point (compared with 15% of non-activists).

In terms of likelihood of becoming a citizen reporter: 27% of activists compared to 12% of non-activists would take a photo of the blaze. Of that number, 8% of activists compared to 5% of non-activists would take a photo and send it to a news organisation.

## Impact of Age

There is a statistically significant relationship between age and awareness of forms of UGC, but there is no statistically significant relationship between age and whether someone has submitted UGC or whether they would act as a citizen reporter

People aged between 35 and 59 are most aware (41%) compared with over 60s (33%) and under 35s (26%). 23% of people who submitted were under 35, 40% were between 35 and 59, and 37% were over 60.

Age does not seem to be a significant barrier in terms of the likelihood of taking a photograph of a news event: 39% of the people who said they would take a photo of a fire were between 35 and 59, 36% were under 34 years of age and 35% were over 60. However, when it comes to sending that photo to a news organisation 44% of people who said they would do it were under 34, 35% were aged between 35 and 59, and 22% were over 60, so younger people are slightly more likely to send breaking news footage to a news organisation.

public office, taken an active part in a political campaign, helped in a fundraising drive, or voted in the last general election.

## Impact of Gender

There is no statistically significant relationship between gender and awareness or likelihood to submit.

There does appear to be a relationship between gender and likelihood to contact the media if the respondent saw a fire. Double the number of men were likely to take a photograph of the fire, and similarly of those who took the photograph, double the number of men would send it to the news organisation.

## Impact of Newspaper Readership

There is no relationship between newspaper readership and submission of material

This analysis was carried out using newspaper readership as a possible indicator of political persuasion to test the theory raised in the focus groups that 'right-wing' people are more likely to submit material.

## KEY FINDINGS FROM THE ONLINE SURVEY

The online survey was linked to at various places on the BBC website between 20<sup>th</sup> February and 20<sup>th</sup> May 2008.

Exposure to UGC-active audience members was gained principally by the placement of 'promos' and 'puff boxes' on the national Have Your Say site, selected regional BBC Local sites and other key locations such as the BBC Scotland Island Blogging homepage. The survey is based on a self-selecting sample of respondents so its results may not be fully representative of all of the

site's users. Nevertheless it does provide useful data on a relatively small and hard to reach group.

## Type of Contribution

By far the largest number of respondents described their most recent contribution to the BBC website as 'comment or opinion'

Respondents were asked specifically about their last submission to the BBC. 51% of respondents' most recent submissions were opinion-based. This compares with just 3% who had most recently submitted an 'account of an experience'. 11% had sent in an eyewitness photograph or video of a news-related event, and 2% had sent in an idea for a news story.

Another question asked them to think about the other occasions on which they had contacted the BBC. In response to that question, 65% of respondents said they had submitted a 'comment or opinion', 16% had submitted an account of an experience, 11% said they had tipped off the BBC with a news story idea, and a further 9% claimed to have sent in eyewitness material.

## Citizen Reporters?

The BBC website users who completed the survey are far more likely to act as 'citizen reporters' if they were to witness a news event than members of the general population.

Our Mori survey found that 4% of people would contact the media to let them know what was going on, and 6% would photograph or video an event and send the results to the media when faced with a hypothetical newsworthy scenario (a factory fire in their home town). Our online survey, on the other hand, found that 40% of respondents would send photos or video to the BBC, and 17% would contact the BBC to let them know what was going on.

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## Motivations for submitting material

The primary motivation people stated for submitting their content was to respond to something they had seen or heard on the BBC. This suggests what drives them to contact the BBC is the wish to respond to original BBC content, or the opportunity to debate with others, more than the urge to submit original newsworthy material themselves.

54% of respondents 'respond to something I heard or saw on the BBC' and 39% said they participated because they 'enjoyed participating in debates or conversations with others'. Motivations which suggest the wish to contribute news material were claimed by far fewer people. 18% said they contacted the BBC in order to 'bring a particular issue to people's attention' and 15% 'to help tell or expose a news story'.

## Non-news material

The majority of photographic material sent in by respondents was not related to news events

26% claimed to have sent in non-news pictures or video (depicting pictures of nature, weather, local areas, etc). 17% said they had also done this in the past.

## Loyalty to the BBC

Contributors show significant loyalty to the BBC in terms of the material they send

89% claimed they had no intention of posting their content anywhere else on the internet, or to any rival media organisations. This loyalty is echoed in the fact that the fourth largest motivation for interacting we

found (27.9%) is the belief that the 'BBC values contributions from its audience'. 4% of respondents said they had already posted, or intended to post their content to another television company, on an internet media sharing site, or social networking web site. Print news companies were the nearest rival to the BBC, with 9% claiming they intended to send their content to a newspaper (online or print copy).

## Journalists as Gatekeepers

There was a strong feeling amongst respondents that journalists should act as editorial filters or gatekeepers in order to maintain news quality

67% of those polled said they thought 'material sent in by the public should always be vetted by journalists to maintain the quality of the news', compared with only 16% who disagreed. This compares with similar levels in the general population, where 56% of people think all public submissions should be vetted in comparison with just 19% who disagree.

## Should the public be involved in producing the news?

The BBC survey respondents were more strongly in favour of public involvement in the news than members of the general population

43% strongly agreed, and 45% tended to agree with the statement 'I think it is a good thing that news organisations are using material sent in by the public more than previously', compared with 17% and 55% respectively in the representative survey. Similarly, 30% strongly agree, and 44% tend to agree with the statement, 'I think it's good for the public to be involved with producing the news, rather than leaving it to the journalists', compared with 13% and 48% in the representative survey.

## News Consumption?

Respondents are heavy consumers of news and current affairs media

Only 16% of respondents consume less than one hour's worth of news per day, compared with 84% who consume more than one hour of news (43% spend between one and two hours, 19% spend between two and three hours, and 21% spend more than three hours a day consuming news).

## Newspaper preference?

Most respondents read newspapers on a daily basis

82% of respondents read newspapers daily. 36% of respondents read a national broadsheet, 15% read a local newspaper, 11% read a middle-brow newspaper (*Daily Mail* or *Daily Express*), 9% read an international newspaper and 6% read a tabloid newspaper and 4% read a free newspaper.

Of those who read a national newspaper, 45% read a right leaning newspaper (*Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *The Sun*), 27% read a left-leaning paper (*The Guardian* and *The Independent*) and 28% read a paper with more centrist editorial position (*The Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The Metro*).

## Demographic Background

The demographic background of respondents is more diverse in terms of age and gender than the overall numbers of people who have submitted material to a news organisation (according to the Ipsos MORI survey).

The highest proportion of contributors of online Audience Material nationwide is men between the ages of 25 and 34. Our sample is older, and is far more evenly spread between age groups (only 12% are aged 25-34, whereas 23%, 24%, and 22% respectively are aged 35-44, 45-54, and 55-64). Our representative survey showed that active 'UGC'-active men outnumber women by a ratio of 7:1, but in this sample 34% of respondents were women compared with 64% of men.

## Socio-economic Class

The class backgrounds of those who responded are not diverse

As with our representative national poll, those who responded to this survey are clustered around advantaged socio-economic groups. 59% of respondents were A, B, C1s, compared with only 21% of C2, D, Es (20% chose 'other' or opted not to answer this question).

## KEY FINDINGS FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS

There is widespread appreciation of the use of eyewitness audio, photographic and video material in BBC news, across platforms

People like it because: it is immediate, and allows early coverage before news teams can be on the scene; it adds drama, human emotion, and immediacy; it is seen as more 'real' and less 'packaged', providing different perspectives and insights on events, something which some see as adding to the trustworthiness of the news; it facilitates coverage of events and locations difficult to reach normally; and because it can be seen as a way of democratising news production.

This belief by audiences that Audience Footage is adding trustworthiness to the news, and an opportunity to get a 'real' sense of what is happening, away from journalistic filtering, is in direct opposition to the journalists' concerns about the authenticity of Audience Footage. The audience appears to have little concern for these issues in comparison to the journalists.

There are significant barriers to widening participation

Appreciation of eyewitness material is tempered by a certain scepticism, and there are a number of considerable barriers both to its full public acceptance and to more widespread participation by non-'UGC' active audience members

Many are concerned that: such material is often of poor quality both in terms of technology and the professional standard of amateur reporting; care should be taken to strike a balance between professional and

non-professional input into news coverage; use of cheap (or free) amateur content is a cost-cutting exercise, and that the numbers of professional journalists might fall as a result of its continued use; news values might be skewed by the availability of visually impressive material that is nonetheless not very newsworthy; citizen reporters should not be treated as though they were experts; growing use of eyewitness 'UGC' might lead to increased incidences of hoaxes and the publication of inauthentic content.

Many people do not see themselves as potential contributors

There are a number of reasons for this: there is widespread ignorance about how to contact the BBC (by phone, text or e-mail); certain demographic groups lack the technical ability and confidence in their use of technology such as computers, digital cameras, and mobile phones; the last thing they would think about doing when faced with an extra-ordinary event would be filming or photographing it; they often assume that somebody else would have done that already.

Supposed motivations for submitting both eyewitness and opinion-based 'UGC' are often framed negatively by other audience members

Imagined contributors are characterised variously by focus group members as: uninformed and inarticulate; publicity seekers looking for exposure; holding extreme and often unpalatable views; and bored or lonely people with too much time on their hands.

Concerns that Audience Material is being framed as representative when it is not

A significant minority of focus group subjects complained that when Audience Material is used, there is often the implicit assumption that it represents public opinion more widely, despite the fact it often is not and/or cannot be truly representative

## Attitudes towards Have Your Say and other BBC web forums

There was a widespread feeling among the focus group respondents that Have Your Say, and other BBC web forums for public comment, opinion and debate have a number of flaws

- 1) There is no perceivable 'real-word' outcome or effect as no-one influential is reading the comments. This was particularly the case with younger members of the focus groups;
- 2) The size of the HYS forum makes meaningful debate very unlikely and makes it very difficult to navigate;
- 3) There were complaints (mainly from those over the age of 55) that they pay for the service through the Licence Fee but have neither the wish nor the technological expertise necessary to participate; and
- 4) There were complaints that it includes too much uninformed opinion, a fact which is seen to trivialise serious issues.

Many see smaller, programme specific blogs and message boards as preferable to HYS because they are more easily navigable and more information-rich due to being based around communities of interest.

## Resistance to the use of unsubstantiated comments and opinions

There is some resistance to the use of texts and e-mails from the public forming part of the output on news and current affairs programmes

Despite some people valuing the fact the BBC want to know what the public think, there are many: who see the use of viewer texts and e-mails as unedifying 'filler';

who

think it is of little use contributing because so few are actually read out on air; are suspicious of the process of editorial selection, fearing that only those who fit a pre-conceived editorial 'agenda' are chosen; and who are concerned about the ill-considered, inexpert nature of the comments, and fear that opening up serious issues to this kind of public response might make light of them.

## Perceived motivations of the BBC for using Audience Material

It was common to hear that in calling for Audience Comment, the BBC does not actually care what the public thinks, but is instead only interested in *giving the impression* that it values the opinions of the audience

## Non-news material

Opinion on the use of non-news audience content in news and current affairs output (such as photographs of nature, etc) is divided, mainly, although not exclusively, along age lines

Those who like such content value it as a pleasurable and relaxing break in-between often very serious and hard-hitting news items; enjoy the opportunity to view the work of amateurs on TV or online; and appreciate the pleasure it affords those who produce the photographs to see their work published on a high-profile BBC platform. Detractors are often vociferous in their criticism, seeing it as: 'pointless' and 'boring'; often of poor quality; insubstantial 'filler' material; evidence of 'dumbing down'; and often presented in a patronising way which detracts from the seriousness of the news items which precede and follow it.

## Strengths of Collaborative Content

Intervention-based approaches to audience content are a proven way of reaching under-represented groups such as audience members from lower socio-economic groups, and the elderly

## KEY FINDINGS FROM THE NEWSROOM OBSERVATIONS

The following issues are a mixture of issues raised by journalists, and from observations by the research team about the most pressing issues in terms of 'UGC' from the perspective of the newsrooms.

### Problematic nature of the term 'UGC'

There was no fixed definition of 'UGC' amongst journalists.

There were 6 different types of 'UGC' being used in BBC newsrooms: Audience Content (including Audience Footage, Audience Experience, Audience Stories), Audience Comment, Collaborative Content, Networked Journalism, and Non-news Content.

### Different Perceptions and usage of UGC in the Nations/Regions compared to the Network

The Nations and Regions already have a strong relationship with their audience, and there are numerous examples of innovative practice (community buses, community teams, community reporters).

The Nations and Regions have been using 'UGC' type formats for a long time but are now using the term 'UGC' to explain/justify what they are doing.

There are a significant number of interesting, innovative uses of 'UGC' in the Nations and Regions that should be celebrated and encouraged, and should not be overlooked.

### Perceptions of journalists

Most news journalists see 'UGC' in newsgathering terms rather than as a tool for widening participation.

Some journalists (mostly older journalists) do not think of 'UGC' as new, and believe it is simply older journalism techniques wrapped up in new technology.

### 'The Public'/Representativeness

Journalists need to ensure that the issue of self-selection is taken into account at all times.

When UGC is broadcast it must not be implied, either explicitly or implicitly that the views are representative of either the audience or the British public.

### Issues which newsrooms have a heightened awareness of potential problems related to 'UGC'

Journalists are aware of the following issues surrounding the use of Audience Material, and find ways of managing them:

- \*Ensuring accuracy by consistently verifying sources and images
- \*Considering impartiality by 'balancing' opinions where necessary
- \*Managing the relationship with the audience, when not all material can be broadcast or published
- \*Managing the volume of material by attempting to tailor requests
- \*Ensuring quality is not undermined when using Audience Material
- \*Ensuring authority of BBC is not undermined
- \*Ensuring that trust in the BBC is not undermined

## Technological/Awareness Problems

Journalists need to be aware that not all audience groups submit UGC because of differences in access to technology, differences in ability to use technology, and ignorance about ways to submit material. Newsrooms need to find ways to combat these barriers.

## Age, Social Class and Education

Journalists need to ensure that all audience groups are encouraged to submit UGC and ensure that the Audience Material which is broadcast and published is relevant and interesting to as many audience groups as possible.

## KEY FINDINGS FROM THE CONTENT ANALYSES

### Content Analysis 1 (Selection of flagship programmes)

Sample Period: Monday 11 February 2008-Friday 15 February 2008  
15 programmes analysed from Television and Radio (Network and Regional (BBC Wales))  
Amount of time analysed: 105 hours and 55 minutes

### Requests and Submissions

The average number of submissions used was 4.82 per hour. There were four programmes which exceeded that average. 3 of these were radio programmes: Jeremy Vine (by some margin at 20.20 per hour), R5 Breakfast (9.17 per hour) and R5 Drive (6.27 per hour);

and one television programme, the early evening Regional news programme *Wales Today* (8.26 per hour).

There were a total of 91 requests for UGC during the coding period. 46 on television (1.87 per hour) and 45 on radio (0.55 per hour). On average, across platforms there were 0.82 requests an hour. The two programmes which were significantly above average were *Wales Today* (8.26 per hour) and the late regional news bulletin of *Wales Today* (8.00 per hour). Jeremy Vine (2.10 per hour), Welsh Breakfast bulletins (1.43 per hour) and BBC Breakfast (1.42 per hour) were all above average.

### Topics

The topics linked with the requests and the topics where UGC was used were mixed. For requests, the most common type of request was a general request for submissions (16%), closely followed by domestic politics (15%), weather (13%) and health (12%). For individual submissions, 17% of submissions used were on finance, business or economic, 12% were on crime issues, 11% were on sport and 10% on health issues (a further 18% were on 'other topics' which weren't listed under our broad headings).

### Where UGC was used

Overall, TV was most likely to use 'UGC' as comments read out at the end of a story, whereas radio was more likely to use it within the package of a story (for example starting a discussion about a topic and asking callers to phone in with their views).

Of the TV coded, 39% of the 'UGC' used were instances of when the story was an idea which came from 'UGC'.

### Television

There was a significant difference between regional and network television.

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On network television, 50% of the 'UGC' was used at the end of the story and was read out by the presenter. 21% were examples where the story had been inspired by 'UGC'. 15% of the examples were when 'UGC' was included in the package and a further 15% were when 'UGC' was used to pose questions to guests.

On regional TV, 76% of 'UGC' used was when the story was inspired by the audience. 18% of the examples were used in a package, a 6% were read out at the end of the story

## Radio

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There were only three examples of 'UGC' in regional radio and all of them were used as interviews with guests. On network radio, 67% were used within the package of the story, 13% were stories inspired by UGC, 12% were questions posed to guests, and 8% were comments read out at the end of stories.

## Types of 'UGC' used

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Radio overwhelmingly uses general comments or opinions sent in by the public (84%). In contrast, TV is more likely to use comments which come from direct experience of the topic (53%) with another 24% being made up by general comments or opinions by the public. It is noteworthy that on regional TV, there were no general comments or opinions. The only comments read out were from people with direct experience of the topic (75%). The other 25% of UGC output were weather photographs.

## Type of UGC Requested

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There were 91 segments when UGC material was requested, and generally only one type of UGC was requested. 61% requests were for general comments or opinions, 22% (for requests on TV) were for photographs or pictures, 15% were for questions for guests, 13% were for story suggestions.

Breaking this down further, on radio, there was a request for a comment or opinion every 2 hours and 10 minutes, and on television it was every 1 hour and 20 minutes (this higher frequency is a result on the static and ticker graphic which allowed for requests to be made).

The least frequent request in story suggestion requests on radio, which happened once every 26 hours and 29 minutes.

## Format of UGC Requested

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On radio, there was one explicit request for comments by phone every 2.5 hours, by text every 6 hours and 15 minutes, by email every 5 hours.

On TV, there was one explicit request for comments by phone every 3/4 hour, by text every 1 hour and 15 minutes, by email every 40 minutes.

## Format of UGC Submissions Used

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The origins of 46% of the submissions was not clear, 31% were from text, 11% were from email and 5% were from the telephone, 4 % were photos.

## Average Time spent using Audience Material

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The average request time was 14 seconds (16.2 seconds on radio, and 11 seconds on television).

The average broadcast time of a segment which uses UGC was 71 seconds (79 seconds on radio and 43 seconds on television).

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## Content Analysis 2 – News 24

Sample Period: Monday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2008 – Monday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2008

Amount of time analysed: 90 minutes each day over 3 weeks to build up a sample of 24 hours

### Requests

191 requests in 24 hours: 189 requests were ‘graphical’ requests (6 were static graphics and 183 were requests on the ticker). 2 were ‘verbal’ requests by the presenter (one was a general request and one as a request linked to a particular story)

- The average length of a request was 19 seconds
- Most requests included reference to email address, phone number (97% each), text number of website address (82% each)
- 82% of requests were General Requests
- 18% of requests were linked to the Main Headlines
- 1% was a specific request to send comments about a crime story

### Use of Audience Material

- Audience Material used 7 times in the 24 hour period.
- 5 were direct experiences of the story (4 were videos used in the package, and one was an email)
- 2 were opinions which were received via email

## Content Analysis 3 – Flagship Websites

There is a great degree of difference between the websites of the flagship news programmes across the BBC. This is clearly down to resource allocations, as maintaining up-to-date busy websites which elicit Audience Material is very time-consuming.

The ‘UGC’ Hub is the most sophisticated by far and during the week analysed, 38 debates were open (some were started before the period and analysis and some were closed afterwards). Those debates received

42,626 comments, 27,077 were published, and 1,936 were rejected (as they broke house rules).

Network websites offered far more opportunity for interaction than the regional ones we analysed. The websites linked to the BBC Wales news programmes (both TV and Radio) had very basic links for Audience Material, relying on a ‘Contact Us’ link asking audience members to send thoughts to the news team.

There were interesting types of audience contribution occurring: BBC Breakfast had a family posting a blog on sustainable living for a year, Five Live Drive featured a monthly newsletter written by the Audience Editor, PM had frequent blog posts written by the presenter Eddie Mair, the Jeremy Vine show published a large number of listener comments, and the Today show had a facility for asking audience members to send in story suggestions (which are subsequently listed on the site).

There were cases where programmes did not broadcast very much Audience Material but did facilitate its publication on their website. For example, during the week analysed, the Today show had one request for Audience Material, and read out two comments. However, on the website there were seven new debates and six ongoing debates with 737 comments posted.<sup>24</sup> In addition, there were 34 story suggestions posted.

Eddie Mair’s PM programme was similar: there was 1 request during the week and 4 submissions read out on air, but the website is very innovative and has a number of features which encourage audience members to contact the programme and comment on the programme and the topics featured on air. In contrast, BBC Breakfast, which relied heavily on Audience Material, had very limited opportunities for Audience Material on their website. Jeremy Vine relied very heavily on Audience Material on his programme, but also published a number of viewer comments on the website.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that the *Today* Message board no longer exists.



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That these differences between websites are a consequence of varying resource-allocation is clear

from our interviews. For example, interviews at the BBC Breakfast newsroom showed how website content has been reduced significantly because there was no longer a single dedicated member of staff responsible for web content. Similarly, the demographic make up of the audience plays a role. The Today programme and PM, both broadcast on Radio 4 have clearly found that the audience will respond online, and as a result have designed their website to accommodate their audience's wishes.