16th Annual International Symposium on Online Journalism

Day 1, April 17, 2015: Afternoon Session–4:30-6:00 p.m.

Research Panel:
Influence, Consumption and Participation: Paths to News Engagement

Chair & Presenter: Jake Batsell, Assistant Professor of Journalism, **Southern Methodist University**

Panelists:
- **Jane Singer,** City University London, England: *Leaning Conservative: Innovation and Presidential Campaign Coverage by U.S. Newspaper Websites in the Digital Age*
- **Joseph Yoo,** Pei Zheng, Hyeri Jung, Vickie Chen, Shuning Lu and Thomas Johnson, University of Texas at Austin: *Tap, Scroll Down, Chat and More? Examining the Influence of Mobile Applications and Interpersonal Discussions towards Political Participation*
- **Terry Britt,** University of Texas at Austin: *Back and Forth in Time: Online News Archives and Presence as Transportation*
- **Fiona Martin,** University of Sydney, Australia: *Getting My Two Cents Worth in: Access, Interaction, Participation and Social Inclusion in Online News Commenting*

Jane Singer: This is a study that's been kind of ongoing for 12 years—over 12 years now, I guess. We're into the academic slides. So, I'm sure my colleagues have really fascinating slides, but mine are academic slides. Not nearly as exciting as some of the ones that you've seen from our great speakers earlier today.

So, what I'm interested in, in this study over time, is in the digital age, because we're going back to 2000 with this study. In the digital age, how are leading newspapers, so the website's leading newspapers around the country, how are they taking advantage of the changes in technology and also the changes in audience capabilities and how people can engage, as Jake was saying, how people can interact with content, how they can engage with it, how they can contribute to it, [and] how are they taking advantage of that? And I'm also in particular interested in how they are thinking about their own role and what it is that they do. How you are thinking about your own role and what it is that you do as these tools become available to you? And as you're able to do more things, and as you're able to draw people in, in different ways, how are you thinking about that? What are you trying to accomplish with it? And what's going on?

So, that was kind of my goal in doing this. Can't say I necessarily thought of that goal back in 2000. But then I thought in 2004, maybe I'll try that again. And in 2008, I said, well, that was fun. Let's try it again. So, I kind of kept going with this.

And so the answer to that is, this is the short version of the answer, that the offerings on leading newspaper websites have gotten increasingly cool and sophisticated and multifaceted and multimedia and everything else. Some of what's being done is fantastic, as we know. Obviously, you've been creating this and also, I'm sure, consuming it over the past 12 years. But the way that journalists think about what they're doing or think about the reasons for doing it actually haven't changed a whole lot. And we can talk about whether you think that's a good thing or a bad thing as we go along or later on.

So, kind of the premise for this or the framework for it—different speakers today have actually alluded to this as well—we're about safeguarding democracy. That's very much the journalist's view of what our function is, what our role is, what we do. Actually, we have a former journalist as well; although, I've been in academia a long time now. So, we kind of have this perception of ourselves as the guardian of this process. And journalists tend to see their role as providing information that enables citizens to inform their selves well and accurately and wisely, and therefore, make good decisions. We all kind of know that premise.

And so, that's been very much, I think, I've found a transcendent perception and a transcendent understanding of what it is that journalists do as all these changes that we've seen over the years have come about. And there have been enormous changes. You think back to 2000 which was kind of the first…. There were some papers online. Owen Youngman alluded this morning to getting *The Tribune* online 20 years ago and virtually today.

So, there's certainly where newspapers and others as well, *The New York Times,* and a variety of others, there were newspapers that were online for the '96 campaign, but it wasn't really a big forest. They basically were just putting some content up. So really 2000 was really the first, I would say, coverage of a campaign in the digital era, and then of course it's expanded since then. And it's expanded through, as we know, a lot of changes.

I mean, this is, we've been talking all morning and all day about how we've adapted to these changes. And how are we thinking about it? Are we thinking about it in the right way? Are we doing it in the right way? But think back to where we were 16 years ago, 15, 14, four news cycles or election cycles ago. We weren't anywhere near where we are now. There's been vast numbers of changes.

So, these are my research papers. So, my research questions. These were my research questions. Basically, to what extent have we incorporated these new changes? Have editors incorporated these new changes in technical

capabilities or in platform kind of related things? To what extent have they incorporated new audience capabilities? Because as each of these things—as we've been talking about, again, all morning—as each of these changes have come along, there's been a steady and significant expansion in what media audiences can do [and] what citizens can do as media consumers as they are using online political information. And then how did this kind of shaped their content choices and also kind of how they thought about -- how editors thought about what they were doing.

So, briefly, my method. I did have some problems with my method, which I'm happy to talk about. But basically, these were electronically distributed questionnaires. I started with email. I switched to Survey Monkey to an electronic questionnaire format. They had open and close-ended questions. The open-ended ones were actually more interesting, because the open-ended ones were about what they were trying to accomplish [and] what they were proud of. I found this to be actually a great technique. So instead of just saying, "What did you do?" "Tell me the things you were proudest of." "Tell me the things that really stood out for you about your own coverage." People love to talk about that. So, that was great.

This was intended to be a census. You never get 100% participation, but it was not a random sample. So, I took the largest newspaper in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, and also any other paper that was a major metro. So, you can see the circulation size.

I started out with a really good response rate in 2000 when people were real eager to talk about this. I had a 71% response rate. For researchers, that's very, very good. Then we went way, way downhill. And I will say that my 2012…. To be honest, I almost ditched it, because the response rate was really pathetic. I had, I think, total of something like 15 editors responded.

So understand that this is not by any means a flawless study, but I think that there's enough here that we can see some trends. I'll tell you what I think I saw and then we can maybe talk about it later.

So, real quickly, the 2000, 2004, 2008 studies have been published, so if you really care about this, you can go find them. I'm happy to give you the site. But basically, so 2000, so think back to 2000. We were just kind of…. We had just gone through the dot-com bubble bust and newspapers we kind of going on from there. Very much the goal for newspaper editors…. Again, that's who responded to my survey—online editors, editors of the online arm of newspapers. Which sounds like an odd way to put it now, because we've come so far, but at that time, they were, in general, different people from the print editors. You remember how that was. So very much their goal was about informing you. They were all about timeliness. They were really excited about how on election night they could finally beat television. Remember those days, right, when you always had to wait until the next day and

everyone already knew who had won? So now, they were very excited because they could beat television.

You recall, of course, that in 2000, television got it wrong. Television called Florida for Al Gore, and therefore, the nation for Al Gore, at least some of them did. But nonetheless, newspapers were very excited that they could be right there first and get it, either right or wrong, but they got it in a very timely way. And they were excited about the fact that they could provide details. So, they were kind of looking at this medium as being a place where they could do the things they had always done. In covering politics, they could inform people. They could give people the information they needed to make good decisions, but they could do it in new and perhaps in better ways. So that was the 2000 finding.

2004 was kind of interesting. So 2004, we're seeing blogs. This was kind of the age of political blogs, and it was also the time when multimedia was becoming more prominent, as we called it then. We don't call it that anymore. But people were able to tell stories in audio and video and blogs. That was kind of the new thing that was going on. Then, and it was interesting in 2004, because they still talked about information types of things, about providing information, informing the citizenry. But there was this kind of surge in…. Well, it's a small sample, but within that small sample, a marked increase in the number of people who talked about the opportunities here for participation. So, editors were thinking about -- were looking at blogs and looking at this more open, more participatory kind of format and saying, you know, there's something going on here that we can be a part of that we could really engage people not in just reading about or being informed about politics and about the options available to them, and all those good things that are a very traditional kind of way of looking at political coverage, but we can also engage them. They can contribute. They can talk. They can interact. There was a rise in people talking about that when they talked about what they were proud of and what their goals were, they related more to those kinds of engagement kinds of things. So, that was 2004.

2008, [chuckles], when social media is starting to take off and there are more opportunities for user engagement, we've now kind of -- the era of comments has kind of matured. Mature might be the wrong word for comments, but anyway, there were more comments and almost everyone is offering them. We went in the opposite direction. So, we kind of went back to where we were -- or editors went back to where they were in 2000 in terms of thinking. Not in terms of what they were offering. They were offering lots and lots of stuff. Cool stuff. But in terms of how they were thinking about it, they kind of reverted back to the way they were thinking about it really before a lot of these capabilities were even available.

It became, again, mainly about information delivery. That what we do is we deliver information. That's great. We can do it faster. It's great we can do more of it. We can provide these really great voter guides. But that's really

what it's about. So it was kind of interesting that despite this increase, this continuing increase in capability of people to participate in making sense of their political choices, and they could do that on these websites, because it was available. They all offered these kinds of places to do it. When editors thought about, well, what was really great about what we did, that wasn't it. [chuckles] It was great to them about what we did, was what we did. We provided information. It was great. It could strengthen our own coverage. They can give us tips. We can find new sources for us to use in writing our own stories. But really, I hope I'm kind of expressing that right. It's not that they didn't offer lots of really great stuff. In thinking about what was really most valuable, what seemed to them most valuable was really what they provided.

And the same thing in 2012. In 2012, methodologically, I had a really, really poor response rate. I had other problems as well. So, take it with a big grain of sale. Nonetheless, what I seem to see among the people who—god love them—if there are some of you in the room, thank you, who responded to this survey. So, now we've got like the gamut. We've got all kinds of cool things going on. We've got Twitter. We've got video, user videos. We've got—you name it. It's fantastically innovative coverage. These are the largest newspapers in their state and in the country, so they are creative news organizations.

We've got all this great stuff going on, but they were unanimous. Small group. But they were unanimous in their goals. What do we do? What we're proud of in what we do is, we help people make good choices. We, the journalists, help you, the citizens, make good choices. We've got to drill down. We really know how to do this now. [chuckles]

So, I want to tell you just a little more briefly. I don't have a lot of time. Real briefly—real briefly—about some of what I found. Lots and lots of opportunities for users to contribute. But mostly what journalists talked about in their open-ended responses to the questions, they talked about what they were doing is, how that fit into what we do, which was minimally. Didn't really have much of a role on them or much of an influence on them, but they did kind of like the fact, as you've all been talking about this morning, that people could share their stuff, so they could promote our content. That's really good. We really like that. And the traffic was up. Great. We love that too.

Sources of pride is kind of in the same lines. Again, we're about what we do. We killed it. Great! Traffic was really high. We provided good information. It's about information. It's about an information role. Are we engaging citizens? Are we finding new ways to really bring people into the political process and to deal with this problem that citizens don't feel connected to politics? That wasn't really what they were thinking about. They were thinking, "Oh, that's nice that we have this. This is great. But let me tell you about what we did.

Let me tell you about the great election night coverage that we offered and how good it was and how high traffic was."

I get it, but still, I think we're kind of…. There are some other ways we could be thinking about this, would be my personal thought about this. Not to say that what we're doing isn't good, what journalists are doing isn't good, but they're still thinking about it in a pretty traditional way.

I can see the chart. Again, a little bit flaky with the numbers, but you can kind of see the trends there. So, the first two are really of traditional journalistic roles: We provide detail. We provide depth. We're accurate. It's updated. It's timely. Journalists blogs overall do okay.

Multimedia and animation is multimedia and animation stuff, interactive graphics that we're providing. And then we get a few sort of things toward the end here: That users are contributing, but we're not really paying all that much attention. We're offering them. They're there. You can use them.

So, I'll fly through because I'm out of time. I don't want to take too much time. So, lots of stuff going on, as I've just said. They're doing everything— cool stuff, live streaming, tweeting, multiplatform. We're obviously going to see a ton of mobile this time around. And they're offering a ton of user capabilities. There's all kinds of things for users to do. And they're doing it, and they're using it. But the editors aren't really thinking about that as being core to what they value -- is I guess kind of the takeaway point.

So, really, the perception that journalists have of their role in a democratic society, which is central to the way journalists see their role, those thought processes haven't changed a lot. The capabilities have changed enormously, but the core self-perception has not really changed so much. We really think that what they provide—you may think this is correct, but I'll just put it out there and we can talk about it—that what they do is civically valuable. What journalists provide on their websites is a civically valuable offering there.

So, last slide. Not that there's not innovation. There's a ton of innovation. But pride of play still goes to the journalistic contribution. In the journalist's mind, [it] still goes to their own contributions to the democratic process. You may feel that's right or wrong, but that does seem to be what they're thinking.

So, the information that citizens really need to be free and self-governing is—those of you who've read Elements of Journalism will recognize the phrase there—it's the information that we provide. It's what we do. And that is all. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

Joseph Yoo: Hi. Nice to meet you. My name is Joseph Yoo. And we have some colleagues in there and we write together for this paper. I'm going to start with this slide.

Mobile communication is ubiquitous. Most of you and I know all of you already have iPhone and Smartphone. And all of you have already downloaded at least one news application. BBC, CNN, and NBC News. I believe that all of you already downloaded at least one news application. And you might read the news and you might give comment and you might talk about political stuff with your friends and colleagues and family by sending text message and any other kind of message functions.

So, our scholars already examined that using mobile devices will increase civic engagement. There are lots of studies, but our scholars have captured how, which means in which way the mobile communication usage will lead to civic engagement.

So broadly, there are two concepts: Interactions and Mediation. The interaction with -- by teaming with media usage and interpersonal discussion, and mediation effect of interpersonal discussion towards political participation.

So, the goal of this study is that we examined the influence of mobile application use on political participation, both online and offline forums, from the perspective of differential gains model and the communication mediation model. Differential, I'm going to talk about definition later, but differential gains model assumes that there might be some interaction and moderation effect, while communication mediation model tells that there are some mediation effects of interpersonal communications.

So, I'm going to start with mobile communication and politics. We already have examined political use of mobile technology. As you see in the picture, this is the two southern city China SARS issue. I think that might be the very first utilization of mobile communication for the public and to southern Arab Springs. I think all of you know about this issue. And mobile technology played significant role for publically engaged in politics.

Mobile communication is successful because it's very low cost and easiness to use and portability. It offers individuals the chance to be engaged in political participation and any other political stuff. So, we wanted to examine the pattern of mobile communication, mobile application used for political use and political information, and its impact on political participation.

Before turning on to the definition of Differential Gains Model and Communication Mediation Model, I want to talk briefly about interpersonal communications. Interpersonal communication is regarded as the sole of democracy. And there are two forms of interpersonal communication—online and offline. As we see, mobile devices, one form of online communication

just became the source for the public to consume political information and let individuals engage in interpersonal communication.

I want to briefly talk about the definition of Differential Gains Model and Communication Mediation Model. Dr. Scheufele coined the term Differential Gains Model in 2002, and it argues that the political effects of news media message are contingent upon media's interaction with interpersonal communication. And Communication Mediation Model also coined by Dr. Shah, Dr. Cho, and others in 2005. Tell us that mass communication has an influence on political engagement, but such a relationship is indirect, which means that interpersonal communication mediates the effects of news media toward political participation.

So, we set four hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that the interaction between mobile application use and online communication is positively related to online and offline participation. The second hypothesis is that the interaction between mobile application use and face-to-face communication is positively related to online and offline participation. Our third hypothesis is about…. The first two hypotheses are about Differential Gains Model. And the later, the two hypotheses, hypothesis three and four are about Communication Mediation Model. The hypothesis three argues that online communication mediates the relationship between mobile application use and online and offline political participation. And the fourth hypothesis tells us the face-to-face communication mediates the relationship between mobile application use and online and offline political participation.

We gathered data by using Amazon Mechanical Turk. Crowdsourcing website platform which can allow us to reach various kinds of people to join the survey. We gathered data from one week before to one week after the 2012 presidential election. Total number of survey participants was 1,267. For the Differential Gains Model, we conducted hierarchical linear regression, including interaction terms of mobile communication and mobile technology use and interpersonal communication. And for Communication Mediation Model, we conducted test analysis by using Amazon.

So, our independent variables are age, gender, race, education, income. This is the basic demographic variables. And later, we measured party ties, ideology, and political interests. And those two plots are utilized for variables. We measured the reliance on mobile application for the user consuming and information consuming. And online and face-to-face discussion…. The degree of online and face-to-face discussion was also measured. And for Differential Gains Model, we calculated the interaction term with the reliance on mobile application use for information and political discussion.

This is our basic figure for Communication Mediation Model. Reliance on mobile phone is the exogenous variable, and political participation is indigenous variable, and interpersonal discussion per online and face-to-face

discussions are utilized for mediators. Our dependent variables are two forms of political participation—online and offline participation.

First, I want to talk [about] the results of our Differential Gains Model. Online and offline political participations are predicted by the interaction term with the reliance on use application and online discussions. So, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Online discussion and reliance on mobile application for information consuming also have direct effect towards both forms of political participation. They positively predicted political participation. However, face-to-face discussion have had direct effects toward political participation, but there were two interaction effects with mobile applications. So, our Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

And for the Communication Mediation Model, the path from reliance on mobile application toward political participation was mediated by online discussions. And the path from reliance on mobile applications toward political participation was mediated by online and face-to-face discussions. So, while Hypothesis 3 was fully supported, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported. I'm going back to the hypotheses. So online communication mediated the — fully mediates the online and offline participation, but face-to-face partially mediates the relationship.

Yeah, this is the results for our Differential Gains Model. [You can] see the interaction effect. And this is the final visual for our Communication Mediation Model. You can see that online discussion fully mediates the relationship from reliance on mobile phone toward online political participation.

So, we concluded that mobile communication and online discussion have both mediation and moderation effects. So, also the synergy effect can be attributed to the portability and connectivity and personalization of mobile technology. So, I think online discussion by smartphone can have larger network size with weak ties, which means that anybody—anyone can join the political discussions by using smartphones, and their network size is much bigger than offline discussions.

So, mobile application and online discussion are successfully mobilizing individuals in online activities. Also, we can tell that mobile communication could complement face-to-face talk these days. So, because we already observed a lot, but this study, the limitation of this study is that we should find more timed relationship between the reliance on mobile technology use and interpersonal communication. So, we should find which one goes first and which one goes latter. So, I think for further study, our study can help to complement this one.

I think there are some news developers in here, news application developers. So, this study can be the strong rationale for news media companies to develop cutting edge mobile news applications to bring out or elicit more engagement for the public.

Yeah, thank you.

[Applause.]

Terry Britt: Well, here we are in the digital age of journalism, where it's normal for everybody to go online for their news content. What you might not be aware of is just how much of the past you can also find online. And when I'm talking about the past, I don't mean five weeks ago or five years ago. I mean back when some of us were a little kid and when some of us didn't have names yet.

So, what I did for this research paper is to try to explain what's going on with this engagement with archival news content online. And I found the presence theory fit very well for that. Presence includes six modes of kind of explanations of media engagement effects. One in particular works really well for what we're about to see examples of.

Presence is transportation. Basically, what's going on when you dial up a news broadcast from, say, 1973 on YouTube, you, the viewer, are being put back in time by the content. At the same time, that content has been pushed forward in time through new media to audiences it was really never originally intended for. In some cases, because you hadn't been born yet. So, there's this bidirectional temporality going on that brings the past alive to you and takes that content from the past and moves it forward to new audiences, new generations, and it's all through new media.

I found two excellent recent examples of this sort of engagement with the past. The first one I want to talk about is something that was made available exclusively online back in November 2013 for the 50th anniversary of the Kennedy assassination. CBSNews.com presented an online live stream of their exact coverage of the breaking news from Dallas and all of the aftermath for the three days that followed. And it was all exactly as viewers in 1963—50 years earlier—had seen it on television. You got everything the way it ran back then—the commercials, the updates, the news reports that were coming in, the interviews, everything.

So, what I'm going to do now is play a little video clip. Again, I found this online. But this is the moment that the first news report came in over CBS and our very own Walter Cronkite is the voice that you'll hear. This is how four straight days of mediated time travel began.

[Video clip plays.]

> ***Walter Cronkite:*** *Here is a bulletin from CBS News. In Dallas, Texas, three shots were fired at President Kennedy's motorcade in downtown Dallas. The first reports say that President Kennedy has been seriously wounded by this shooting. More details just arrived. These details about the same as previously. President Kennedy shot today just as his motorcade left downtown Dallas. Mrs. Kennedy jumped up and grabbed Mr. Kennedy. She called, "Oh, no!" The motorcade sped on. United Press says that the wounds for President Kennedy perhaps could be fatal. Repeating, a bulletin from CBS News: President Kennedy has been shot by a would-be assassin in Dallas, Texas. Stay tuned to CBS News for further details.*

> ***Commercial:*** *It takes more than an instant to make a real cup of coffee. That's why Nescafe has come up with a new kind of coffee. It's more than an instant. It's new minute brew Nescafe. Anybody can make….*

[End of video clip.]

That's right, folks, even when you've just heard shocking news that will wind up becoming one of the most pivotal points in American history, there's nothing like a good, old cup of Nescafe. [laughter]

So, moving onto the second case example that I found online. There is a company called British Pathé. Have any of you by chance heard of them? Some. OK, not very many, but a few. British Pathé is the legacy company of one of the major producers and distributors of the old cinematic newsreels that showed in cinemas and theatre houses all around the world. And before television news came of age, that was how a lot of people got their news from around the world. These reels played before the feature film that everybody had gone to see that evening.

So, British Pathé now owns a huge library. 85,000-plus individual videos of news and events from most of the 20th century, from literally the turn of the century, around 1900, all the way to about the mid-1970's. Last year, and actually about a year ago in April, the people at British Pathé made what I think is the awesome decision to make that entire library—all 85,000-plus pieces of content—available as a YouTube channel. Accessible to anyone with an internet connection.

Sorry, I forgot to put my slide up there. But yeah, so, here's all this enormous amount of news and history from the 20th century now that you can basically punch up anytime on your tablet, laptop, mobile phone. So, on the main YouTube channel page for British Pathé, there's a little introductory video that you get to see. And really, I thought about, well, you know, maybe I should select something, you know, a certain historical event or something like that. But really, this introductory video kind of, I think, best

explains, you know, what they have and what they're really all about. So, I'm going to play that one for you.

[Video plays.]

> **Narrator:** *We are British Pathé. With more than 80,000 videos, we captured the 20th century on film: the building of the Titanic, the first flight of the Concord, World War I and World War II, the Queen, Marilyn, Mohammed Ali, or the Beatles. Tragedies and glorious events. If it happened, we were there. Discover our playlist to see films we've picked out especially for you. Discover the 20th century like you've never seen it before—here at British Pathé. Click 'subscribe' for regular features and highlights.*

[End of video.]

So with all that video content to select from, and again, we're talking about most of the 20th century with, you know, a lot of historical events. You've got two world wars. You know, they mentioned the Beatles [and] Martin Luther King, Jr. Just more than you can imagine. So, you might be sitting here thinking, "Well, I've got a pretty good idea of what the most popular video on their YouTube channel is, what the most watched video is. You'd probably be wrong. In doing my research, I found clocking in at 3.7-million views to this date a 1969 news report on the Mr. Universe competition. [laughter] And my only comment to that is, seriously, people?

[Someone comments from audience. Inaudible.]

I guess so, yeah. It obviously was. But, you know, that's the beauty of the past being available to us now through new media. Whether you like big muscles or big moments in history, chances are you can find it somewhere online.

So, a few points I want to make in closing. First of all, I think what's taken place in the last few years with the addition of all of this content from the past is a greater awareness now in not only the United States, but really worldwide, of the importance of archives. I see a lot of archives starting up or being expanded.

I took a class here last semester with a professor, Carolyn Frick, in the Radio Television Film Department, who runs Texas Archive of the Moving Image. That's one such [example]. And I think this is going to be a trend that continues, and not just with videos, but print media as well, radio archives, and even digital webpages [and] multimedia content.

There are concerns though. One, of course, is copyright issues. I did a study last year, another study, talking to some people who kind of make it their hobby to put up archival content that they've found. And they ran into

problems with, you know, YouTube channels being taken down or content being taken down on copyright claims.

Also, back in February, Vint Cerf with Google did a BBC interview in which he expressed his concerns about a forthcoming digital dark age, where the problem in the far future is that the technology in place for digital content might not be backwards compatible, in a sense, with the operating systems that we use today and the digital content that's generated for those. So, those are things that will have to be addressed if we are to prevent, as he put it, a huge loss of time represented by all the digital mediated content during that time.

The last point I want to make is maybe something you can take home with you. A long time from now, scholars who haven't been born yet are going to be studying the earliest era of digital journalism. And for those of us who are still around, you may encounter some of that scholarship, and it might include archived webpages, journals, and videos, including the one that's being recorded right now from ISOJ.

And before you realize what's going on, your mind will start to become flooded with memories of being at ISOJ and listening to all the great ideas and all the new technologies, the new friends you made over pints of water, and the old friends you were glad to get one more April weekend in Austin with. Just perhaps you might remember that year that there was a man on stage who told you [that] you'd be thinking about all those things. [laughter]

I will close with this. With a wink and a grin toward David Lowenthal, the past may still be a foreign country, but new media has sure made the borders a whole lot closer. Thank you for your kind attention. Hook 'em Horns!

[Applause.]

Fiona Martin: I think I'm obligated to say, good day, mate. I would like to shake things up a bit. It's the last session. You're probably half asleep. Can you put your hand up if you have been abused online? OK. Yeah, about half of you. Very tentative, some people. Keep it up if you've been abused as part of GamerGate. No. Some brave souls maybe. I was. I had the displeasure to post a very innocuous comment about GamerGate. And my whole Twitter stream lit up like this. And I was told by one fellow that he'd deleted all my games and rats would hiss at me in the streets. That was actually one of the nicer things that was said. [laughter]

This is the first stage of a project that's funded by the Australian Research Council looking at how media companies can host more civil productive conversations online. And I started off being interested in how you could control abuse and make things nicer in these new social spaces. But since

I've been working the last 12 months, I've actually become more interested in how you build more inclusive commenting spaces.

That's what the paper is about today. Indeed, one of my findings from this project [from] the last 12 months of sifting through data from 15 major news sites internationally was that women, or rather female identified users, make up around about 20-something-percent generally of the commenters on news sites. As low as 3% on *The Guardian*. And the most, 35% from *The Texas Tribune.* Kudos to you guys.

So comment sections aren't as inclusive as we might have thought. Now, social inclusion is a way of talking about how comments and news sharing more broadly—because of course when we share news on Facebook or Twitter or wherever, YouTube, Instagram, we tend to comment on it as well—how this sort of commenting can now be seen by policymakers as part of being fully participative in your political and cultural life.

In European commission debates, it's now referred to as digital inclusion, which is placing a bit too much emphasis on the digital, I think. It's actually the inclusion we're interested in. I gather that inclusion is not a policy concept that's popular here, but it's good to see that it is actually becoming more recognized in liberal research. Here, we've got the America's Quarterly/ Annual Survey.

I know in the current media climate that a lot of news editors may not be interested in whether providing comments supports all these high-minded ideals, like inclusional political participation, media diversity, which I think is kind of important, or even cultural citizenship. But the bottom line, this is a question of media economics. Because if a large proportion of your audience is not engaged with your news to the point that they will comment on it or share it, then you've got a problem.

And I think before editors dismiss or journalists dismiss comment sections as a space for the crazies, you know, one of those, "We'll just leave them all over there," you know, as crappy or valueless, or even as some publications have done recently, to abandon them altogether, I think you need to understand a little bit more about why this sort of adversarial dynamic is being set up in these spaces. They are news social spaces. It's not like church or meetings where we have hundreds of years of socialization into how to behave there. We don't teach our children necessarily how to behave in these spaces.

So, to understand whether the commenting systems that we have might favor some users over others or some types of uses, I looked at how easy it was to actually make a comment on 40 of the top news media sites around the world. And I thought, well, you know, it must be fairly easy. I took ten sites from the UK, ten sites from the US, two big diverse markets, and I took

ten sites from Australia and ten sites from Denmark, two very small, incredibly concentrated markets.

I also took a cross-media sample, which is uncommon for participatory study, so I had legacy newspaper sites, broadcasters, and digital native sites that I was looking at. And what I found was a bit surprising. It wasn't as easy for me to comment on the news as I thought it would be. What I found was that only 55% of the online services that I looked at hosted freely accessible, regular, in-house news comments. Most of these were print organizations. Now that's that section there.

This section here, the paywall section, six publications put up paywalls around commenting. So, they recognized that there was value in this practice, but they were only letting subscribers have access to it. Now, the problem about this, I mean, you can understand why they're doing it. Yeah, it offsets the cost of moderation considerable. However, what it can set up, it deters casual users. And you'll see why that's a problem in a minute. And it also could support that echo chamber effect with regular subscribers. And certainly, we're seeing that in some sites that do set up paywalls around commenting.

Several sites also—and they're not represented here—but several sites also offered commenting on news and analysis, but it was pretty hard to predict what topics would be open, and indeed, when. So, you couldn't always bet that you could comment on newsworthy topics.

The thing that was interesting was that this big slice here, which was mainly broadcasters and one-third of the digital native sites relied only on social media channels for their commenting platforms. Now, I'm putting it out there that this is an access issue. You may not think it is, but Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., provide a naïve form of accessibility. They provide ubiquity without governors and without accountability.

Lee Rainey and a team from the Pew Center recently showed that 42% of Facebook users were not paying to comment on controversial news topics, like the Snowden revelations, because of perceived social judgment from their peers or from the perception that there would be political or corporate surveillance of their posts.

There's also a problem of technical accessibility with social media and the way it is implemented on the websites of major news corporations. Just finding the icons, working out which ones, whereabouts on the page they are is sometimes difficult. Sometimes at the top. Sometimes at the bottom of the story. Sometimes they are in a sidebar. They are different colors. The buttons and the widgets don't always look the same. And the guy from Vox is probably not here anymore, but I went to Vox Mobile and it took me two to five seconds to actually work out where I could comment. Because the top

buttons are actually *their* branded social media channels, and if you want to comment on *yours*, you have to go to the bottom. So, there you go.

Knight from Grist taught me yesterday that just by moving the social badges from the bottom of the page to the top of the page that they increased their shares by 100%. And when you increase your news shares, of courses, you're increasing your comments, because people tend to comment when they share. OK. So, design is actually a really important fundamental part of recognizing users and building that inclusiveness into your system.

OK. I worked out inclusiveness as a problem, so then I focused on the in-house commenting systems of 15 really high engagement sites. By high engagement sites, I mean, sites that had a stated capacity to innovation and commenting. And sometimes they've won awards.

In this big data part of the study, computational analytics, we collected comments from sites in the UK, US, and Australia, five sites each. And over three months, we scraped and then indexed nine-million comments and the stories that they responded to. We met the comparative scale and scope, and that's what you can see here. These are the actually high, high engagement sites. *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* up here. *New York Times, The Washington Post, Sydney Morning Herald,* and *The Huffington Post.*

Now, what that showed me was that there are distinct patents in engagement across these sites. These two sites here have both been really aggressive in their innovation around commenting, but they also support really open styles of commenting. So, the open journalism model of *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* just opens up every story for comment. So, it's not hard to find where you can comment there. Both of those organizations have worked with things like ranking tools, like up and down votes. In fact, *The Daily Mail* introduced up and down votes in 2009.

So, they were early, fast movers in the innovation space, which allows for full participation that is user controlled—flagging abuse, things like that. They give more inclusion into the conversation than some of the other organizations.

Then you've got this group here down in the corner. They are the quality broadsheet newspapers. They open only a very few stories and they moderate tightly. So, their mantra is quality. They want to make sure that the comments that go up are really good.

Huff Post, I talk about the paper. I'll have to zip through this a little bit. Here, on this longitudinal number, you have the public broadcasters. They're the ones that open up opinion, news opinion, analysis only, but they have a lot of comments from very few stories.

And down here in the corner, you've got all the local sites, including *The Texas Tribune.* The biggest bubble is *The Liverpool Echo* and that's because it talks about football or soccer. That's all soccer in there, I swear. The interesting outlier here is a site called *The Conversation,* which many of you may not have heard about, but which is a university-funded analysis, academic analysis site, which has expanded. It's now got three editions: one here in the US, one in Australia, and one in the UK. And I write for it and a lot of academics do. It's a pro-am site. It's called *The Conversation,* but it actually doesn't have a lot of conversation going on at the moment, because like *The Texas Tribune*, it has focused its early development on content rather than conversation, rather than building that sort of inclusive network, but that's its next step.

All right. So, we see these changes. I'm going to flip through. I'm way over time. Am I? Yeah. Just a little bit. OK. Who's commenting? A very small group. How low ratio? That's kind of expected. What I didn't expect from the study was this: This comes from a gender analysis of names, user names, on the top 100 commenters of each of the sites that I looked at. Here are the women's names. Here are the men's names. And these ones here are pseudonyms that I couldn't decide one way or another. Now, Emma Pearson has done a similar study for *The New York Times*, and our data came out more or less the same, which is kind of interesting.

What we see is here, where you can see *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*, the two lowest figures for women's participation. And I'm guessing here that female identified users are actually women. It's possible there a couple of guys who like women's names. These two figures here correlate with very high rates of pseudonyms. So, it could be that women are adopting pseudonyms in order to avoid abuse. We don't yet know. The interesting thing though is that they—the patterns follow across the sample. So, they're not just about the international or the metro sites. This is the public service sites. These two, the BBC and the ABC, have really low levels of participation by female users or female identified users. Higher though for pseudonyms. So, are there women in there somewhere? We don't know.

When I say, we don't know, I scraped this data, so I don't have streams. I can't actually identify who any of these users are unless I go back to the ABC or the BBC and ask them, will they let me in and look at their data? And actually, most organizations are not interested in being part of comparative studies. They want to be exclusively studied.

OK. So, here's the final example from the local services. And there's *The Texas Tribune* with 35%, the highest percentage of female identified users participating, commenting. There are lots of good reasons why *The Texas Tribune* might have a higher participation by women. I can't talk about them there. I'd love to talk about them in the questions.

But I think -- the title of this paper is called *Having Your Two Cents Worth.* And that term comes from having a small gamble on cards. Commenting is risky. We risk being abused. We risk being faced off by people. We risk having our ideas challenged. If we want to make these sections less adversarial, less open to that sort of really nasty dynamics that put people off taking part, and indeed, if you go back to the long tale slide—ah, there it is—this one here, which shows that most people only comment once or twice, you don't want to deter people who are going to comment on your news in an irregular way, who might provide the lead that you need or might be there to give you content [or who] give you ideas in the middle of a natural disaster. You don't want to be deterring them because your comment sections are adversarial.

So, I think what this suggests, and it's very early days in the study, but news media companies need to look at all of those facets that I talk about—design interaction, participation, and accessibility in order to produce more inclusive commenting networks. Thank you.

[Applause.]

Q&A Session:

Mike: I was going to identify myself, but Jake did it for me. [laughter]

Jane Singer: We know you.

Mike: Yeah. And my question is for Jane. I'm curious, you know, you looked particularly at campaigns and election coverage. And I know that has some particular aspects that are really distinct to it from other types of journalism. You know, election night coverage, in particular, is oriented towards speed, and it seems like maybe potentially a little bit less oriented towards interactivity; although, the possibilities are definitely there. And I'm wondering if you've kind of looked at that as a potential sort of confounding variable in the sense of, what sort of things did you sense in your responses were, "Well, this might be more campaign journalism," as opposed to their attitudes towards digital journalism as a whole? And I know you've done a ton of research over that entire era on digital journalism as a whole. And I'm wondering if there were particular things that you said, "Well, this is more of a campaign journalism thing," as opposed to, "This really is reflective of how these editors might have viewed all of digital journalism at this time."

Jane Singer: Yeah. No. Thanks, Mike. That's a really good point. When I did the first study in 2000, I asked questions, and I kind of thought I was asking about their campaign coverage, and their responses focused so heavily on election night. They were really pumped about their election night coverage, which, as you say, I mean, that is -- people want to know the results and that is going to be very information oriented. So, I tried to frame the questions in a way without changing them too much, because I was trying to

ask the same thing over time, so that they wouldn't just focus on election night when I was really interested in the campaign. Because I think it's the campaign where there's those opportunities to draw people in and to understand what matters to people and to get people talking with each other about what matters to them and all those kinds of things, when there are fewer opportunities on election night. So, I think there's a variety of things going on there.

I do think that it is kind of a cultural sense among journalists about what they do. And to the point about educating the managers, these were the managers. [laughs] These were the editors. So, it wasn't really so much the journalists. These were the people who were actually in charge of the websites. So, my sense is that it's a very kind of strong self-perception. You know, we're sort of socialized to see ourselves as being foundational to democracy. And I think it's hard to let people into that tense in an inclusive way perhaps.

You know, Fiona's really interesting study about comments. I mean, as we all know, comments in particular tend to be kind of raw and abusive. And so, I think if journalists are thinking about letting users into the conversation or letting citizens into the conversation, that maybe what they're thinking about. I'm thinking, well, we don't see the value of it. So, I think there's a lot of different things going on there. And that perhaps we're not thinking about ways in which we might make this a valuable and civically oriented space for true participation. We're kind of falling back on what's easier, which is delivering information.

If that answers your question. But there's a lot going on there, I think.

Jake Batsell: Thanks. Do we have another question?

Jo Ellen Kaiser: Hi. I'm Jo Ellen Kaiser. I'm the Executive Director of the Media Consortium, and I have a question for Fiona. My members…. We represent 75 independent, progressive, North American sites. And they had a lot of trouble during GamerGate. I was really interested in…. I know for a lot of our members, they make the comment sections difficult, because they are trying to keep out abusers who could abuse women commenters. So, it's really interesting that your studies are showing that the more difficult it is to get into the comment section, it's actually hurting women commenters. But I was wondering if you have examples of organizations that handle comment sections well in a way that both deterred people who were going to be abusive and welcome people who might not otherwise comment, whether they were women or people from other disadvantaged groups.

Fiona Martin: That's the next step, Jo, is to find out, you know, which organizations are doing it well. So *The Texas Tribune* has actually agreed for me to come back and ask them some questions about, what are they doing? And I already had a discussion with John Jordan, whose been their digital go-

to person for ages. He suggested look at -- these are really specific cultural contexts, so you've got to look at things like Texan women are really outspoken, apparently. Really keen to talk no shit about anything. [chuckles] So, you know, it's quite possible that they are not deterred by that really robust conversation.

So, that would be a factor, but there are other factors perhaps, like they took a very tough stance on moderation. And they actually personally contacted some of the really abusive characters that were in their system and just said, "We're banning you every time you turn up now unless you start to follow, you know, some codes of behavior," which worked with some and didn't with others, but it did actually fosters that conversation.

There are all sorts of other factors, like the first post that you put on a story will determine the tone of the conversation. So, your moderation practices, what you choose to post first, what sort of users you promote. All of those tools that I was talking about [like] up and down voting. It's really unclear how all of that works, so I think case studies would be great.

I've done one already at the ABC with a group, long-standing group called Self-Service Science, a scientific news commenting forum. And they went through all of these disasters, including having kind of attempted suicides on the site and what-not. And they now have a series of, I suppose you'd call them social controls, including having like peer support people [chuckles] and honored citizens. So, they actually give status to individuals who answer questions and guide other people and kind of act a little bit as like pseudo moderators as well.

So, you know, it's early days. I'm really interested to find out if you can suggest some communities that would be good to look at. Let me know.

Rosental Calmon Alves: I have just a comment for Britt about the transportation. Since the very beginning if ISOJ, I thought about that.

Terry Britt: Yeah.

Rosental Calmon Alves: And we have all the videos, all the transcripts, most of the PowerPoints, all the papers since 1999 online. A couple of times I've received email from someone. I remember one from Poland. The guy was saying, "This is an Eldorado." It's amazing. However, we had to change technology, because in the first years I was using Real Media.

Terry Britt: Right.

Rosental Calmon Alves: And if I kept using Real Media, it would not…. But I thought that this conference would be not only for now, but it would be for the future. Because I thought it was, you know, being a series of testimonials of the evolution of journalism in the course of time.

Terry Britt: Right. Yeah.

Rosental Calmon Alves: So, I hope you're going to remember that in 2057 when you….

Terry Britt: Well, exactly. I mean, what you just said is exactly what I was talking about in the presentation with the greater awareness now of organizations like universities, symposia, conferences like ISOJ, media corporations, local television stations and local newspapers. Because you get a lot of content that you're not going to find anywhere else about a specific time and place and things that took place. And the thing about it is, you know, a lot of the research work that I've started to do pertains to collective memory and how we build memory through media content, concepts of temporal consciousness, [and] how we structure time in our minds through the use of media content. So, I think there's a greater awareness than there was many decades ago.

Case example with a lot of the local television stations [who] did this horrible practice called *wiping*, where they would reuse the tapes that the station had and thereby totally erasing from existence so much local programming content. But it also speaks to the concern that I mentioned about, you know, not so much 10-15 years from now, but when we start talking 40, 50, 100 years from now, is the technology still going to be able to read the digital content that has been generated in a given period of time? So, hopefully, answers are being worked out to ensure that it can.

Jake Batsell: I'm told we have time for one last question. So, I'd like to ask Joseph.

Joseph Yoo: Yes.

Jake Batsell: From a user's perspective, when you talk about engagement and political engagement, is there much of a distinction between mobile participation and just general online participation? You know, for example, are you more or less likely to comment or share using a mobile device versus a laptop or a desktop? And is that distinction blurring even more as mobile becomes more pervasive?

Joseph Yoo: For the study, I think I strictly -- I did not strictly differentiate the web participation but online participation and mobile participation. Maybe the participations are mixed maybe at the time. It was taken in 2012. So, it was mixed. The participation might be mixed. And the people might use web, and people might use mobile, their iPhone. So, yeah, for the study, we should see how mobile participation are fully worked and are fully working, yeah.

Jake Batsell: Mm-hmm. Well, great. It was an excellent study as were all four of them today. So, let's give our panelists a round of applause.

[Applause.]