Comments please: How the British news media are struggling with user-generated content
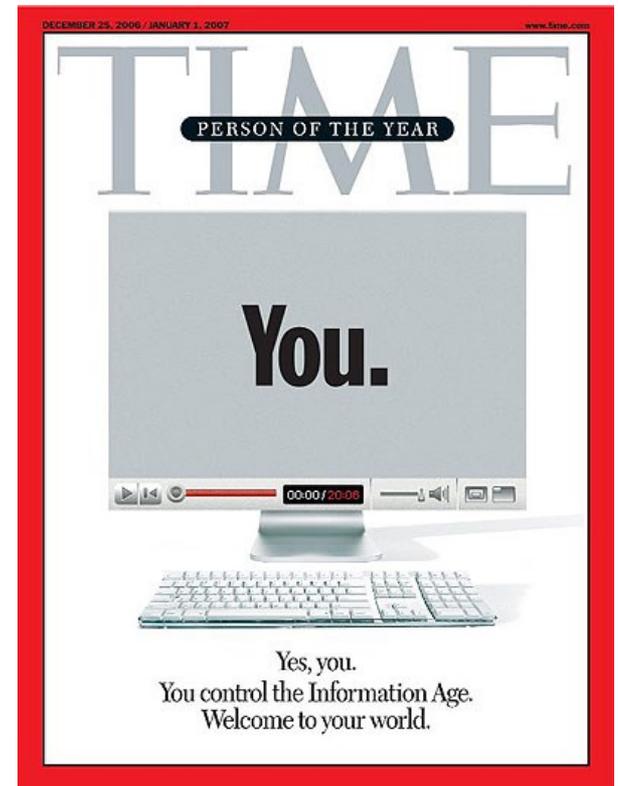
8th International Symposium on Online Journalism,
University of Texas, USA, 31 March 2007

Alfred Hermida and Neil Thurman

Research context

Source: Freedryk (http://www.flickr.com/photos/freedryk/)

What we did

- In-depth interviews with 11 senior news executives at British newspaper websites

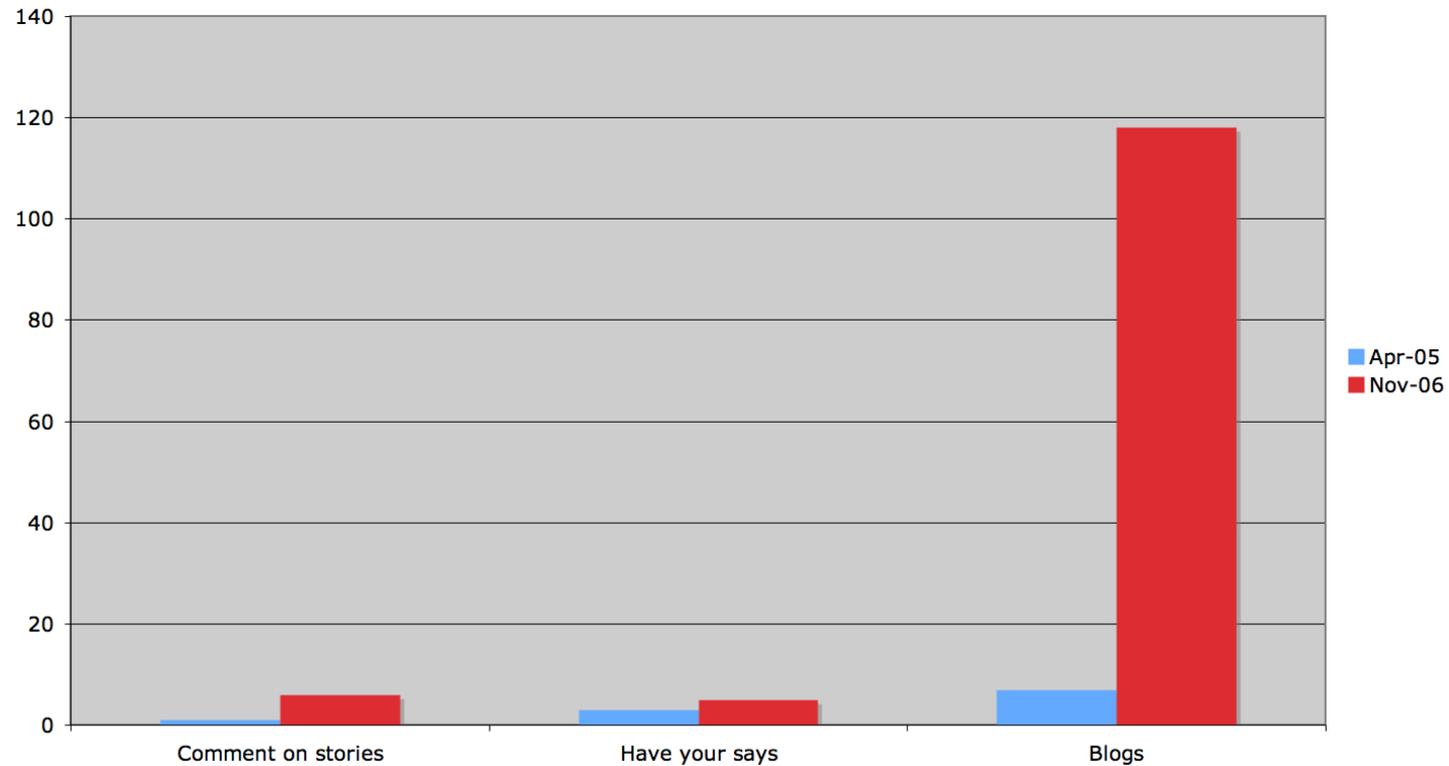- Survey of UGC on 12 UK newspaper websites

What we found

– Growth in UGC

– Motivated by fear and self-interest

– Shift towards a filtered model

– Debate over value of UGC

What we found

- Formats for participatory journalism:
  - Polls
  - Messageboards
  - Have your says
  - Comments on stories
  - Q&As
  - Blogs
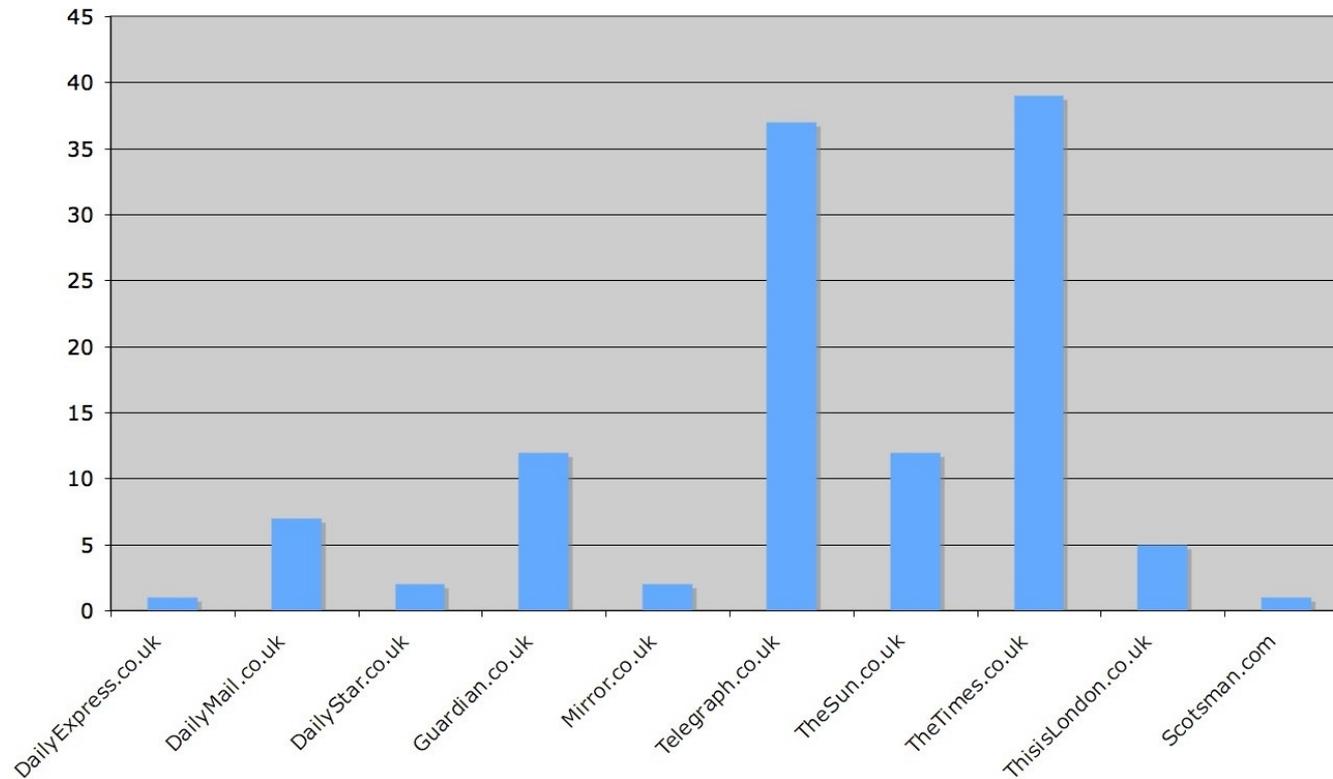 - Your media
  - Your story

What we found

UGCIs at British newspaper sites

What we found

Blogs at a selection of British newspaper websites

Why editors are doing this

Telegraph.co.uk

- "The idea of becoming a forum for debate was an area that newspapers had to get into, otherwise they'd get left behind"
  - Richard Burton, *Telegraph.co.uk*

Why editors are doing this

TIMESONLINE

- "Give them a piece of property on the internet, within our site."
  - Peter Bale, *TimesOnline.co.uk*

Why editors are doing this

- "There's no substitute for a good story and more than 10 times the amount will read the story rather than the comments attached, but it's still valid to give that feedback area."
  - Steve Purcell, *Mirror.co.uk*

Towards moderation

Source: Janerc (http://www.flickr.com/photos/6542906@N00/)

Towards moderation

FT .com
FINANCIAL TIMES

- "We serve a busy audience who don't have much time to read the paper, who don't have much time to read the website, and they look to us to have done the filtering and the compression for them"
  - James Montgomery, *FT.com*

The value of user media

Source: Sniffles (http://www.flickr.com/photos/sniffles/)

The value of user media

- "You need to realise that only a small number are really going to communicate. But that small number make it much more interesting for everyone else."
  - Simon Walden, *Guardian.co.uk*

Conclusions

- Ambivalence towards user media

- Retention of gatekeeper role

- Add value by mediating