

## 2005 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

### Day 1, Panel 1: Participatory Journalism in Action: The Cases of OhMyNews.com, wikinews.org, and the blogs

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**Moderator: Lorraine Branham**, Director, School of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin

**Panelists:**

**Jean Min**, Deputy Chief, International Division Of Ohmynews.Com

**J.D. Lasica**, Journalist and Blogger

**Chuck Olsen**, Blogger and Director Of Blogumentary

**Wayne Saewyc**, Editor and Admin, Wikinews.Org

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**LORRAINE BRANHAM:** And we have four experts up here. I am not an expert, by the way - who's really going to give us some interesting insight into this rapidly emerging new form of journalism. I'd like to introduce some of those experts to you. Each of them is going to give a presentation which we're going to try to keep to fifteen minutes, hopefully, because we want to allow time when they're finished for your questions, and I'm sure you'll have plenty of them.

So, our first person to my left is Jean Min, who is the deputy chief of the international division of OhMyNews, and Dan talked a little bit about OhMyNews, and I made reference to it. It's a fascinating participatory journalism project in South Korea and you're going to hear a lot about it with our first presenter.

You're also going to hear from Chuck Olsen, who's a blogger and director of "Blogumentary," who's going to talk a bit about that form of participatory journalism.

Then we'll move on to J.D. Lasica, who's a journalist and blogger.

And last, but by no means least, Wayne Saewyc who's the editor and administrator of wikinews.org, which Dan also talked a little bit about.

So why don't we go ahead and get started, Jean. And I think, Chuck, you'll have to move a little bit to the side, you and I. But, you two are fine.

**JEAN MIN:** The title of this presentation is, "The Citizen Reporter." That might sound a little provocative to you, (inaudible). Actually, according to Mr. Oh, every citizen is a journalist.

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So, I want to explain --- (hunts around lectern) OK, how do I operate? That's when Oh My News was founded. You may find a lot of twos, and it's what Mr. Oh (the founder of Oh My News) intended. He said, OK, this is a second generation media. I don't want a first generation media.' So that's how he selected this time and date.

Here's a new concept. Every citizen is a reporter. And Mr. Oh, one of the things he was thinking was he didn't invent this concept. Actually, every citizen used to be a journalist. And now I want to why is this happening?

If you look back at the past hundred years in media history, you've been looking at the birth of newspaper and TVs and Internet. The scale of the speed of communication has been expanding dramatically. So that's the good news. But the bad news is that we've been losing the interactivity of the communication that (indicates screen) we got a list -- develop between the mass media. So suddenly, with the introduction of the newspaper and the TV, we start to have a whole new profession called journalist.

So think back to a hundred years ago, in a small town, like every citizen is a journalist. They have some news, like, "Hey, my son got married," or something. It's news to them, so they can share (with) each other. But trouble was, the scale of diffusion was confined to the town.

So it's a very interesting situation at the moment with the introduction of Internet, now you have Internet, you have blogs and citizen journalists and bulletin boards, various stuff. We both have a scale of diffusion -- it is global now. Then you have of course interactivity. So, with this background on new revolutionary media environment, we'd have to say, citizens participate in journalism finally.

So here's a little comparison between the old media, and the new media. OK, you have a newsmaker and news sources. The journalist collects the news, and they interview them, and deliver them to the audience. That's the old media model.

So here's the Oh My News model. OK, there's still famous people, entertainers, politicians. We do collect the news from them also, and deliver them to our audience. But if you look very closely at the arrow (indicates screen), it's two-way. And then while we allow our readers to have a debate on our site, so it is they tell each other. They don't simply listen to Oh My News, but they talk to each other.

There's one more. The newsmaker can connect to the audience directly. So here is some interesting situation. Like, many politicians are very unhappy about the media. They think the media is not representing them correctly, and there are great tensions going on between the news media and the newsmaker. So, in the Korean situation, if you have some issue with the media, they will post their own statement on their own homepage. And each parties will have their own reporters, and a lot of them happen to be Oh My News readers. So they can correct the politicians' statement, take them to the readers, and they share with each other.

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So this is a way to bypass the news media anyway. So Oh My News is in the middle of this very chaotic communication situation. So that's the fundamental difference between the old media system and the Oh My News system.

So this background on Mr. Oh Yeon-Ho explains that, "Journalists aren't some exotic species. They are everyone who seeks to take new developments, put them into writing, and then share them with others." That is a new definition of journalist, as citizen reporters when they have a new media.

And if you think about many of the citizen journalists, citizen reporters of Oh My News, in the open outside, they try to copy some news formula. You know, they have a very clear idea of what news are. They have read newspaper and watched TV, so they have a certain formula already imprinted in their brain. So they try to copy this style.

But Mr. Oh talked to them. He said, "Please, don't do that. Please be yourself." It shouldn't be a right answer for carrying such a message. So Mr. Oh said, "The news, as you know, is simply a byproduct of the 20th century. So if you have new media, if you have a better way to carry out your story, please be yourself."

So that's why Oh My News has a variety of new formats, new forms of articles. One of the reason many readers come to Oh My News is that they can see kind of content they cannot see anywhere else. So our news content can be very colorful this way.

So, since the foundation of Oh My News we'd begun with 727 citizen reporters. Now, the number of citizen reporters is over 37,000. If you look back at the past five years, there has been some important political events in Korea, like general election, and presidential election, and another general election last year. So as you can see, the data slightly goes up during these important political events, so the interpretation is that our citizen reporters are very much interested in political issues. So whenever we have big political events, the number of newly joining Oh My News citizen reporters increased.

So they are, at the moment, overwhelmingly male, and they are from all walks of life. There are even some professional journalists that are joining us as a citizen reporter. So we really want to know why they have their own paper or media or something and why they are joining us as a citizen reporter? Maybe they are unhappy about their editors. Or, because Oh My News is online, it's a news media where you can give them unlimited space. So maybe they want to write some longer story? That's my explanation.

So, by age, they are overwhelmingly young, almost all in their twenties and thirties, and some in their forties. The youngest citizen reporter is just 12. He's writing stories from the United States.

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So you might want to know why they are writing for Oh My News. We do give them some money. It's not a lot, though. For the typical story, they are only given about 20 U.S. dollars, so I don't think money's the reason they write spend their time to write for Oh My News.

So first three eyeballs. Like advertisers would pay for the space, why they are paying with money? Because they are buying eyeballs this way. And then the citizen reporter also wants to have some eyeballs. So suppose you have some political statement to make. It's not like you're writing in your own diary or something. So you want to have a lot of as many audiences as possible. So there's a fundamental desire, an inherent desire for that to have a lot of eyeballs. So Oh My News is giving them those eyeballs.

How much? As much as a hundred thousand eyeballs in some cases.

And secondly, there's an instant feedback, so you have written and you want to know how your readers will think about your story. And there's an instant feedback. Up to 3,500 readers can comment on a single story, even in just two hours. So if you want to have a figure of an idea what they are thinking of your story.

And there's also a sense of empowerment, and as I told you, (inaudible). OK. So they are writing topics they already have access to. I already explained, some people really try to copy professional reporter and pretend to be a professional reporter in their writing. So we told them, please don't do that. Write anything you can write.

So they are writing essay-style readings on daily life, and then columns on various political and social issues. You have an opinion, right? So you saw the news, you have an opinion, so they will write something. And film and book reviews. Media criticisms, mostly on conservative, established media.

So, on any given day, they submit between 150 to 200 stories per day. That's over 70 percent of the news content we produce during the weekend. During the weekdays, uh, it really goes down to 50 percent, because there's a lot of hard news that's generated during the weekdays, so that's what the change is.

So the fundamental question would be so they are all amateurs, so how would you insure credibility of the stories written by citizen reporters? So we have some it's not really prep, but we have some system in place. Like we do background checks before they can join us as citizen reporters, so they are not allowed to use a pseudonym or something else. They have to use real names.

And it's not like a blog. No news can appear on the front pages until they've passed through the fact-checking processes. So we have about 12 dedicated copy editors, and they spend the whole day reading the articles, and changing them, and fact-checking them.

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So during the process, about 30 percent are rejected for various reasons. So our copy editor has a huge fight all day long "Tell me why my story's rejected!" It's a tension going on.

Some sensitive stories contain claims of potentially damaging news-making stories get more thorough fact-checking processes. I don't have much time, but I want to give you this episode.

About three or four months ago, one of our citizen reporters has written a very long story from Germany. Samsung's Chairman (inaudible) Lee visited Germany last year. and then our citizen reporter joined Oh My News almost three years ago, but he hasn't written a thing until last year. And suddenly, he wrote something that Chairman Lee visited some type of German operation for his own personal holiday.

But (inaudible) spent over three months preparing for his personal journey. (inaudible) His story was so outrageous, that such a global company like Samsung would spend their corporate hours for the chairman's own personal journey time. So he thought it was very outrageous, unfair, and he has waited about three months until he wrote a very long story, detailing what actually happened, how Samsung employees misused their corporate time and money for the Chairman Lee's own purpose.

So we thought, "This is great news! It's sure news! You broke the exclusive story. But there's a lot of factual stuff that we are not sure can it contain some errors or mixed message or something? Samsung's a huge corporation. If we get involved in legal fight, if we lose the game, then we will be in trouble. So you have to be very careful about that.

So we spent about one month communicating with the reporter, citizen reporter, asking each sentence, one by one, OK, "you describe some episode, blah blah blah," until we are quite sure that the last tiny part of factual stuff we just postpone final publication of the story. And so we spend one month until we publish the story. And it made a great repercussion among Korean society because Chairman Lee has been regarded as very good in Korean society recently.

So that's how we do that. But that sort of stuff does not happen every day. We'd be in trouble then. We cannot spend a month or something. Mostly they do write some softer news. So by design, you don't have to be very nervous about the everyday outcome.

So here's a little comparison between New York Times digital and Oh My News. I mean, New York Times Internet edition. My impression is that New York Times considers the web as simply a pipe for news delivery. OK, we sold the news using paper channel, right? We're going to recycle the news for the web edition. So it's simply a pipe.

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But Oh My News considers the web as a playground. So nickname of the Internet is cyber-space, OK? It's a space, playground. So we consider the web as a playground.

And if you compare news consumption styles, New York Times says, "OK, I will produce and you will consume. If you don't understand, then just please leave." And Oh My News says, "We will produce the news together, and we will consume the news together. And because it is a place, we'll stay here having fun."

So if I can compare the attitude, The New York Times might be a modernistic elite media. If I can borrow Dan's expression, Oh My News would be the post-modernistic "we" media.

OK. A lot of questions from Western journalists visiting Oh My News' office is how citizen reporters compare with bloggers. Whenever you think about the theory of participatory journalism, always what comes up is "blog." Blog, blogging and bloggers.

I want to give you some Mr. Michael Goldharbor, one of my favorite economists, he tried to explain, what is truly valuable on the web? Is it information? His answer is attention, which is eyeballs. If you write anything on the web, because you are writing that (inaudible), because you are writing that for eyeballs, people's attention. That's why you spend your time and money on the web.

So here's how that goes along with the process of Oh My News. Our citizen reporter produces news and opinion, and our news audience consumes that. In return, they get eyeballs, and some money that's good news. That's compared to blogging because all the news goes through a single channel which is Oh My News, and Oh My News is a strong brand, so that's a more rewarding experience for them instead of writing his own blog.

So all in all, a lot more eyeballs than blogging. Plenty of views and (inaudible) are guaranteed if you're writing for Oh My News as a citizen reporter.

And there's also professional peer review by Oh My News editors. So after the copy editing process, everything the editor realized their writing is much, much better, way better than their initial submission. We fact-check them, we correct the typos, we polish their sentences. We even sometimes give them some images, additional images and good headlines. And headline writing is very important to catching people's attention. So they are generally satisfied after the process.

Also, there's instant fame because Oh My News is already famous media in society, it's not think about it. Your name is up high just like a famous reporter on top page. So that's news to them. So, "Honey, I'm on Oh My News! Come here!" (laughter) And they already talk like that.

So that's a powerful brand. Powerful brand if you can find a relation's name on a powerful brand, that's a satisfaction. And that's also sense of solidarity.

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We do limit the main page, space on the main page. Because the fundamental principle of economics is that scarcity makes value. So the top space is very limited. There's a threat of competition to grab the few space on the main page. So that's one of the reasons why the citizen reporters are enjoying writing for Oh My News, and it's no small motivator.

So here's the Oh My News editorial process. Citizen reporters there's over 30,000 of them will write some stuff, and there's a screening process, we call it "news gorilla desk," and then publication.

And we do have professional reporters. That's over 48 of them. They will write the kind of news we're already familiar with. There's also screening process and final publication.

So as you can see, both citizen reporters and staff reporters are competing for the same spot. So there's even a chance that some staff reporter's story can be shot down just because some citizen reporter wrote a much better story.

It's a little graph showing the traffic between the weekday and the weekend. During the weekend, traffic goes down.

This graph shows that a month of articles written by citizen reporters divided by professional reporters. So, during the weekend, the professionals goes up. That means that our citizen reporters will still write a lot of stories, even during the weekend.

Uh, let's skip this page.

We do have a web TV operation as well. We allow a viewer to leave a message while watching the web TV on PC monitor screen they can leave a message. And that's how we run over 85,000 reader comments in just 6 hours. So while they are watching the TV signal right here, they can talk, they can have a debate. So that's more involving.

Uh, I want to skip this.

Lastly, I want to show you we have very unique tipping system. We do give citizen reporters about 20 dollars for the top story, if he make it to top story, we pay him about 20 U.S. dollars. But we implement a new system last year enabling our readers to give tips on the net to each citizen reporter. So think about you are in London, and suddenly you catch the street musician. Because really it's so beautiful, you stop and listen, and what do you do after that? You give some money.

So the same thing is happening on the web. If you are satisfied with a citizen reporter's story, you can give money. How? Mobile phone tipping, and credit card, and even bank transactions, we allow them to do that way. And one citizen reporter

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made money over 30,000 U.S. dollars within two days this way. So we didn't expect that thing to happen, but we were surprised as well. But it can happen in time.

So do I have time? I want to let go my story here. OK?

**LORRAINE BRANHAM:** Yes, yes. (applause) Chuck, why don't you go ahead and get set up.

And we'll have time for questions for Jean Min after everybody completes their presentations. Hold your questions. Thank you.

**CHUCK OLSEN:** Oops. OK. How do we get audio? OK.

**LORRAINE BRANHAM:** Oh, this is interesting. We're going from "We the media" to "I am the media." The blogger viewpoint.

**CHUCK OLSEN:** Sorry about that. Well I'm Chuck Olsen and I made a documentary feature film about blogs called "Blogumentary," not too cleverly. And of course, I'm also a blogger. So I'm going to -- those are hard acts to follow, Dan Gillmor and Jean Min from Oh My News. So I'm just going to start out with a hastily assembled five minute clip, it's actually about three different clips just kind of meshed together from my documentary.

They kind of give a little background on this is basically focusing on sort of the citizen journalism, grassroots media angle of blogging. Obviously many different strains of blogging, but I'm going to focus on the citizen journalism aspect.

Let's see if I can (film begins; inaudible for 5 minutes)

Once again, a little taste of what's in "Blogumentary." So Rosental mentioned that we're all professional news media and researchers, and I'm a complete amateur at both those things. I like to call this my blog-and-pony show.

I'm a token blogger, I think, at the conference. I create media about what interests me. I was going to say I write about what interests me, but actually, increasingly, I make video about what interests me almost as much as I write. I video-blog probably about once a week, sometimes more frequently than that. And I write probably every day.

But I think, you know, we're living in an age where we're all probably media makers, and bloggers aren't just writers. It's podcasting, it's video-blogging, they're all just different aspects of the same things. We all have the power to create media, and we are.

Obviously, I'm not a professional journalist. I can only call myself a hobby journalist. Sometimes what I do is like journalism, but I do what most bloggers do, which is link to things I find interesting and comment on them.

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And sometimes I get original information. In the video realm, a political blog I'm part of, we interviewed a library board candidate, which is a real kind of hyper-local thing to do. Most cities don't have library boards. You probably, maybe don't know what that is. It actually turned out to be really interesting. I didn't know a lot about our library system and the financing. There's a lot of issues involved with that. But that's an example of the kind of original reporting. But that's something that's so local, you don't see that on the news, because it's probably too narrow of an interest. But it serves an important function, I think.

How many of you have heard of the "long tail"? Probably half of you. Well, I'll go ahead and get into what that is. It's basically a pattern that you see when you have a diversity of choice available to you. You also see a pattern like this emerge if you think of this like, films. The top 20 percent there those would be the big blockbusters. That's your "Star Wars," and your "Spiderman 2," that's the stuff that gets a lot of eyeballs, makes a lot of money.

But then, you know, there are lots of independent films and smaller films "Blogumentary" would probably be like off the right-hand edge, you know, 20 people have seen my film but at the same time, that's what they call the long tail, the yellow part of the graph. It basically goes off into infinity, with me down in the very end there.

But there's a diversity there of viewpoints in there, and in fact, the area under the yellow part of the graph is greater than the area under the red part of the graph. So, and you can apply this to a lot of things.

One more example before I get to the media would be bookstores, or books in general. You can fit an entire Barnes and Noble in the red portion of the graph there. A single Barnes and Noble can hold like 150,000 books. But Amazon carries all of the books in red, as well as all of the other books that aren't popular enough for Barnes and Noble to carry. And they actually do more of their business from the long tail, you know, from the more special interest books and that kind of thing.

So those are just a couple of examples showing you how much value there is in the long tail. Both intrinsic, intellectual, value, diversity of opinion kind of value, as well as, in the case of Amazon and EBay, monetary value.

So, I basically applied this to when you think of the media in the same way, the mainstream media, Fox News and The New York Times, they get the most eyeballs. And obviously there's a lot of quality content that you find there. And there's also a lot of important work that's done by bloggers. And obviously here the blogosphere is represented by being the long tail, the independent people, and obviously some of the bloggers.

On the left end of the yellow tail have audiences that approach or even exceed some mainstream media. If you take the Dan Rather incident, you have a single person on

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a forum, who would be on the far end of this graph, who watched the "60 Minutes" report, and said, "Hey, this doesn't add up to me, this is fishy, I think they're forgeries." You know, a single person posting that in a forum. Then it kind of hops up a little bit and gets picked up by Powerline, who are Minnesota neo-conservative bloggers, with a much bigger audience, and suddenly everyone in the long tail is jumping all over this thing, it just goes crazy. They make so much noise down there that the mainstream media can't ignore it, has to pick up that story.

That's just an example of how important a single person can be in the long tail.

Now I was impressed with the numbers of arrows Jean had in his graph (laughter). I should go back a second. Right now, the mainstream media does mostly original reporting, and bloggers will link to that content and comment on it and criticize it. So you basically have bloggers linking to mainstream media, but you don't have mainstream media linking to bloggers. So you don't have, in a way, the long tail is where the conversation is happening.

So what I would like to see is a lot more arrows like Jean had, have the conversation be more two-way.

A few minutes left? Oh, I gotta cruise.

So mainstream media could benefit from the diversity of ideas and opinion found in the yellow tail, the long tail.

One way the news media could do this, I would say these would be some intermediary steps to something as revolutionary as Oh My News, these are kind of more achievable. These are Track Packs. How many people don't know what Trackbacks are? OK. Trackback is basically a way in the blogosphere to tap someone on the shoulder and say, "Hey, I'm talking about the same thing you are. You might want to check out my blog because we're talking about the same thing."

But this isn't something you have only in blogs, this is something mainstream media could have. There was a really excellent PBS show called "The Persuaders," it was about kind of the cutting edge of marketing that a lot of bloggers were talking about, and you know, really spurred a lot of conversations. And I'm not sure if PBS was aware of a lot of the conversations that were going on, but it's interesting, someone looked at the source code of PBS and found they actually have Trackback code in every single page of PBS.org has Trackback code. Someone wrote and said, "hey, are they thinking of doing Trackback on every page? That would be really cool!" And they talked to PBS and said, "Oh, you found that. No, we're just experimenting, that probably will never happen. Or maybe talk to us in 6 months." So it's possible to use trackback on PBS, but you would never know it because they don't make it public, which seems really kind of stupid (laughter).

It's very closed. They should welcome the conversation. If they had Trackbacks on "The Persuaders," then all the bloggers who were talking about the program could

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send a Trackback to that page, and then people who maybe don't know anything about blogs who came looking for more information could not only find what the producers want you to know, but they would find everyone on the yellow tail, on the long tail, they would find all these other people talking about their perspectives on the story, which obviously, the audience knows more than you do, why not let them know what the audience is saying?

How many of you have seen this? The annotated New York Times. I hope The New York Times guy doesn't sue them (laughter). It's probably just a matter of time, I don't know. Someone has taken The New York Times and what they're doing is posting stories from The New York Times see it's in yellow there and giving weblog citations. So, here's a story about Tom Delay giving a bunch of money to his family to work for him, and there are, at this moment, there were 18 different blogs linking and talking about this story.

This is revolutionary, I think. It's a little clunky. It's a little clunky, I think, because The New York Times isn't doing it, somebody else is doing it for them. So if you go to this page, basically at the top is a synopsis of the story with a link to the full article and if you scroll down, you see both conservative and liberal and all over the map different takes on that story. And I'm a lefty guy, but I want to see what the conservatives are saying about it without having to try and go find them. Here, the conversation's all in one place. The conversation's in the same place as the article.

So, this is kind of, gets to the point of, you know, publishing being not the end. Publishing is the starting point. It's the idea that news is the conversation. Stories shouldn't end at the publishing stage, because really, that should be the gateway then to opening it up to all the diversity of opinion and the long tail. And I think I'll end on that note. (Applause)

**LORRAINE BRANHAM:** Getting right along. (inaudible) We go from "we media," to "my media," to "our media," which I think is terrific. J.D. is going to talk about OurMedia.org, which is sort of a repository for media, video, and photography from citizen journalists and everybody else, which should be interesting as soon as he gets set up.

(inaudible; setting up technology for 2 minutes)

**J.D. LASICA:** All right, thanks. Hi, folks. I've got a five minute video here I want to show. It's a combination of three different videos and it'll sort of show what's happening in some of the areas of grassroots media. So, why don't we just take it away.

(film begins; inaudible for 5 minutes)

The only reason I come to these conferences is to really have a conversation with the folks who are attending. I love meeting new people, new professors, students.

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My professional life is kind of so fragmented now that I don't really know how to introduce myself. I'm the founder of a new website called Our Media, which I'll show you in a moment. I'm a longtime columnist for the Online Journalism Review. I'm a senior writer for (inaudible). I'm an author, I have a new book coming out in a month called "Dark Net." And I write three different blogs. And sometimes even get to spend a few minutes with my family.

The reason I mention all this is I think it's kind of interesting how people move back and forth between different identities that they have. There could be some University of Texas professors in this room who are super-bloggers at night. So it's getting to be interesting, how people are getting involved in the mediasphere.

Something really big is happening here. The Internet, I think, is creating the biggest re-distribution of power in history. Away from centralized institutions and toward individuals, empowering all of us to be part of the conversation that Dan Gillmor's been talking about.

So we're seeing that play out in a lot of different ways. Certainly in the blogosphere, bloggers have become forces to be reckoned with in a lot of different ways. On the political stage, from the takedown of Dan Rather to the (inaudible), to the South Asian tsunami disaster we've seen bloggers sort of achieve new levels of prominence and influence on the media stage.

The estimate is there's 7 million to 9 million blogs out there today. And what's remarkable is that 15,000 new blogs are being created every single day. So this is a phenomenon that's not going away. It's becoming more and more influential. I think the latest number is there are 32 million Americans who visit weblogs on a regular basis.

So I think now what I'd like to talk about is how we're entering a new stage of this phenomenon, what I like to call the personal media revolution.

So text-based blogs are now slowly evolving and giving way to a richer multimedia experience of grassroots media.

I would encourage you all to, after this conference is over, not end the conversation there. Get on weblogs, pick up some books by people writing on this subject. You can sort of approach this subject on a number of levels. Dan Gillmor's "We the Media" is the prototypical book on the subject.