

**Author:**

Neil Thurman, Department of Journalism, City University, London

**Email:**

neilt@soi.city.ac.uk

**Contact details (until August 2005):**

Room 667  
International House  
2299 Piedmont Avenue  
Berkeley, CA 94720-2320  
USA  
Tel: +1 (510) 643 4227

**Biographical note:**

Neil Thurman is a senior lecturer in the Department of Journalism at City University, author of number of award-winning multimedia CD-ROMs and interactive videos, his previous work on online journalism is included in Keeble, R. (2005) *Print journalism: a critical introduction*. London: Taylor and Francis.

# **British news websites and the overseas reader**

A study of user behaviour, professional attitudes and commercial strategies

*This paper uses participant interviews with journalists and web metrics to examine the significance of the overseas reader to the online operations of British newspapers and BBC News. This large and often underreported audience makes heavy use of news aggregators whose story selection processes favour particular genres of news and styles of publishing. Although overseas readers view fewer pages than the domestic audience their presence is changing, to varying degrees, the editorial and commercial strategies of the publications they visit.*

### **Animal interests: the ‘Indy’ and the Asian dissertation**

A PhD student from Singapore, conducting his thesis on the perception of animals, emails a nationally circulated British broadsheet newspaper asking whether it is correct to say “squirrels are animals who eat nuts” or “squirrels are animals, which eat nuts”. The query is passed to the letters’ editor of the *Independent*, the newspaper in question, who replies. The correct formulation, incidentally, is “squirrels are animals that eat nuts” (King 2004).

This story is just one example of how the global nature of the Internet is now allowing the British press and their broadcast counterparts to reach a new audience far beyond their traditional radius of circulation or transmission.

This paper presents and analyses some of the attitudes that editors of British news websites have towards readers from abroad; and the commercial and editorial strategies their publications are adopting. It is primarily based on qualitative research interviews conducted in the Autumn of 2004, supplemented by email correspondence with the subjects and quantitative analysis of reader data supplied by the publications concerned and by *Nielsen//Netratings*, a commercial provider of Internet audience measurement.

### **Turning the tables: qualitative studies of news websites**

As a practice, online journalism is a relatively new phenomenon. The first British newspaper to publish online, *The Daily Telegraph* launched its website in November 1994 and one major British newspaper, the *Daily Express*, which has a print circulation of 949,238 (ABC 2005), has still not launched a web service. The short history of the medium helps explain why qualitative studies of online news operations and the attitudes and practices of online journalists, editors and executives are relatively rare. The studies that have been undertaken are now rather outdated and have been primarily focused on US publications.

Between 1997 and 1999 Boczkowski (2004) undertook ethnographic research at three online newspaper sites: the *New York Times*, *Houston Chronicle* and *New Jersey Online*, conducting 142 interviews. In 1999 Stepno (2003) conducted object-orientated interviews at a *WRAL-TV.com*, a US based 24 hour news web site, in a study looking at team working and news publishing. Brannon’s (1999) work at three prominent news sites (*USA Today Online*, *ABCNEWS.com* and *National Public Radio Online*) centered on 20 interviews, assessing impediments to performance as perceived by online news workers. Singer (2004) used quantitative data drawn from case studies of four US newsrooms to examine journalists’ attitudes to convergence in the multimedia newsroom. Murrie’s (2001) qualitative research concerned the editorial, staffing and strategic practices of nine local US radio and television station news websites.

Surprisingly there has been little or no equivalent qualitative work published about the British experience of online news publishing and in particular about the significance of,

and attitudes to overseas readers. This in spite of the popularity of British news websites at home and abroad:

- *News.bbc.co.uk* is one of the world's largest and most popular news sites reaching more than 20 million people in a typical month. More than a quarter of the UK's Internet users use the service and 30-40% of the readers are outside the UK (Deverell 2004). In January 2005 *News.bbc.co.uk* attracted more American readers than web sites of: the *Washington Post*, *CNET*, *Fox News*, *CBS*, the *LA Times* and the *New York Post* (Nielsen//Netratings 2005).
- The editor of the *Guardian* believes that, thanks to the Internet, his newspaper is becoming “the English language global liberal voice”. *Guardian.co.uk* has readers “in more than 180 different countries on an average day” (Mayes 2004).
- The web is extending the reach and influence of British media brands overseas. Between September 2003 and September 2004, the websites of the *Independent*, *Sun* and *Telegraph* each averaged over one million unique visitors a month from the US alone (Nielsen//Netratings 2005). *TimesOnline.co.uk* now has more overseas readers than readers from the UK (Bale 2004).

### **Research methodology: approach, ethics and limitations**

In this nascent and rapidly changing field, an ethnographic approach, although time-consuming, was thought to be necessary. The absence of qualitative studies of British online news operations means that, at this time, it is important to provide detailed descriptions of the nature of these important, but normally closed, organisations as well as to document the perceptions and interpretations of the actors involved.

Much of the value of this paper is in the record it provides of the thoughts of the subjects interviewed. These editors and managing editors, and the publications they represent, are still formulating attitudes and policies to, and developing the practice of, journalism on the web—at the time of writing, Rupert Murdoch is leading “a meeting of senior executives in a bid to map out the global media group's Internet strategy” (Timms 2005).

During these interviews there was a real sense of opportunity and experimentation. The editor of *Telegraph.co.uk* sees online as “the laboratory of journalism. From a technical and editorial point of view you can try so many different things and you can try them quickly to see if they work or not” (Burton 2004).

The rising readership of news web sites and the static or falling consumption of news in print and on radio and television means that the attitudes of web journalists' newspaper and broadcast colleagues are changing. Newspaper journalists at the *Times* and *Sunday Times* are becoming “much, much more enthusiastic” about the website with “some quite established figures quite eager to be part of it. They realise it is here to stay” (Bale 2004). At the *BBC*, although some correspondents would “rather slice off their fingers than write something” for *News.bbc.co.uk*, the head of *BBC News Interactive* believes that the “trend is in our favour”. The fact that “internationally it is the principle point of contact

with the *BBC* for many opinion formers” has changed “our correspondents’ attitudes towards the website. They have realised the reach and the impact that it has” (Deverell 2004a).

Although this article attempts to analyse the material collected thematically, space was provided for the subjects to debate, in their own words, some of the issues that are being played out daily in newsrooms and on the screens of the readers of British news sites worldwide.

The fact that all of the participants are either journalists or closely associated with the profession meant that they were familiar with the dynamics of interviewing. Although the interviews were recorded and ‘on-the-record’, occasionally participants spoke ‘off the record’. In these cases the material was used only when it was possible to get independent collaboration from another source. The nature of the research and the likely published outlets for the results, were carefully explained to all participants. All were happy to have their names associated with the words they spoke. The participants were:

- Peter Bale, editorial director *TimesOnline.co.uk*
- Pete Clifton, editor *News.bbc.co.uk*
- Tracy Corrigan, editor *Ft.com* (with additional email correspondence with Lisa Rohumaa, News Editor, *Ft.com*)
- Richard Deverell, head of *BBC News Interactive*
- Martin King, editor *Independent.co.uk*
- Stewart Kirkpatrick, editor *Scotsman.com*
- Pete Picton, editor *theSun.co.uk*
- Mike Smartt, former editor, *News.bbc.co.uk*
- Avril Williamson, editorial director, *Associated New Media*
- Richard Burton, Editor, *Telegraph.co.uk* (with additional email correspondence with Sanjit Chudha)

The length of the interviews, between 55 and 110 minutes, and the fullness of the participants’ responses, typically over 10,000 words once transcribed, provided ample material for interpretation, summary and integration. Detailed interview guides were used, partly because there were complex technical and commercial issues to cover but also because the subjects are busy people used to operating in an intellectually demanding environment. They expected, and coped with, concrete and complex questions. It was not felt that the detailed interview guides curtailed the range or depth of responses: the interview subjects were highly articulate and prone to tangential divergences.

The limitations of the research methodology centered mainly on the fact that the participants interviewed represented a relatively narrow range of functional roles (editors and managing editors) within the organisations. It is hoped further research will include a wider range of participants and supplement the qualitative participant interviews with field observations both in the UK and, for comparative purposes, overseas.

## Overseas reader data: laying bare the logs

Although the primary research method used was the qualitative interview, some time was also spent gathering quantitative data, specifically looking at the standard Internet audience measures: Page Impressions and Unique Users, as well as breakdowns of readers' geographical location, for British news sites.

Discovering accurate and up-to-date circulation figures for British news websites is not easy. In Britain the non-profit Audit Bureau of Circulations, or ABC, provides publicly accessible independent verification of national newspapers' circulation figures. Although ABC Electronic, or ABCe, was established in 1996 as the new media arm of ABC, its coverage of British news websites is far from complete. At the time of writing, February 2005, ABCe did not provide recent data on a number of the main British news websites and missed others out all together (see table 1).

**Table 1: Currency of ABCe data on the readership of a selection of British news websites.**

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Most recent ABCe data, February 2005 (1)</b>
<i>DailyMail.co.uk</i>	November 2004
<i>Ft.com</i>	March 2004
<i>Guardian.co.uk</i>	December 2004
<i>Independent.co.uk</i>	No data available
<i>News.bbc.co.uk</i>	November 1999
<i>Scotsman.com</i>	August 2004
<i>Telegraph.co.uk</i>	September 2004
<i>theSun.co.uk</i>	April 2004
<i>ThisisLondon.co.uk</i>	November 2004
<i>TimesOnline.co.uk</i>	April 2004

1. ABCe (2005a)

What of the data that is available? It will be demonstrated later that sources are often contradictory. According to the ABCe (2005), although the number of Unique Users provides an indication of a site's audience or reach it is a measure that can "overstate or understate the real number of individual users". This is because web servers, which use IP addresses—the code that identifies a computer or device connected to the Internet—to help identify users, may be confused by the fact that Internet service providers can allocate the same IP address to different users over a given period.

Page Impressions, used to establish how many pages are read in a given period, may also be misleading. The danger is that one request by a user causes the web server to "send several files to satisfy the request. For example, the server may send an HTML file followed by several associated graphics images and audio files". The Interactive Advertising Bureau UK advises, "sites must ensure that all additional, non-requested files

are filtered out and excluded when counting the claimed number of Page Impressions” (IABUK 2005).

The nature of the Internet means that web publishers know a great deal about their online readers. *News.bbc.co.uk* use a number of systems:

For the last two or three years we’ve had a system called *Net Genesis* and that gives us daily Page Impressions. We use *BMRB* [British Market Research Bureau] to give us basic information about readers’ age, gender, socio-economic group, location and so on. We use *Red Sheriff* to give us more international information. You can tell where people are coming from around the world and it gives you some additional information about user journeys and so on. *Red Sheriff* will eventually supersede the *Net Genesis* system and it will tell us a lot about the usage of different sites, number of visitors, the frequency of visits, the number of Page Impressions per visit etc (Deverell 2004a).

Unfortunately publishers guard their circulation figures and data on user demographics closely. Information is provided in ‘media-packs’ for advertisers but this is often either undated or months out-of-date. In February 2005 the latest figures available from *Ft.com* were eleven months old.

Data on overseas readers is even harder to find. Although *News.bbc.co.uk* (Deverell 2004) and *Guardian.co.uk* (Mayes 2004) have published limited geographical breakdowns of their readers’ locations these sites are the exception.

Commercial data providers such as *Nielsen//Netratings* and *Comscore* are an additional independent source of Internet audience measurement but their panel-based data does not always have sufficient sample size to allow the reliable projection of the size of the overseas audience. Also, access to their data can cost many thousands of pounds.

Working within these limitations, the matrix in Table 2 was constructed to allow the comparison of the size and geographical breakdown of the audience for a selection of British news websites.

**Table 2: Home and overseas reader statistics for a selection of British news websites.**

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Unique Users per month: home and overseas readers</b>	<b>Page Impressions per month: home and overseas readers</b>	<b>Unique Users per month: US readers and / or readers from other overseas territories</b>
<i>DailyMail.co.uk</i>	<b>0.65 million</b> (November 2004) (1)	<b>10.19 million</b> (November 2004) (1)	<b>US readers: 11%</b> <b>(December 2004)</b> (2)
<i>Ft.com</i>	<b>1.7 million</b>	<b>22 million</b>	<b>US readers: 37.8%</b>

	(December 2004) (3)	(December 2004) (3)	(December 2004) (3)
<i>Guardian.co.uk</i>	<b>10.15 million</b> (January 2005) (4)  <b>UK only: 3.2 million</b> (January 2005) (4)	<b>110.66 million</b> (January 2005) (4)  <b>UK only: 55.95 million</b> (January 2005) (4)	<b>US readers: 39%</b> <b>UK readers: 22%</b> <b>Non US overseas readers: 39%</b> (June 2004) (5)
<i>Independent.co.uk</i>	<b>1.7 million</b> (September 2004) (6)	<b>23 million</b> (September 2004) (6)	<b>US readers: 73%</b> (September 2004) (7)
<i>News.bbc.co.uk</i>	<b>15 million</b> (November 2003) (8)	<b>350 million</b> (November 2003) (8)	<b>All overseas readers: 30–40%</b> (November 2003) (8)  <b>US readers: 28%</b> (November 2003) (9)  <b>UK readers: 60–70%</b> (November 2003) (8)
<i>Scotsman.com</i>	<b>3.08 million</b> (January 2005) (10)	<b>20.5 million</b> (January 2005) (10)	<b>US readers: 36%</b> (January 2005) (11)
<i>Telegraph.co.uk</i>	<b>3.52 million</b> (September 2004) (12)	<b>37 million</b> (September 2004) (12)	<b>US readers: 28%</b> (September 2004) (12)
<i>theSun.co.uk</i>	<b>4.8 million</b> (November 2004) (13)	<b>129 million</b> (November 2004) (13)	<b>US readers: 42%</b> <b>UK readers: 30%</b> <b>Non US overseas readers: 28%</b> (November 2004) (13)
<i>ThisisLondon.co.uk</i>	<b>2.3 million</b> (November 2004) (14)	<b>16.72 million</b> (November 2004) (14)	<b>US readers: 33%</b> (January 2005) (15)
<i>TimesOnline.co.uk</i>	<b>3.86 million</b>	<b>34.05 million</b>	<b>US readers: 41%</b>

	(November 2004) (16)	(November 2004) (16)	(November 2004) (16)
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1. Anm.co.uk (2005)
2. Nielsen//Netratings (2005) and (1)
3. Rohumaa (2005)
4. Guardian (2005)
5. Mayes (2004). MacArthur (2004) gives the *Guardian*'s US readership as 44%.
6. King (2005) and Directorym (2005)
7. Nielsen//Netratings (2005) and (6)
8. Deverell (2004)
9. Nielsen//Netratings (2005) and (8)
10. Kirkpatrick (2005)
11. Nielsen//Netratings (2005) and (10)
12. Chudha (2005)
13. Picton (2005)
14. Anm.co.uk (2005a)
15. Nielsen//Netratings (2005) and (14)
16. Bale (2005)

### **Who, where and why: the foreign sale**

A significant overseas readership for British news websites is not a new phenomenon. In 1999 between 48 and 60 per cent of *TimesOnline.co.uk* readers came from North America, Canada and Australia (Nicolas & Huntington 1999). The situation today is similar. At the *Scotsman.com*, US readers make up 36 per cent of their Unique Users. *Scotsman.com* is one of the few British news websites to have generated content specifically for their overseas audience, content such as their 'haggis hunt' game, which the editor describes as "fluffy and silly and shameless in going for the Diaspora but it does very well" (Kirkpatrick 2004). Without any content targeted explicitly towards readers outside the UK, the *TimesOnline.co.uk* have a similar proportion of overseas readers: in November 2004, 41 per cent of their readers came from the US (Bale 2005). *TimesOnline.co.uk* introduced subscription charges for overseas users in May 2002. Since lifting those charges in October 2004, they have seen their overseas audience "triple" (Bale 2004), helping them to move ahead of *Telegraph.co.uk* and *Ft.com* in terms of Unique Users per month.

Although for *Guardian.co.uk*, overseas readers account for about 78% of their Unique Users, they have a lower proportion of readers from the US than some of their rivals. The *Guardian.co.uk*'s profile, a result of their consistent and substantial investment in the site over the years, has allowed them to build a brand second only to *News.bbc.co.uk* in terms of Unique Users. They attract almost as many overseas readers from outside the US, 39 per cent, as from within.

*News.bbc.co.uk*'s success in the domestic market—it now has a 'reach' broadly equivalent to the BBC's news and sport radio station *Five Live* (Deverell 2004a)—means

that, despite having more overseas readers in absolute terms than any of its UK rivals, its proportion of overseas readers is lower at 30–40 per cent (Deverell 2004).

As befits a newspaper with US, Asian, European and UK editions, *Ft.com* has a considerable overseas readership with 38 per cent of the readers from the US (Rohumaa 2005). *Ft.com*'s policy of charging readers, wherever they are from, a fee for viewing much of the content they publish has meant that, in absolute terms, they now get a million less Unique Users and less than half as many Page Impressions as they were getting in July 2002, before the introduction of subscription (ABCe 2005a). Their intention to move more content, specifically corporate news, behind subscription in early 2005 is likely to mean this trend continues, a fact *Ft.com*'s editor acknowledges. "Inevitably our unique user numbers are likely to go down". Although they will have less traffic to sell to advertisers, they hope that more of their Unique Users "will be encouraged to subscribe over a period of time" (Corrigan 2004).

Over the same period that the *Ft.com* has seen a drop in usage, Britain's best-selling newspaper's website, *theSun.co.uk* has been attracting users in record numbers. In April 2002 it received 24.7 million Page Impressions (ABCe 2005a). By November 2004 that figure had risen to 129 million putting the *theSun.co.uk* ahead of *Guardian.co.uk* in terms of Page Impressions per month with only *News.bbc.co.uk* ahead out of the British news websites. *Guardian.co.uk* maintains its lead over the *theSun.co.uk* in terms of Unique Users.

*TheSun.co.uk*'s decision, in November and December of 2004, to remove much of its print parents' content from the site is likely to mean that it will struggle to maintain the rise in readers from home and abroad it has enjoyed for some time. That decision was based on a survey placed on the *Sun*'s website, the results of which showed that about 90,000 readers of the *Sun* might stop buying the newspaper because of the Internet. The research "wasn't held in particularly high regard by the *theSun.co.uk*'s editor" (Kirkpatrick 2004) and first reports, in the *Observer*, incorrectly stated that the Newspaper was losing "90,000 readers a day to its website". The *Observer*'s report was correct, however, in its statement that the *Sun*'s management intended to "remove most of the editorial from the website and replace it with story samples designed to entice readers to go out and buy the paper" (Robinson 2004). The removal of content started with news, picture and sport exclusives and, on 8 December 2004, was extended to "all features content" (Picton 2004).

*Telegraph.co.uk* was the first British newspaper to publish online. Its relatively long pedigree, initially as the *Electronic Telegraph*, has allowed it to build up a significant user base (3.52 million Unique Users per month) and a user base, which, because of its policy of requiring registration, it knows a lot about.

Attempting to ascertain the overseas readership of the *Independent.co.uk* provides a case study in the problems that beset researchers in this field. It is fairly well established that they have around 1.7 million Unique Users a month and 23 million Page Impressions

(King 2004). Looking at *Nielsen//Netratings* data reveals an apparent US audience of 1,248,000 Unique Users in September 2004: to 73 per cent of the *Independent.co.uk*'s audience that month. If true this would be a remarkably high figure despite the fact that they have built a reputation for being “a source that can be trusted by those people who are very unhappy with the American press” (King 2004). The reliability of *Nielsen//Netratings*' panel-based data can be assessed by comparing their data with the data provided by three publications that provide a breakdown of their US audience (see table 3).

**Table 3: US Unique Users of British news websites: comparing panel-based and sites' self-reported data.**

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Self-reported US audience</b>	<b>Neilsen//Netratings data on US audience</b>
<i>Guardian.co.uk</i>	<b>3.5 million Unique Users</b> (June 2004) (1)	<b>1.076 million Unique Users</b> (June 2004) (2)
<i>TheSun.co.uk</i>	<b>42%</b> (November 2004) (3)	<b>28.3%</b> (November 2004) (2)
<i>TimesOnline.co.uk</i>	<b>41%</b> (November 2004) (4)	<b>16.6%</b> (November 2004) (2)

1. Mayes (2004)
2. Neilsen//Netratings (2005)
3. Picton (2005a)
4. Bale (2005)

The comparison in table 3 shows that, based on an admittedly small sample, *Nielsen//Netratings* data consistently reports a smaller US audience for British news sites than those sites report themselves. Although a US audience of 73% is high compared to its rivals—the editor of *Independent.co.uk*, Martin King (2005), described the figures as “like nothing I've ever seen. In short, they're wrong”—it maybe that overseas readers represent more than 73 per cent of the *Independent.co.uk*'s audience.

The recently launched *Daily Mail* website has an unusually low proportion of overseas readers: 11 per cent from the US. This is almost certainly because their site was launched relatively recently (June 2004) and hasn't yet come to the attention of the large audience that exists, particularly in the US, for British news websites. The editorial director of *Associated Newspapers*, the *Daily Mail*'s parent company, is “very happy” (Williams 2004) with *Dailmail.co.uk*'s large proportion of domestic readers. Unfortunately for her this percentage is almost certain to rise. The longer-established stable-mate of *DailyMail.co.uk*, *ThisisLondon.co.uk*, gets 33 per cent of its readers from the US, and, compared to the *DailyMail.co.uk*, has less international appeal. As its title suggests, much of its content is London-related.

## Unlikely bedfellows: the ‘idiot with a modem’ and the British press

Interviews with editors and managing editors of British news websites revealed what they interpreted as significant in the mass of, often contradictory, user statistics available. In many ways their interpretations have more value than the raw data on overseas readers. One recurring theme concerned how overseas readers located individual stories. Much talk was of the ‘referrer’, technically “the fully-qualified URL of the page from which, via a direct hyperlink, a user reached the current requested URL” (ABCe 2005). In layman’s terms, unless users type the URL of a website into the address bar of their browser, they leave a trace showing where they’ve come from, whether that be *Google* or their own collection of ‘bookmarks’ or ‘favourites’.

Unsurprisingly the most consistent referrer for most British news sites is *Google* and *Google News*. For the *Scotsman.com* it is “certainly the biggest referrer” (Kirkpatrick 2004). At *TimesOnline.co.uk*, “after people’s bookmarks, it is still the biggest” (Bale 2004). When the *Ft.com* recently changed their publishing system, for a short period their content wasn’t listed in *Google* searches. This had a “noticeable impact on hits” (Corrigan 2004).

After *Google* and *Google News* aggregators such as the *Drudgereport.com* that publish links to stories in other publications are the next most important source of hits for British news sites. So much so that the editor of *Independent.co.uk* has the impression that “the way half of America found out about us is *Drudge*” (King 2004). The editorial director of *TimesOnline.co.uk*, who has “been following *Drudge* for six years”, is “surprised how effective it still is in getting reach like this” (Bale 2004). Both the *Ft.com* and *Scotsman.com* notice large traffic spikes when *Drudgereport.com* links to a story of theirs. *Telegraph.co.uk* have had “a million hits on one story” courtesy of the aggregator. Their service was “absolutely overwhelmed” (Burton 2004).

For *theSun.co.uk* and *Scotsman.com* another important source of overseas hits is *Fark.com*. The *theSun.co.uk*’s editor describes *Fark.com* as being “in the spirit of the *Sun*” (Picton 2004). The editor of *Scotman.com* is more direct describing it as “a puerile site that collects weird news”. According to the editor of *Independent.co.uk*, the popularity of sites such as *Drudgereport.com* and *Fark.com* is a function of the relatively narrow range of opinion available in the mainstream US press. “In America there are very few outlets like them”. King (2004) calls them “skeptical, well independently minded may be putting it too weakly, skeptical to hostile probably”.

*Fark.com* and *Drudgereport.com*, which, respectively, receive 150 million (Intermarkets 2005) and 33 million (Fark 2005) Page Impressions per month, are as or more popular than many of the publications they aggregate content from—*TimesOnline.co.uk* gets 34 million page views per month. This fact is not lost on the syndication department at *TimesOnline.co.uk* who “have issues” with at least one aggregator, *Moreover.com*, “about how they [are] redistributing [our content] for other customers” (Bale 2004).

It is perhaps surprising that the *Drudgereport.com*, whose founder and editor Matt Drudge “describes his own politics as libertarian”, has a “dedicated right-of-center following, which he continues to cultivate” (Pachter 2003), and has been called “an idiot with a modem” (Kurtz 1998) is seen by the left-of-centre *Independent.co.uk* as “matching our image”. In the end it all comes down to hits and for *Independent.co.uk*, and many other British news web sites, losing the hits that come their way from *Drudgereport.com* would be “a bit of a pain” (King 2004).

### **Politics and the puerile: overseas readers’ story choices**

The reliance that British news websites have on US news aggregators for hits determines, to a significant extent, which stories overseas visitors read. For the *TimesOnline.co.uk* their “most read story this year was a story about an x-ray machine at Heathrow airport which was showing naked images of people” (Bale 2004). In fact that single story, “Plane passengers shocked by their x-ray scans” (Gadher 2004), accounted for 30 percent of their traffic in November from the US. Unsurprisingly most of that traffic came via an aggregator: *Drudgereport.com* (Nielsen//Netratings 2005).

The *Scotsman.com*’s most read story in 2004 was similarly titillating. It concerned Janet Jackson’s ‘wardrobe malfunction’ at the 2004 Superbowl. The extremely high-level of page views it received, 440,000 (Kirkpatrick 2004), was largely because another aggregator, *Google News*, picked it up.

Although significant in terms of intra-day hits, it is difficult to spot a trend in quirky stories such as these. They are related only in as much as they caught the eye of the editors of the US aggregating sites: Matt Drudge, Drew Curtis and their like.

One trend that appears to be emerging it is that overseas, particularly US, readers are interested in the British view on domestic and international political issues. This trend was particularly evident in 2004 with a US presidential election and continuing conflict in Iraq.

At the *Independent.co.uk* stories that are “questioning of the Bush administration over the Iraq war will put us into meltdown” (King 2004). An example was the front-page story published immediately after the 2004 US presidential election results, ‘Four More Years’ (Independent 2004). The story’s “despairing tone” caught the mood with the result that it “was well up there with the greatest ever record breakers”. In fact for the *Independent.co.uk*, in the run up to the 2004 US presidential election, “anything that could be seen as not showing the Bush administration in a good light” did very well with their US readers (King 2004).

At *TimesOnline.co.uk* their decision to lift the subscription barrier to overseas readers coincided with the build up to the 2004 US presidential election. A story on French President Jacques Chirac commenting on Blair’s support for Bush during the war,

“Backing Bush has won you nothing, Chirac tells Britain” (Bremner and Webster 2004), was very popular with US readers, accounting for 15 per cent of *TimesOnline.co.uk*’s US readers in November 2004 (Nielsen//Netratings 2005). Partly as a result, that month they registered “more overseas readers than UK readers” and since subscription was lifted their overseas readership has “tripled” (Bale 2004).

### **The Google News dance**

The *Scotsman.com*’s second most read story of 2004 was also political in nature, “Cherie causes controversy after attack on Bush” (Kirkup 2004). It achieved 210,000 Page Impressions (Kirkpatrick 2004). The interesting aspect of the story is that a *Scotsman.com* journalist did not, originally, write it. It started life as a Press Association, or PA, feed in the *Scotsman.com*’s ‘latest news’ section “it will have been one of the first up there” (Kirkpatrick 2004).

The *Scotsman.com*, in common with other British news sites such as *ThisisLondon.co.uk* and the *DailyMail.co.uk*, runs “a PA feed of breaking news on the site”. This means that they don’t have to divert “precious resources to re-writing PA” but can instead “write comment pieces or targeted specials on things like elections where we’ll do a micro site” (Kirkpatrick 2004). As well as having a benefit in terms of resources this approach allows *Scotsman.com* to publish breaking news stories very quickly, a fact that has helped contribute to their remarkable success on *Google News*, a consistently important referrer for British news web sites.

Take *Google News*’ UK page on 12 December 2004 (Google News 2004). Of the 91 outbound links, 16 were to the *Scotsman.com*, 17 per cent of the total. By comparison the *Independent.co.uk* had five (5.5 percent), *News.bbc.co.uk* eight (8.8 percent), *Guardian.co.uk* three (3.3 percent), *Telegraph.co.uk* seven (7.7 percent), *ThisisLondon.co.uk* two (or 2.2 percent), the *Ft.com* one (or 1.1 percent) and the *TimesOnline.co.uk* three (or 3.3 percent). The *Scotsman.com* admit they “don’t fully understand why their site does very well out of Google” and are “frightened to ask in case somehow it has all been a terrible mistake” (Kirkpatrick 2004).

One possible explanation comes from Richard Deverell (2004a) who reveals that *Google News*’ algorithm puts “a very heavy reliance on the latest news story”, favouring sites, like the *Scotsman.com*, that use feeds from news agencies, such as PA or Reuters, who are often first to market with a given story. Deverell explains that this may be the reason why, on many stories, *Google News* links to publications whose coverage may not be the most relevant. “You sometimes get very strange things where the *Kansas Evening Gazette* will give you an update on the Northern Ireland peace process today simply because it published three minutes ago and it doesn’t link you to the *BBC News* website or the British *Times* newspaper web site, which may have much more detail and better explanation of the story”.

The vagaries of the *Google News* algorithm frustrated the founding editor of *News.bbc.co.uk* who noticed that when it came to “important stories about Britain” *Google News*’ algorithm was often making strange choices. “If people want to read about a constitutional crisis in Britain they would want to read the *BBC*, the *Guardian.co.uk*, the *Telegraph.co.uk*. They do not want to read the *South Wales Mercury* but that’s what happened all the time” (Smartt 2004).

The editor of the *Telegraph.co.uk* concurs, speculating that users of *Google News* would be “very confused” (Burton 2004) if they found that a small British regional newspaper’s coverage of an national or international story was prominently featured on *Google News*.

### **Auntie’s aggregator: News.bbc.co.uk’s Newstracker**

The *BBC*’s own news aggregator, their ‘Newstracker’ system, attempts to get round some of these problems by making “sensible judgments” about linking choices. So if the *BBC*’s algorithm “spots an overarching similarity in many of the stories then it won’t select them because it deduces that they’ve come from the same feed” (Clifton 2004).

The head of *BBC News Interactive* explains:

When there is suddenly a breaking news story you find that the top half-dozen stories are all pretty much the same, because they are all relying on the same bit of agency copy. Our software recognises that they are all the same, will just put one in and search for other original material on the same story (Deverell 2004a).

However the *BBC* concede that because of the “element of automation and logic involved” their system is unlikely to ever be perfect. On 8 November 2004, on a story about a train crash in Berkshire, their Newstracker’s number one link was to a story written by the *Chinese National News Agency*, which the editor of *News.bbc.co.uk* admitted consisted of “eight very badly written paragraphs that had been through various iterations and translations” (Clifton 2004).

### **Making the economics fizz: Coca-Cola and the untapped potential of overseas readers**

However they find their way to British news sites, overseas readers are certainly doing so in significant numbers. Is their presence changing the commercial strategies of British news web sites?

This research reveals a range of attitudes. On the one hand *Associated New Media* see no value in having any overseas readers. One of their publications, *ThisisLondon.co.uk*, gets over one third of its readers from the US (Nielsen//Netratings 2005), which the editorial director believes “is too much” (Williams 2004).

On the other hand *News Corporation* publications such as the *theSun.co.uk* and *TimesOnline.co.uk* see more potential in their overseas audience. *TimesOnline.co.uk* believe it is the “right time to extend our reach overseas” and that there is a commercial opportunity in offering “advertisers a chance to reach audiences outside the UK more effectively” (Times Online 2004).

*TheSun.co.uk*'s editor draws an analogy between online newspapers today and Coca-Cola in 1980s. In 1988, when Warren Buffett began investing in the soft-drink giant, the corporation's shares were trading at just over \$10. His decision to invest in a company many other investors were ignoring was based on his assessment that the globally recognised brand had unrealised sales opportunities overseas. By 1993 the stock had “soared to \$74.50. Buffett's current stake is valued at some \$13 billion” (Kanter 1999). For the Pete Picton (2004) the situation at the *Sun* is not dissimilar. “Five years ago you couldn't get [the *Sun*] anywhere [other than the UK] and now you can and it is up to us to earn money out of those people. Now we can do it with things like *Dreamteamfc.com*, charging for content”.

The difference is, of course, British news sites are not global brands in the same way that Coca-Cola is and was. The former editor-in-chief of *News.bbc.co.uk* believes that although “*FT.com* is certainly is an international brand” (Smartt 2004), building a loyal overseas audience will be more difficult for titles such as the *TimesOnline.co.uk*, *Guardian.co.uk* and the *Telegraph.co.uk*.

The editorial director of *Associated New Media* is also sceptical “I don't think any of us, any UK web publisher, has found a way of commercialising them”. Although she and her team are “not going to give up on them” —exploring charging and advertising—at the moment she “would far rather they had a hundred per cent UK audience”, adding “the *Guardian.co.uk* has seventy per cent of their audience overseas. You can't commercialise that, you simply can't. You are just paying an awful lot of bandwidth and an awful lot of server costs to serve those people” (Williams 2004).

For Richard Burton at the *Telegraph.co.uk*, the idea of “building a bigger foreign sale” would make his readers “very unimpressed.” His feeling is that for “a lot of the blue-chip clients that we deal with” it is not “going to go down well if we tell them we've got two million people reading us everyday from Washington”.

However he did leave the door open if the media-buying world convinced advertisers that a publication with a global reach could get their message across “simultaneously throughout all time zones” (Burton 2004).

For the *Scotsman.com*, having overseas readers:

Is important for some advertisers. For instance whiskey brands are trying to push hard in the States at the moment and it doesn't exactly hurt us that we have a very, very strong Scottish identity. For some people in the United States a strong

Scottish identity matters and these people are trying to sell something that is Scottish in the United States and we are aware of them and try to do business with them (Kirkpatrick 2004).

Indeed the *Scotsman.com*, following the success of their 'haggis hunt' game, are planning to launch premium services in 2005, which will "certainly have an eye to the US market" (Kirkpatrick 2004).

Although *theSun.co.uk* is relatively upbeat about monetising overseas readers, the two globally targeted advertising campaigns that they have won were, they admit, "small nibblings". They know that there is a global market there, that "it is not going to go away", but they want to concentrate on "UK sales at the moment, investing a bit more to sell to global brands" at a later date. They don't doubt that "the potential is great" and look forward to whether and when it might be possible to talk about the *Sun* as "a world newspaper". "Maybe that is the next step for us, to think in those terms" (Picton 2004).

It maybe surprising that a paper that whose coverage has been called "xenophobic" (Greenslade 2004) is thinking in these ways, but the global readership *theSun.co.uk* has may, already, be changing their news values:

With our breaking news it seems to have recently developed slightly more of a global feel. I don't think it is intentional it is just that we are not afraid to look at stories from abroad because we know the readership is there whereas the paper is probably thinking more of the UK (Picton 2004).

### **Satisfying the promiscuous reader**

One problem with trying to monetise overseas readers is their promiscuous reading habits. The editor of *Telegraph.co.uk*, makes the analogy between web and print readers and cats and dogs. "Print readers have canine loyalty but readers on the web have all the feline fussiness of cats. We get one thing wrong and they are off down *Google* alley to find another fresh bowl of cream" (Burton 2004).

Vin Crosbie's work (2004) illustrates this problem. He reports that "the average newspaper web site user in the United States visits only two to four times per month, spending less than 35 minutes on the paper's web site each month." Where as, by comparison, "the average newspaper reader reads the paper 3.4 times per week (14.7 times per month), spending an average of 28.2 minutes per day with the paper".

If web readers can be characterised as capricious cats then overseas web readers are their even more fickle feral cousins. Whereas the average *NYTimes.com* user's visit lasts about six minutes (Crosbie 2004), the average US reader of the *TimesOnline.co.uk* in November 2004 stayed on site for about three minutes (Nielsen//Netratings 2005). At the *DailyMail.co.uk* the situation is similar with US readers in November viewing between 1-2 pages and staying on site for just over 2 minutes (Nielsen//Netratings 2005).

## Overseas readers' habits: the impression pages make

The *Nielsen//Netratings* data presented in table 4 shows that, in order of stickiness; *News.bbc.co.uk* has the highest number of page views per US reader per month (8.46), followed by *Telegraph.co.uk* (6.84), *theSun.co.uk* (5.93), *Guardian.co.uk* (4.9), *Ft.com* (4.89), *TimesOnline.co.uk* (2.99), *Independent.co.uk* (2.76), *ThisisLondon.co.uk* (1.82) and *Scotsman.co.uk* (1.78).

**Table 4: US and 'average' readers' page views: a comparison of reading habits for a selection of British news websites.**

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Page Impressions per Unique User per month: all geographical locations, home and abroad (unless otherwise stated).</b>	<b>Page Impressions per Unique User per month: US readers. (Nielsen//Netratings 2005)</b>
<i>DailyMail.co.uk</i>	<b>15.52</b> (November 2004) (1)	Insufficient sample size
<i>FT.com</i>	<b>12.94</b> (December 2004) (2)	<b>4.89</b> (December 2004)
<i>Guardian.co.uk</i>	<b>All readers: 10.9</b> (January 2005) (3)  <b>UK readers: 17.5</b> (January 2005) (3)	<b>4.9</b> (June 2004)
<i>Independent.co.uk</i>	<b>13.5</b> (September 2004) (4)	<b>2.76</b> (January 2005)
<i>News.bbc.co.uk</i>	<b>23.3</b> (Undated) (5)	<b>8.46</b> (December 2004)
<i>Scotsman.com</i>	<b>6.65</b> (January 2005) (6)	<b>1.78</b> (January 2005)
<i>Telegraph.co.uk</i>	<b>10.5</b> (September 2004) (7)	<b>6.84</b> (January 2005)
<i>theSun.co.uk</i>	<b>14-24</b> (November 2004) (8)	<b>5.93</b> (November 2004)

		N.B. Excludes traffic from <i>Page.com</i> and <i>Dreamteamfc.com</i> .
<i>ThisisLondon.co.uk</i>	<b>7.27</b> (November 2004) (9)	<b>1.82</b> (June 2004)
<i>TimesOnline.co.uk</i>	<b>8.82</b> (November 2004) (10)	<b>2.99</b> (November 2004)

1. Anm.co.uk (2005)
2. Rohumaa (2005)
3. Guardian (2005)
4. King (2005) and Directorym (2005)
5. Deverell (2004)
6. Kirkpatrick (2005)
7. Chudha (2005)
8. City University estimate. Taken together *theSun.co.uk*, *Page.com* and *Dreamteamfc.com* deliver 26 pages per user per month (Picton 2005). I estimate that, on its own, *theSun.co.uk* serves between 14-24 pages per user per month. Pete Picton (2005a) confirmed that “in terms of page consumption (number of Page Impressions per unique visitor), *Sun Online* is on a par with *BBC News Online*”. *BBC News Online* delivers approximately 23 pages per unique user per month.
9. Anm.co.uk (2005a)
10. Bale (2005)

Although based on an admittedly small sample, the comparison in table 5 shows that *Nielsen//Netratings*'s data on the number of page views per US reader per month for British news websites closely matches the figures reported by some of those publications.

**Table 5: US Unique Users' monthly Page Impressions of two British news websites: comparing panel-based and sites' self-reported data.**

<b>Publication</b>	<b>US Unique Users' Page Impressions for the month of November 2004. Figures, supplied by the sites themselves.</b>	<b>US Unique Users' Page Impressions for the month of November 2004. Figures, supplied by Nielsen//Netratings (2005)</b>
<i>TimesOnline.co.uk</i>	3.01 (1)	2.99 (3)
Combined traffic for: <i>theSun.co.uk</i> <i>page3.com</i> <i>dreamteamfc.com</i>	10.6 (2)	10.52 (3)
<i>theSun.co.uk</i>	No data available	5.95 (3)

1. Bale (2005)
2. Picton (2005)
3. Nielsen//Netratings (2005)

The loyalty of *News.bbc.co.uk*'s US readers may well be a reflection of the fact that the site, unlike any of its competitors, has a dedicated 'Americas' page (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/default.stm>). Their funding model is also appreciated by users who "write and say we like *BBC News Online* because it doesn't have any adverts" (Smartt 2004).

The fact that US users of both *Telegraph.co.uk* and *Ft.com* read a relatively high number of pages per month may be because they have to register on their first visit, and login on subsequent visits. *Ft.com* readers must, in addition, pay for access to the majority of the site's content. Readers may be seeking to recoup some of the time (and money) spent on these processes by returning relatively frequently and / or viewing a higher than average number of pages.

Both *Guardian.co.uk* and *theSun.co.uk* are impressively sticky with overseas readers. Neither has the ad-free advantage of *News.bbc.co.uk*, rather both these sites, which, not coincidentally, vie for the position of most popular British newspaper website, understand their market and deliver content that keeps their readers coming back for more.

The referrals that *ThisisLondon.co.uk* and *Scotsman.com* get from *Google News* and aggregators such as *Fark.com* and *Drudgereport.com*, may well explain the relatively low number of pages their US readers view each month. Readers who use aggregators frequently are likely to be promiscuous, visiting a large number of publications but not staying for very long.

For *Associated New Media* these promiscuous overseas readers do not help in the long term:

All it does is momentarily inflate your figures. Although it's good for my circulation, and at the end of the day an editor gets judged on their circulation, in real terms does it help us commercially? Well no it doesn't and that's why, the two goals of the editorial team are: firstly to build a loyal audience; and secondly to bring in the right kind of audience and that is difficult. *Google News* brings in an audience but sometimes they can be the wrong audience, an audience that doesn't stay very long (Williams 2004).

*FT.com*'s editor makes a similar point. Although promiscuous readers, who have often picked up a story from an aggregator such as *Drudgereport.com*, "will mean that a single story gets a huge amount of hits. It doesn't really make a big difference in terms of the business model because it doesn't happen with enough stories". Another factor is that although these visitors result in advertising revenues they "are not necessarily potential subscribers to *Ft.com* if they are just coming to look at one story" (Corrigan 2004).

At the *Scotsman.com* US readers, although representing 36 per cent of their monthly Unique Users, only account for 9.7% of the pages viewed (Kirkpatrick 2005)(Nielsen/Netratings 2005). The editor admits that they “get advertising revenue from a high level of traffic from promiscuous users who come and look at one page a month and then go away again” but, in the long term, their strategy is to concentrate “on the core, regular users” (Kirkpatrick 2004).

*TimesOnline.co.uk* see it as “a challenge for us to get our overseas readers to stay more and to engage with them”, adding that “there is no doubt it is a harder sell for an advertiser unless we find the sort of advertiser for whom that strategy suits” (Bale 2004).

Although it might not yet make sense commercially, The *TimesOnline.co.uk* see another reason for targeting overseas readers, “simple reach”. “Editors of newspapers and editors of websites want their publication to be read globally. And the web is still an extremely cost-effective way to get out to them” (Bale 2004).

One publication that has had some success monetising overseas readers is *Ft.com*. Their editor believes that “what UK papers are generally doing overseas is attracting ex-pats whereas we’re not. We’re attracting people who live there and do business there whatever their nationality”. As an international brand, with a 24 hours a day news operation and news desks in Hong Kong, New York and London they manage to sell “quite a lot of global advertising”. They have online advertising sales staff in London, Hong Kong and New York from where online advertising is coordinated (Corrigan 2004).

### **Serving the overseas news client: a publicly funded model**

*News.bbc.co.uk*’s experience of generating content for the overseas reader may provide a model to its commercial rivals if and when the economics mean they too begin, in earnest, to target their overseas readers with dedicated content.

*News.bbc.co.uk*’s ‘international edition’ for overseas readers carries no advertising and is funded by the British Government’s Foreign Office through grant-in-aid via the *BBC World Service*.

Although they have “no” plans to revisit advertising for their overseas readers and the Foreign Office is “quite happy with that funding model basically” (Deverell 2004a), when the idea of an international edition was first proposed “there was a lot of pressure to consider having advertising on the World site because there was a precedent for it in *BBC World* [television]”. Although *BBC World* “makes a huge loss” it was felt that an international news website wouldn’t necessarily lose money because it would be “much cheaper to produce” (Smartt 2004).

After initially conceiving the ‘international edition’ as a separate site, *News.bbc.co.uk* realised that they “had enough material on the site anyway” and that their “international

coverage was as good, if not better, than any other site". So rather than begin again they decided that the material they were already generating "could be re-presented" to the overseas audience in "a different way". The "technological and editorial challenges" that the project presented weren't expected to "cost us very much at all", "£300,000, I think", so "money was found for that and we did it" (Smartt 2004).

The advertising-free model makes the publication process "a lot easier" for *BBC News Interactive* because the international site, as a public service offering, can be cross-promoted from other *BBC* web sites, *BBC World Service* radio and *BBC World* television. A commercial site would mean "much more difficult set of negotiations with rights holders", and "you have to have a huge team to sell advertising, which adds to your costs" (Deverell 2004a). Advertising would also:

introduce a huge new way of working because you've got to start thinking like newspapers about positioning adverts against editorial. One or two web sites have been caught out like this. The updating is so fast that you get the juxtaposition of editorial and adverts without noticing it. There has been a big plane crash and you've got an advert for *British Airways* on the page (Smartt 2004).

The editor of *News.bbc.co.uk* believes that whatever money could be made from advertising would be "considerably outweighed by the loss in credibility. We are clearly much the better for being seen to be impartial and not be muddied by having advertising across our pages. The feedback we get often makes mention of that fact." He acknowledges that they are "very lucky to be in that position" (Clifton 2004).

### **Subscription: paying for broadband content**

At the moment overseas readers pay to watch broadband video on *News.bbc.co.uk*. The *BBC's* head of *News Interactive* explains that this is:

for the simple reason that the unit costs of serving broadband content are still quite high and whilst you can justify it for those who pay, in effect, a subscription via the license fee in the UK, I don't think that you can justify it for international audiences. I think, in effect, what you would end up doing would be serving a lot of broadband video and audio to Americans and I am just not sure whether that is what the *BBC* is there to do.

He sees no reason why subscription charges should be extended, largely because although:

the costs of serving [the] overseas audience rise with increasing numbers of users the unit costs of that distribution has been falling. Leaving aside audio and video on the web, the distribution costs are modest. The distribution costs of text on the web are roughly 5 per cent of our total content budget.

He even conceives of a future where, if the unit costs for streaming video and audio come down sufficiently, the subscription barrier for broadband video to overseas viewers might be lifted although “that is way off to be honest” (Deverell 2004a).

### **Round the world round the clock: staffing an international news website**

*News.bbc.co.uk* has “a separate world core team”, journalists who are employed specifically to work on the international edition. Some of those journalists come in earlier in the day “to help us get going on the Asia Pacific side of things” and others stay later “to make sure we’re doing a reasonable job on US stories and other areas where stories are still going on”. They also have a team of two or three people overnight who are “updating the core stories on the World and UK sites”, although the editor admits that “our coverage of more detailed regional stories round the world tends to fall away a bit overnight because we don’t have the resources to staff up around the clock for all those regions” (Clifton 2004).

*News.bbc.co.uk* also has dedicated editorial staff outside the UK: “two people in Delhi one in Brussels and one in Washington”. Although the *BBC’s* head of *News Interactive* thinks that they will expand this number, in part to help cater for their overseas audience, the expansion is likely to be modest:

The *BBC* already has a very extensive and expensive international newsgathering network. I’d like to put someone full-time into Jerusalem because I think the Middle East is such a crucial area. Though even there the decision for us is, is it better for us to have one person in Jerusalem or is it better for us to have specialists in London with access to air tickets? And it is a marginal call at times. I’d like to make the Brussels posting a permanent one. I don’t see much beyond that because I think that the other factor in this is the increasing likelihood that we will get good content from *BBC* correspondents in those places (Deverell 2004a).

### **Discussion**

“The vast majority of the money and the management attention goes on [TV and Radio]. The website at *BBC News* accounts for, I think, about 6 per cent of the budget. It is a small part of the train set, there is no doubt about it”. Richard Deverell’s comments (2004) are indicative of how, even for the popular and influential *News.bbc.co.uk*, British news websites continue to have an equivocal relationship with their print and broadcast parents.

The questionable profitability of most sites is the major factor. Although *FT.com* claims it “is profitable this year” (Corrigan 2004), as do: the *Scotsman.com* “we are profitable” (Kirkpatrick 2004); *TimesOnline.co.uk* “the site is profitable” (Bale 2004); and *theSun.co.uk* “profitable within [our] terms, it is” (Picton 2004), Crosbie (2004) criticises the accounting of revenues behind newspaper’s self-reported claims of online profitability saying that “very few newspapers’ online editions are actually profitable solely from their

own operations. Almost all depend on newspapers for content and financial support". At least one British news site acknowledges this criticism. "It is fair to say [that we] don't fully cost the cost of producing all the news that the papers produce. We are totally open about that" (Bale 2004).

The significant, and probably underreported, overseas audience for British news websites is mixed blessing. On one hand sites fear their advertisers—who provide the lion's share of revenues—are uninterested in the overseas reader. On the other the consistent ongoing demand, particularly from America, for news published online in the UK is difficult to ignore. That demand is, in part, due to the popularity of news aggregators such as *Google News* and the ease with which they can link to UK sites but also because of the reputation British news sites have built for coverage that can be trusted.

As far as the overseas reader is concerned, previous reputations in the domestic market seem to count for little. Witness the overseas readerships of a regional paper such as the *Scotsman* and a struggling recent entrant to the British quality newspaper market, the *Independent*, against well established, relatively high circulation competitors such as the *Times* and *Telegraph*. Although some British news web sites, like *DailyMail.co.uk*, might like to believe that they can maintain a low overseas audience, to do so would be to buck all the trends.

A significant proportion of the overseas audience comes through third party sites such as *Drudgereport.com* and *Fark.com*. For the most part, British news web sites have not paid or courted these aggregators and some unlikely dependencies have developed. There is an ambivalence towards these sites with, on the one hand, publishers wanting to ensure their continued inclusion but, on the other, not being entirely comfortable with the size and success of their parasitic partner. Some welcome the hits aggregators bring as a way, in the short term, of supporting advertising revenue. Other sites believe these visitors are not a unsustainable way to build consistent revenues. But, with the unit costs of serving content to overseas readers falling, and a market in global media buying developing, albeit slowly, these hits may well prove more lucrative than they have, thus far, been.

If this does happen then British news websites are likely to try harder to retain the overseas reader who, compared to home readers, views half to a third as many pages a month. There are already stirrings, some deliberate, others occurring organically and in unlikely places: the only general interest, commercial news sites who mentioned, explicitly, generating content for overseas readers or changing their news agenda in response to their presence, were the tabloid *theSun.co.uk* and the regional *Scotsman.com*.

The *Ft.com* and *News.bbc.co.uk* are already generating content for overseas readers but as, respectively, a specialist subscription site and a publicly funded publication, the costs of employing staff to work on their international editions are defrayed by overseas subscription income and, in the BBC's case, direct Government grant.

Overseas readers are still something of a novelty. Journalists are “enjoying the feedback” and “the immediacy” (King 2004) that they get from the near-instantaneous connection they have with their global readership, and remain “amazed” (Picton 2004). by the volume and geographical spread of reader responses. Their presence flatters editors who value “simple reach” (Bale 2004). When the novelty wears off it will be harsh commercial reality that determines whether and how overseas readers prevail upon the practice of online news publishing in the UK.

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