Africa at the World

The 60th World Association of Newspapers Congress and the 14th World Editors' Forum came to Africa for the very first time. The steep conference fee was going to exclude many senior journalists until the SA National Editors' Forum and The African Editors' Forum stepped in and negotiated a rate for their members and the educators more suitable for southern pockets. The African Editors' Forum chair Mathatha Tsedu and secretary general Elizabeth Barratt then did some very hard work organising sponsorship and travel so that a significant 202 African editors could make it to Cape Town. The South African delegation was by far the largest contingent (375 out of 1 600 people from 109 countries) with editors and educators joining media managers and owners. Most of the sessions at both sections of the overall event (WAN and WEF) were geared towards educating and conscientising editors and owners about the threats and values of digital and mobile technologies and about how to run multi-platform newsrooms. There was also a great deal of pumping-up talk about the growth, value and future of newspapers. Africa did get a slight look in at the round table session dedicated to the issue of press freedom and a focused session on reporting Africa on the World Editors' Forum agenda.

Information in se

What dominates the treatment of African subjects by the Western media and the international news services? War, endemic disease, poverty and misery, corruption and political conflict. It is as if there is a standardised format for the information coming out of this continent.

Ignacio Ramonet, director of *Monde Diplomatique*, commented: "…information was a rare good – thus expensive. Today, it is superabundant, and tends to be free. At the same time, it is regarded more and more as goods, so that its value does not depend any more on the criteria which traditionally gave it value – the truth and the lie – but the number of people likely to be interested by it. Information thus is primarily subjected to the laws of supply and demand."

Information is thus, actually a product. And like any goods, it is in search of a market that enables it to find purchasers. Where is this profitable market? Not in Africa where there is an insufficient number of consumers of information ready to pay the price. In the West? Certainly. When journalism is not creative any more but becomes a simple provision of services which breaks the impartial duty of information, one will search in vain for professional rigour without any chance of finding its traces.

But is that a reason for Africa to remain an object rather than a subject of western journalists' coverage? Often to counteract this Africans call for "African reporting".

One should not speak about reporting which is typically African, European, American or Asian. As a profession which requires internationally-recognised universal standards, the manner of practising journalism should not vary according to continent and country, at least in form. It is as ridiculous to speak about African, American or Arab literature; one should indeed speak only about "literature" or "journalism".

Pictures to tell African Stories

text and photos by Finbarr O'Reilly

What is Africa? Is this a continent of:
- chronic hunger
- war
- poverty
- misery
- disease, and
- death

Or is that colourful place we see in the pages of *National Geographic*, tourism brochures and coffee table books? All beautiful landscapes, colourful tribes and exotic wildlife?

Africa is both, but the reality of most people's daily lives exists somewhere between these two extremes, one predominantly negative, the other overly-sanitised.

For better or for worse, this is how Africa looks to much of the outside world.

African stories can often seem complicated or incomprehensible to an audience unfamiliar with the continent, and the bad news tends to dominate. It sometimes seems overwhelming.

Our job as journalists, whether as writers, photographers or in TV, is to show the nuances of life, the depth and diversity of life in Africa. To provide stories that go beyond the stereotypical images.

I began working in Africa six years ago in Congo as a text correspondent covering the deadliest conflict since World War 2. I was always astounded that so few people were aware that millions of people had died and continued to die in a regional war

Editors' Forum

arch of a market

by Cheriff Moumina Sy

However, a report cannot be dissociated from its author; it is indeed about a point of view. No matter how objective or impartial it aims to be, it conveys (even unconsciously) the cultural, social, economic and political background of the journalist, all the experiential landscape which marked out the life of the journalist.

It is this socio-cultural background which determines the appreciation that journalists have made of events of which they are the direct witness or simply the relay, placed in a privileged position between a source and a receiving public. This is why a report on a given event will not be the same when treated by journalists coming from different countries and especially from different cultures.

The relations between Africa and the rest of the world show that, in spite of the fantastic progress made on the continent since the '60s, the way westerners, in particular, see Africa remains characterised by economic misery and cultural backwardness.

How to improve the coverage of Africa? Africa must become an information provider for itself and the rest of the world. It is necessary to support the growth of African journalism made by African journalists on subjects of which they have a better reading culturally and socially. What is needed? To do an audit of news agencies on Africa and to set up credible agencies to cover Africa for Africans and the rest of the world, and to reinforce the media's institutional capacities and their human resources. If Africa does not want to remain an outfall of information, it is necessary that it obtains a powerful means of communicating to an international audience. The Arab world has given us just such an example with the TV channel Al Jazeera.

Improving reporting

"The unfair coverage debate has a long history," said Azubuike Isheikwene, executive director of *Punch* in Nigeria. And this debate often focuses on how the West sees Africa as "death, disease, destruction and despair".

But in the spirit of the focused session on Africa which the chair Mathatha Tsedu steered away from bewailing the situation and towards solutions, Isheikwene then made the following points about how to improve the reporting:
1. Journalists covering Africa need to be familiar with its histories, cultures and peoples.
2. They need to understand context.
3. They should realise that their journalism must give voice to the weak, the vulnerable and minorities.
4. They should be aware the African landscape is changing rapidly (citing the Chinese investment into the continent of $40-billion).

"Journalists need: specialisation, numeracy, fluency in other languages, extensive contacts and sources and analytical ability," he concluded.
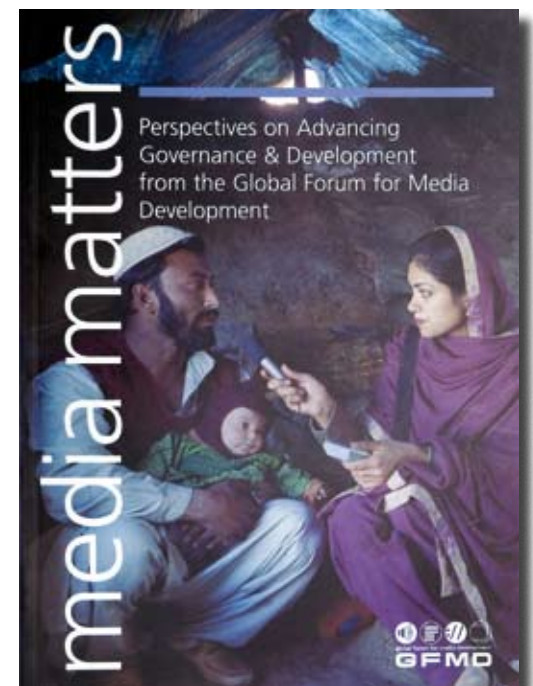
Good governance

According to the Economic Commission for Africa good governance survey of 2005 of 28 African countries, while corruption, the bane of good economic management, continues to be found:
- respect for human rights is on the rise (with some glaring exceptions),
- adherence to constitutions is getting stronger,
- legislatures and judiciaries are asserting their independence,
- the legitimacy and credibility of the electoral process have increased,
- voter turnouts are on the increase,
- the political space is more inclusive, and
- economic management is getting better.
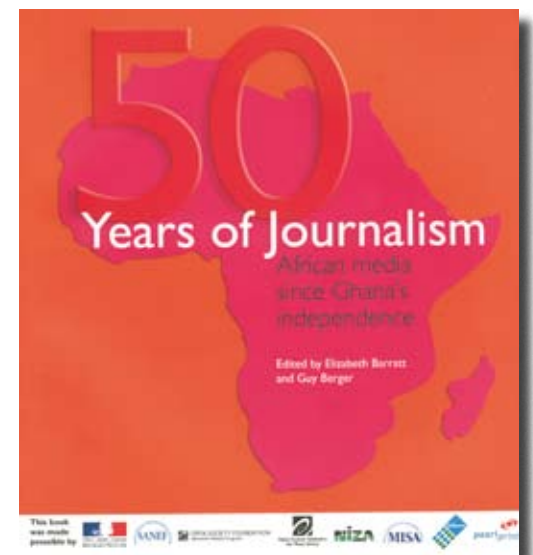
50 Years of Journalism: African Media since Ghana's Independence by Elizabeth Barratt and Guy Berger, promotes independent African journalism and takes stock of the situation on the continent, five decades after the first colony became free. The book is no dry overview. While it does an audit of the regions of the continent (using geography and language) it also contains some of the liveliest stories about the "characters, cases and causes", displaying the unique and clever ways journalists have made stories, issues and their outlets an indispensable part of African life and history.

that engulfed much of central Africa. And I was frustrated too that nobody seemed too interested in what was happening.

The same was true when I spent a month in Darfur in 2004. But what was different for me on that assignment is that I turned to photography to tell my stories. Pictures can have an immediate emotional impact that words cannot. A successful image can make people pause in the midst of their busy day to reflect on what is shown, perhaps prompting them to find out more about what is happening and why. Photographs have the ability to connect people on a human level, even though the events they depict can be worlds away.

Coming from a background as a writer, I still value the importance of words, but I now rely on photographs to tell African stories, hoping that if an image is successful, the viewer will seek out more information about the stories we're covering. At best, it will prompt people to do something.

All too aware of the cliché of starving children with flies in their eyes, I focus on portraying people not as helpless victims, even if that's what they are, but rather as almost heroic figures coping under some of the most difficult conditions on the planet.

This to me is the essence of reporting from Africa. Illustrating that people are not nameless victims, but individuals whose lives and stories matter as much as anyone else's. The strength of character and the dignity of people living and surviving under such difficult conditions is humbling to anyone who experiences it. As journalists, we can convey that aspect of life to the outside world and to other Africans.

Sure we need to cover the news. But there are other stories that need to be told too, to show that Africa is not just about war, famine and disease. It is about hope and struggling to make a better future in a challenging world.

Finbarr O'Reilly works for Reuters and is based in Senegal.

The African Forum for Media Development is a "well co-ordinated media assistance programme," according to Jeanette Minnie, a media consultant and activist, "and a network of African freedom of expression organisations." One of the tactics now being worked on by those searching for the best way to secure the freedom of African media is to make viable and sustainable the many media businesses and ISPs on the continent and to spawn new businesses, because a proliferation of functional businesses is very difficult to control and shut down for repressive regimes. "A great plurality is required," says Minnie, and "tremendous capacity building." And to this end energy is being put into training in "the art" of how to run sustainable media and into sourcing venture capital which Minnie calls "a whole new entrepreneurial approach". This is being done through Samdef, a small development bank for media, which is to both "inspire and fund" media development.
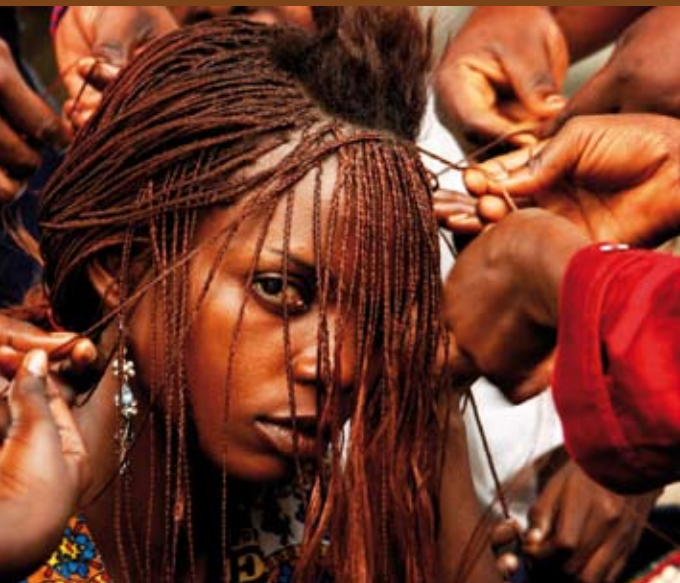
Anti-'insult' laws campaign

The Declaration of Table Mountain, which calls for the abolition of ``insult'' and criminal defamation laws throughout Africa and which was launched during the annual congress of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) in Cape Town on 3 June has been sent to the United Nations, Unesco and the African Union.

All three bodies have been requested to bring the document before their general assemblies and to adopt it as a document specific to Africa where ``insult'' laws and criminal defamation are the scourge of African journalists.

These laws, which restrict journalists from criticising heads of state for their corruption, malpractice, human rights abuses and other misdemeanours and which protect heads of police and defence forces in some countries as well as other civil servants and foreign diplomats, are in use in 48 of the 53 countries that make up Africa.

In the first five months of this year until the end of May, 229 editors, journalists, radio presenters, bloggers and those who have online publications or maintain websites were arrested, imprisoned, beaten or harassed under these or similar laws in 27 countries.

South Africa is one of the few countries in Africa that does not have "insult" laws though it does have the common law crime of criminal defamation which, however, it has not used for some 30 years.

International PEN and the Media Institute of Southern Africa have been quick to endorse the declaration.

The Declaration was the brainchild of Raymond Louw, chairman of the Media Freedom Committee of the SA National Editors' Forum and the Africa representative of the World Press Freedom Committee.

Louw approached WAN's Timothy Balding last December, outlined the concept and how it could be furthered and was invited to draw up the Declaration which he did with Professor Guy Berger, head of the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

Louw also drew up a list of cases of attacks on journalists in the first five months of this year, which with the declaration have been drawn to the attention of the UN, Unesco and the AU.

Declaration of Table Mountain

The World Association of Newspapers and the World Editors' Forum, meeting at the 60th World Newspaper Congress and 14th World Editors' Forum Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, from 3 to 6 June 2007:

Note that in country after country the African press is crippled by a panoply of repressive measures, from the jailing and persecution of journalists to the widespread scourge of "insult" laws and criminal defamation which are used, ruthlessly, by government to prevent critical appraisal of their performance and to deprive the public from information about their misdemeanours;

State their conviction that Africa urgently needs a strong, free and independent press to act as a watchdog over public institutions;

Consider that press freedom remains a key to the establishment of good governance and durable economic, political, social and cultural development, prosperity and peace in Africa, and to the fight against corruption, famine, poverty, violent conflict, disease and lack of education;

Reaffirm our responsibility as the global representative organisations of the owners, publishers and editors of the world's press to conduct "aggressive and persistent campaigning against press freedom violation and restrictions";

Reaffirm our commitment to freedom of the press as a basic human right as well as an indispensable constituent of democracy in every country, including those in Africa;

Note that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees freedom of expression as a fundamental right, and emphasise that freedom of expression is essential to the realisation of other rights set forth in international human rights instruments;

Recall that those principles have been restated and endorsed in the 2002 Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression in Africa, adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Union, thus requiring member states of the African Union to uphold and maintain press freedom;

Recall also the 1991 Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press;

Observe that despite numerous opportunities for a free press to emerge from national independence, fully-fledged press freedom still does not exist in many African countries and that murder, imprisonment, torture, banning, censorship and legislative edict are the norm in many countries;

Recognise that these crude forms of repression are bolstered by the deliberate exclusion of certain newspapers from state advertising placement, the burden of high import taxes on equipment and newsprint and unfair competition from state-owned media;

Note that despite the adoption of press freedom protocols and the repression of that freedom on a wide scale in Africa, the African Union in instituting its Peer Review Mechanism under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) programme has excluded the fostering of a free and independent press as a key requirement in the assessment of good governance in the countries of the continent; and

Identify the greatest scourge of press freedom on the continent the continued implementation of "insult" laws, which outlaw criticism of politicians and those in authority, and criminal defamation legislation, both of which are used indiscriminately in the vast majority of African states that maintain them and which have as their prime motive the "locking up of information";

Declare that:

African states must recognise the indivisibility of press freedom and their responsibility to respect their commitments to African and international protocols upholding the freedom, independence and safety of the press; and

To further that aim by, as a matter of urgency, abolishing "insult" and criminal defamation laws which in the five months of this year have caused the harassment, arrest and/or imprisonment of 103 editors, reporters, broadcasters and online journalists in 26 countries;

Call on African governments as a matter of urgency to review and abolish all other laws that restrict press freedom;

Call on African governments that have jailed journalists for their professional activities to free them immediately and to allow the return to their countries of journalists who have been forced into exile;

Condemn all forms of repression of African media that allows for banning of newspapers and the use of other devices such as levying import duties on newsprint and printing materials and withholding advertising;

Call on African states to promote the highest standards of press freedom in furtherance of the principles proclaimed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other protocols and to provide constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press;

Call on the African Union immediately to include in the criteria for "good governance" in the African Peer Review Mechanism the vital requirement that a country promotes free and independent media;

Call on international institutions to promote progress in press freedom in Africa in the next decade, through such steps as assisting newspapers in the areas of legal defence, skills development and access to capital and equipment;

Welcome moves towards a global fund for African media development and recommends that such an initiative gives priority attention to media legal reform and in particular the campaign to rid the continent of "insult" and criminal defamation laws;

Commit WAN and WEF to expand their existing activities in regard to press freedom and development in Africa in the coming decade.

WAN and WEF make this declaration from Table Mountain at the southern tip of Africa as an earnest appeal to all Africans to recognise that the political and economic progress they seek flourishes in a climate of freedom and where the press is free and independent of governmental, political or economic control.

Cape Town 3 June 2007.

The Wild Wild Web

The impact of the digital world on mainstream media is an ongoing concern among editors, as reflected by discussions at the World Editors' Forum (WEF) hosted in Cape Town in June. Kim Gurney takes a wider look at the debate over user-generated content and the mainstream media's approaches to this new phenonemon.

David Schlesinger, editor-in-chief of Reuters, told delegates that a defining aspect of the changing media landscape was the advancement of new forms of online community and communications. If a portent were needed, it came during the presentation of his colleague, London-based Reuters reporter Adam Pasick. He has embedded a digital avatar, Adam Reuters, inside the online world called *Second Life* where over seven million users create their own 3D community. Pasick has in his virtual guise even interviewed Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu.

Such attempts to reach a new techno-savvy audience are part of a broader dynamic impacting upon journalistic practices in newsrooms around the world. Digital advances have enabled audiences to increasingly assume the role of reporter through posting online articles, weblogs (blogs), feedback commentaries and video clips. The trend has earned itself a label: "user-generated content" (UGC), also referred to as "citizen journalism". Opinion on whether UGC is a threat or a boon to mainstream media is less tidy.

The debate has broadly polarised between two positions, as so-called Web 2.0 flourishes. Traditionalists argue that journalists occupy a unique space in the public sphere; that along with the obligation of covering events in a fair and balanced manner come particular responsibilities and obligations skilled journalists best fulfill. Advocates for digital media's rejuvenation generally laud the possibility of new voices and local, accessible content driven by consumers tired of a passive role.

Indeed, globalisation aided by new technologies has paradoxically whetted the appetite for hyper-local content in an apparent knee-jerk response to increased connectivity. Added to this is a postmodern proclivity for pastiche: we live in a "remix, mash-up" world, according to Richard Sambrook, director of Global News

at the BBC, speaking at the *We Media Global Forum* in London last year. Vincent Maher, a strategist at the Mail&Guardian Online, responds: "On the one hand, I think UGC, Web 2.0 and the whole blogging phenomenon is the cultural crystallisation of the change in capabilities that the physical media infrastructure offers. On the other, the uses of the technology remain highly unpredictable and the way they are taken up is a form of expression that will keep anthropologists interested for a long time."

The phenomenon certainly has interesting ideological undertones – a kind of metaphorical battle between the hallowed *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the constantly morphed online *Wikipedia*, where web users revise existing entries as part of a constantly changing public consensus about "the truth". *Britannica versus Wiki* pits professional arbiters of knowledge against "the cult of the amateur", the title of author Andrew Keen's recently published book. As Américo Martins Dos Santos, head of the Brazilian section of the BBC World Service, puts it: some journalists still see their profession as "a lecture rather than a conversation".

So what has shifted the balance of power? Dos Santos says the July 2005 London bombings was a turning point because of the scale of the response – 20 000 messages were sent to the BBC within 12 hours. "That just highlighted the importance of having a better structure to deal with this kind of content … the BBC recognises that it must open its airwaves for a bigger dialogue with the audience. UGC is a tremendous tool to do it and to keep the BBC relevant to an audience that wants to be really engaged with news."

Dos Santos reflects the view of many other editors when he declares citizen journalism as merely complementary. He concedes there are attendant challenges, in particular keeping consistent editorial values. "The UGC broadcast or published by media companies must still have the same editorial standards. At the end of the day, it is the responsibility of those media companies that are using the material to check if it

is correct, relevant and how best to use it in editorial terms."

Editors and their publishers are nervous of landing on the wrong side of media law. And rightly so: the majority of bloggers who also identify themselves as journalists do not abide by some common journalistic practices, according to the Pew Centre. Its survey with the American Life Project on bloggers, published in July 2006, found 34% considered their writing a form of journalism. However, only 56% "sometimes or often" spent extra time trying to verify facts; 54% hardly ever or never quoted people directly; 61% hardly ever or never got permission to post copyrighted material and 59% hardly ever or never posted corrections. Such flouting of journalistic convention has landed some American bloggers in lawsuits. This has not stopped bloggers getting more official recognition, however: they have been assigned media seats in high-profile trials. Most recently, two former sex trade workers who knew the dead women in a serial murder case in Vancouver covered the trial for citizen media website www.orato.com.

There have been calls to create a bloggers' code of conduct, including one earlier this year by Tim O'Reilly. But blogger "Karl" wrote on O'Reilly's site that taking responsibility for content could only be a good intention: "…to accept full responsibility would mean that those of us without resources would have to shut down the conversations that take place on our pages to avoid liability. And that will create a stratified web where only those with money and time will be able to provide places to converse".

Mainstream editors of web content are facing a similar dilemma. Frits van Exter, former editor-in-chief of *Trouw* newspaper in the Netherlands, told WEF delegates that interactivity actually means you run "an open sewer system". He said: "The readers, your audience… are using it to throw all their garbage through your lines 24/7." Van Exter questioned the rush for new website traffic at the expense of active moderation, arguing that old values in a new game

Citizen contributions are incredibly important. But journalists perform a different function. And we professionals should be the ones to make the distinction

could be an asset. He stressed the need for engaged debate on ethics: "Make clear what your ethics are, stick to them and be as transparent as possible about them."

Kelly McBride, ethics group leader at Poynter Institute in the US, says ethics for a journalist are very important because every decision has ethical implications; however, she does not see any lack of grounding in media ethics as a major disadvantage of citizen journalism. The problem is actually with the description itself – "citizen journalism". She states: "Citizen contributions are incredibly important to journalism. Their voices are crucial. But journalists perform a different function. And we professionals should be the ones to make that distinction."

Maher at the M&G concurs: he does not consider most blogs to be citizen journalism anymore: "The blogosphere will continue to be the Wild West of publishing but one has a different set of expectations of it." Maher thinks in future citizen journalism will mostly be created in conjunction with media companies that protect themselves and their contributors from legal exposure. "I don't think there is a big future for citizen journalism that is not edited in some way or another," he adds. "One of the primary reasons for the gatekeeping, other than social responsibility, is the limitation of legal risk and exposure for the media company. This will not go away unless people suddenly stop caring about defamation."

Maher's observations are borne out by research on how the British media are struggling with UGC, conducted by City University journalism lecturer Neil Thurman. He says his findings also have relevance to other news organisations because journalists tend to share similar norms and values. Thurman's paper, presented in March 2007, concluded that reputation, trust and legal concerns suggest news organisations have too much at stake to just open the doors to UGC. He found an opportunity existed to facilitate user media by filtering and aggregating it in ways useful and valuable to audiences. The M&G has recently done just that by launching an "aggregator" Amatomu.com, which effectively provides a one-stop, searchable blog interface.

One recurring gripe among editors in Thurman's first round of interviews in 2004 was the drain on resources to monitor UGC. Interestingly, attitudes had shifted markedly from fear to enthusiasm by a second round of interviews in 2006. Thurman said this was partly driven by Rupert Murdoch's speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in April 2005 where he warned against complacency about the digital revolution. Thurman said technology also helped: content management systems became more flexible and affordable, which lessened the burden of moderation.

What is clear is UGC is taking off, according to online audience measurement firm Nielsen/NetRatings. It found in an August 2006 report that half of the top web brands in the US were driven by UGC and the media was a big part of this trend: Associated Press scored a high rating on the back of a new video offering to complement online and print news. Others are following suit: Sky News has built a virtual replica of its Twickenham News Centre in cyberspace and BBC News 24 last year launched a new TV programme based entirely on UGC. It also broadcast a series of reports motivated, produced and presented by listeners about major issues in Africa.

There has not been a watershed event spurring citizen journalism in South Africa but the established players are not sleeping: the *Sunday Times* recently launched a UGC website under the masthead 'For the people By the people'.

It is partly the fear of being marginalised that is driving the adoption of UGC initiatives – at least in the UK newspaper world, according to Thurman.

But as the BBC's Sambrook told WEF delegates, there is nothing new in terms of editorial principles about the UGC dynamic. He said: "We've always interviewed the public, we've always interviewed experts, we've always taken contributions from the public but the technology is such that it allows this to happen on an unprecedented scale. And it's much more one of quantity rather than qualitative difference in terms of the editorial principles that lie behind it." McBride at Poynter agrees: "It's merely possible now. That's the only thing that's changed. But that's everything. Many people want interactivity. Now that they can have it, they refuse to live without it."

Maher points out that the old one-to-many mass media model seems incongruent with the way digital culture expresses itself today. Most media companies are embracing UGC more than convergence; it has "immediate and obvious benefits when you consider that introducing UGC onto news sites along with other Web 2.0 functionality… dramatically increases the volume of ad inventory available for sale." He says most news companies are capitalising on the input they get from their audience by monetising the content: "It is therefore inevitable that elements of the audience are going to become a paid resource, especially as quality becomes increasingly of concern." This is already evident in the US where some newspaper sites syndicate content from bloggers. Others, like associatedcontent.com, offer cash for stories that range from the serious to a miracle photo of Jesus Christ in the Korean mountains.

In the end, the battle might be over-hyped. As Steven Johnson points out in *Time* magazine's January 2007 cover story, most UGC is working in a zone where there are no experts or where the users themselves are experts rather than challenging the authority of a traditional expert: "The overwhelming majority of photographers at flickr [a photo-sharing website] harbour no dream of becoming the next Annie Leibovitz. They just want to share with their extended family the pics they snapped over the holidays." His observations are supported by Nielsen/Netratings, which found that overwhelmingly most bloggers were motivated by creative expression.

Thurman at City University says UGC has already had an impact on established newsroom models. He concluded: "Whether it is boon or a threat depends on your point of view and is difficult to unpick from the other changes that are happening – convergence, mergers and acquisitions, globalisation and consumer preferences. UGC can be a positive influence on the mainstream media and its journalists but only in properly resourced and managed newsrooms."

I don't think that there is a big future for citizen journalism that is not edited... this will not go away unless people suddenly stop caring about defamation

Mario Vargas Llosa

At the World Editors' Forum in conversation with Alejandro Miró Quesada, from *El Comercio*, Peru

AMQ: What is good journalism for Mario Vargas Llosa and what is bad journalism?

MVL: I think that good journalism is decent, trustful journalism, journalism that conveys an objective vision of what is going on in the world, and bad journalism is journalism that lies, that distorts the real world, that disseminates confusion. I think the basic problem is that in our times, journalism has been becoming more and more a form of entertainment. Many people read papers, weeklies, or watch television, looking for entertainment much more than for true information about what is going on, and this has provoked the degradation of journalism.

AMQ: Should well-made journalism get involved in this discussion and criticise this journalism? Should it get involved in all this debate?

MVL: Debate can be useful. But the best way to fight against bad journalism, against yellow journalism, journalism that is entertainment, is by a good example, doing exactly what good newspapers, radio, or TV programmes have been doing; telling the truth, trying to convey good information in order to be able to take a position about what is going on. This is what has been the fantastic service that journalism has provided since the beginning. I am not against entertainment, of course not, I think that entertainment is perfectly licit, but I think that it is very dangerous to think that it is the most important goal of journalism. I think that if you believe this, distortion is inevitable.

AMQ: Anyone can claim to be a journalist and act as one. For you, who is really a journalist?

MVL: Well, I think a journalist now is a professional. As in all professions there are different kinds of specialists. Because knowledge has become so vast, so complex, so diversified that not even the most talented and well-trained journalist can write about everything, it is absolutely impossible. Specialisation is indispensable among journalists and I think also very serious training. When I started it was considered that a journalist was someone who became a professional by working as a journalist. I don't think this is true anymore. I think a journalist needs, like an architect or a lawyer, very serious training, not only of the techniques but also the historical, civic and moral dimension of the profession.

AMQ: What are the professional and intellectual skills that modern journalism must have to be capable of properly observing and analysing this globalised world of today?

MVL: You should write with a serious knowledge of what you are writing about. This is a basic requirement. But also you need to have instincts and creativity. A good journalist is also a kind of creator, someone that uses language. And for that you need skills. And for these skills you need first, training, culture, but also flair and instinct. It is something that is very difficult to define.

AMQ: Many people talk with nostalgia about the good old quality journalism. Have journalistic values changed through the years?

MVL: It is true that in the past there were great newspapers and magazines. But there were also many very bad newspapers and magazines. It is true that now, as the world has become much more complex and there are so many different techniques and means of information, the challenges for journalists are enormous and the adaptation has not been easy. But I wouldn't be so pessimistic as those people who believe that journalism in the past was a model and that this model has disappeared. I think this is a romantic prejudice.

AMQ: In many developing countries, readership and even credibility are suffering. Is it because of the competition from the Internet and all the new media, or is it because of the press not fulfilling its job?

MVL: Well, I think in many cases, journalism has abdicated because it is facing very difficult challenges, many media consider that the only way to conquer or retain the public is banalisation or frivolisation of journalism. And this of course is very, very dangerous.

AMQ: Do you think that this is the main threat for today's journalism?

MVL: I think it is probably the greatest challenge that journalism has in modern times.

AMQ: Are you optimistic about the future of journalism

MVL: Oh yes, without any doubt.
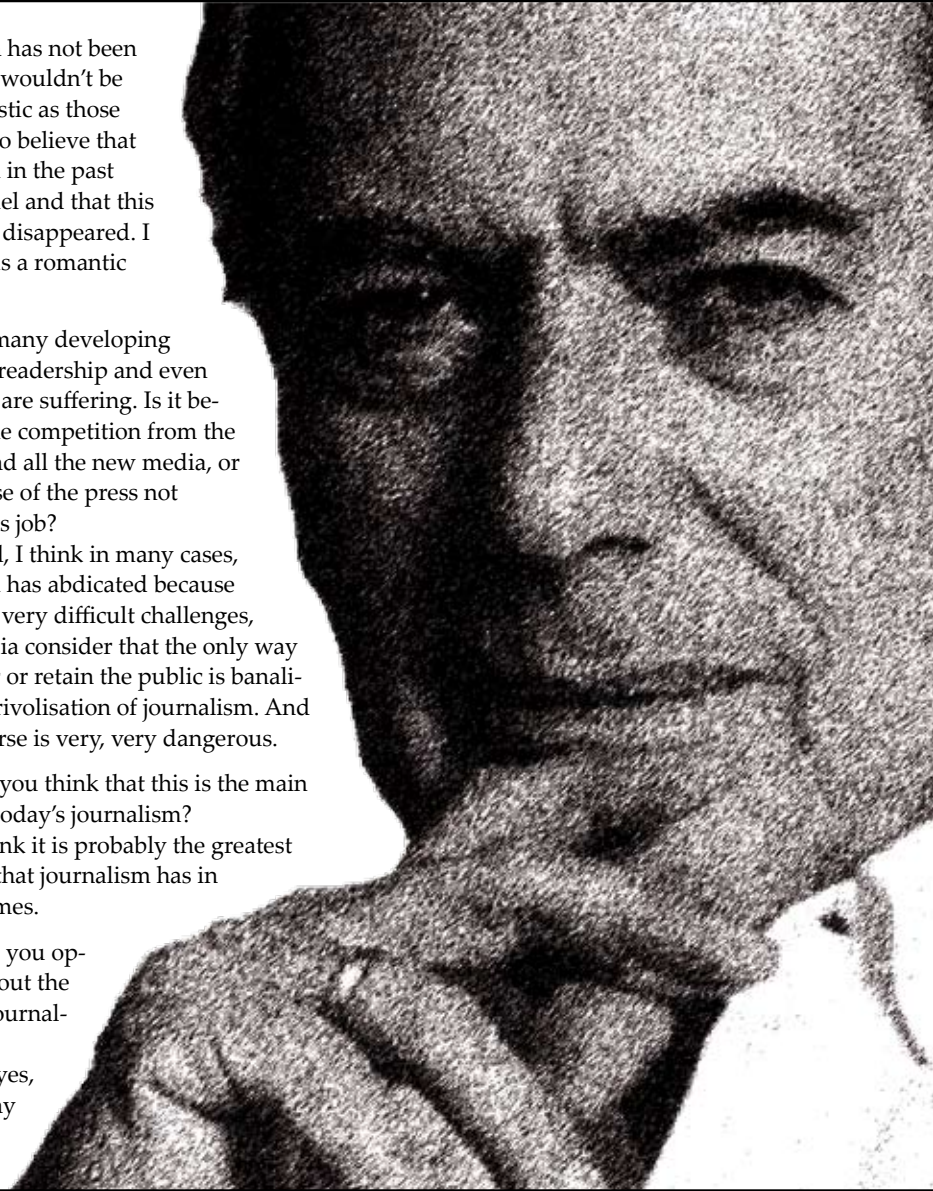
Avatar Adam helps Reuters get a (second) life

by Anne Taylor

Reuters, the world's biggest financial news service and data provider, has a virtual agency in a virtual world, headed by a virtual bureau chief known as Adam Reuters, who reports on news in the virtual world.

You can find Adam Reuters (Adam Pasick in real life) heading up the virtual Reuters bureau on an island inside Second Life – an online world that has more than eight million registered users and an economy worth the equivalent of $500-million.

Adam Pasick introduced his Second Life alter-ego at a Reuters masterclass at this year's WAN/WEF in Cape Town.

Describing Second Life as "the most talked about and most exciting thing in the media world", Pasick said Reuters had signed up in October last year to "get experience of the virtual world".

Although many independent journalists and bloggers have joined such virtual worlds, Reuters was the first established news agency to dispatch a full-time reporter. In fact, Reuters invested enough money to buy an island, which is modelled on its headquarters in Times Square, New York. On the island, visitors can access a Reuters newsfeed, which is a streaming video that users can activate. "We wanted people to know the Reuters brand. This is a bit of an experiment for us," Pasick said.

After all, joining Second Life is a sure-fire way for a traditional media company to create virtual credibility. This is important for an industry unquestionably in flux.

As David Schlesinger, Reuters UK editor-in-chief, told the masterclass, the era of one-way journalism is over: "After the London bombing, we received a flood of images and videos from citizen journalists. Since then our engagement with bloggers and informal journalists has exploded."

The agency works on a collaborative model that brings audience, subject and journalist together – and their involvement in Second Life is key to that. "People are participating and making their voices heard in a new and innovative way," says Pasick.

For those of you in the real world who haven't heard about Second Life yet, it's a virtual community, which has its own economy, businesses and currency, known as Linden dollars. Its growth in the past year has been dramatic, with about 25 000 new residents every day. Created by US firm Linden Labs, it has a registered membership of over 8.6-million users (up from 2.4-million in January). It's big. And it is only going to get bigger. According to Gartner Research, quoted in a recent *Newsweek* article, four out of every five people who use the Internet will actively participate in Second Life or a similar medium by 2011. "If Gartner is to be believed (and it is one of the most respected research firms in the field) this means that 1.6-billion – out of the total two-billion Internet users – will have found new lives online," says *Newsweek*.

At this stage, South African participation is quite limited. To make the experience pleasant, you need a high-speed connection, and Second Life is broadband intensive.

Other media in Second Life: UK pay-TV company SkyNews, with a virtual replica of its newsroom and presenter Adam Boulton, plans to become the first 24-hour news channel in Second Life by giving away virtual TV sets so that Second Life residents can watch SkyNews in their virtual lounges. Go figure.

German publisher Axel Springer, which owns Germany's top-selling newspaper *Bild*, has a tabloid called the *Avatar*, which carries news that happens in Second Life.

Channel 4 offers some of its TV programming on a virtual TV network. It recently launched 4Radio, which offers podcasts of programmes from music to speech.

Adam Pasik works for Reuters in the real world; avatar Adam Reuters works for the Reuters bureau in Second Life.

Mario Garcia, the great guru of newspaper redesigns worldwide and exponent of WED (writing-editing-design) as a newspaper construction philosophy, was at the World Newspaper Congress and World Editors' Forum in Cape Town, to tell both sets of participants just how online media is being used by tech-savvy users. His conclusion – for those who may be worried –

We do read!
...

In 1990 Garcia, now a professor at Syracuse University, and Dr Peggy Starke Adam, who were both working at the Poynter Institute in Florida, came up with a method to figure out how people read newspapers called Eyetrac. By attaching small cameras which look into the eyes of readers and recall their eye movements, they could tell what readers were attracted to, how long they would read

and how they navigated information.

This method has been repeated with online readers in a new survey this year. Part of the driving thought behind the research was the hunch that because of the speed of delivery of breaking news by digital and broadcast media, many people already know the news before they come to read it in their newspapers. A recent survey he did of *Wall St Jour-*

nal readers showed that 60% of them know the news before they pick it up in this paper.

The survey involved 600 print and online readers in four US cities, Minneapolis, St Petersburg, Philadelphia and Denver, reading dailies and news websites on "ordinary days" involving no extraordinary news events. 100 people read the *StarTribune* and 100 the StarTribune.com; 100 read

the *St Petersburg Times* and 100 the online version; 100 read the *Daily News* and another 100 the *Rocky Mountain News*. Each person was recorded reading for 15 minutes.

50% of the study were between 18 and 41 years old, and 44% from 42 to 60. 80% of these news consumers used two media simultaneously. 71% used four or more websites in a week. 87% had at least some tertiary education and 75% were employed.
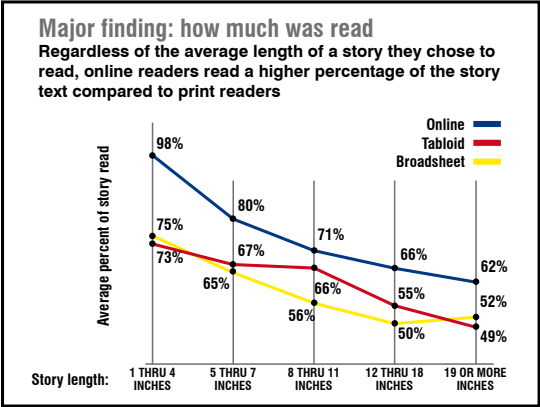
Garcia presented the main findings of this study as:

1. These 600 guinea pigs are "choosing what to read and then reading it a lot". Conclusion: "The long form is not dead."

2. These readers read more of the online story and do more depth reading online. "People stay there [online] longer," Garcia said. His quick conclusion: in print you can see how long the story is on the page, thus getting intimidated, online you can't see the end! Watching carefully how his study group was reading he discovered that if the story started to flag in interesting detail at about 21 lines, the reader could be lost. His advice: refresh the story at about that point. "Online is a bit like a book, readers don't get sidetracked," he said, adding "newspaper design is distracting, there are many things on the page that set up competition."

When figures were compared: 57% of stories in tabloids which readers chose to read were read in their entirety; and the figures were 62% for broadsheet stories and 77% for online stories. For online stories overall two-thirds were read entirely. The most text that was read was in the news section, and it seems that when a newspaper's brand is trusted, so is their online version.

Major finding: how much was read
Regardless of the average length of a story they chose to read, online readers read a higher percentage of the story text compared to print readers

3. Garcia characterises the reading in two types: scanning and methodical. And readers do both.

But when they move online they combine these two types of reading more evidently than they do in print. "People have not lost the ability to read in depth, they are now more selective. One becomes a methodical reader if the content seduces us," but, "you must also create opportunities for scanners, as scanners can turn methodical".

4. In terms of design and navigation of text, Garcia says "online and print are two worlds apart". He still believes that design is aesthetically important for print media but "not so critical" for online reading. Online readers, he believes, are "not into beauty, but utility".

He also made the following points:
• In the 1990 survey of newspaper readers, he and Starke found that teasers were important in luring readers to stories. The 2007 survey shows that they remain important for readers in both print and online.
• Photographs and headlines remain important as drawcards to pages in both environments but in the case of photos they must be "action" pictures – "live" pictures get more attention than staged shots. In the case of headlines the personal address to a "You!" is noticeably useful.
• Graphics get eye attention: but, says Garcia, they have to be explanatory and accessible, charts are difficult to read.
• What about opinion pieces? Print and online, readers are interested in what other readers have to say, and not really in what editors think. In print the letters pages attracted "more attention than we expected".
• Interactive elements need to be emphasised and given attention so that readers can use them.
• If advertising takes up a full page readers ignore it, if it's surrounded by content it gets attention. Colour "is a big draw".

Garcia now has a new philosophy he punts for how to deal with breaking news: begin online and on mobile technology with the first version of the story, then move it to print, then move it back online with more details. He calls the first version "the report", the print version "the story 1" and the fuller online version – with interactive possibilities – "the story 2". The rationale is "assume the reader knows more than you do" and certainly that by the time the breaking news story reaches the print pages it is already known to readers. The idea of the "newspaper of record" is no longer sustainable in a new technology regime, you have to "begin the record in some other medium" and Garcia says "online is now where the story begins and the story ends". To make this "fusion of print and online" Garcia advocates appointing a "fusion editor, someone who can keep a foot on the printed edition, one on the online edition" or "naming a 'storytelling sheriff' to decide on and to patrol the path of the story throughout an entire cycle".

He said to the WAN/WEF audiences: "If your organisation has not put together a small group of thinkers and visionaries to study multi-platforms and how to achieve them, then start as soon as possible. This may be the most important topic to deliberate in the next year."

So what of the future?

Is the large format newspaper going to disappear? "Yes," says Garcia.

And what does he think of the mobile phone? "One of the most impactful tools of today."

Has the newspaper habit disappeared from most people's lives? "For an increasing number , the

answer is yes. But our interest in **news** is forever increasing."

Is this the end of print? "Certainly not. But it is a change of role for print for sure. Remember," he says, "books killed sermons."

And for those who continue to worry about reading as an issue: "We have not lost our ability to read in depth, and, in fact, reader attention spans have not shortened dramatically or irreversibly. But we do have more highly selective readers who choose what they want to read, and then read a lot. Even more than we thought they would."

... *Navigational guides like teasers, tips and summaries remain important devices for luring readers into pages and stories.*