

Journalism in the New Age of Participation: Meeting the Challenge in Fiji Newsrooms

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Abstract

This study of mainstream media and its approach to online publications and participatory journalism comes at a time of significant change in technological and telecommunication regulation in Fiji. It specifically seeks to analyse attitudes and practices within the local media industry, particularly towards greater interaction between the audience and journalists (or media companies) through advances provided through the Internet.

Introduction

Every day journalists around the world and their organisations are adapting the way they operate to take advantage of new technology such as mobile phones, digital cameras and computer software to file stories, speed up photography, and lay out newspapers. Fiji has traditionally been slow to accept international technological changes; for example it did not allow the introduction of television until 1991. Australia, on the other hand, had television in 1956, New Zealand in 1960, American Samoa in 1964 and Papua New Guinea in 1986.

Fiji's telecommunications sector has been in a monopoly since inception. With new developments in telephony, deregulation was promised in 2008 for the mobile phone sector. While opening up this sector creates greater opportunities for integration of text messaging into newsroom offerings, for internet users there is still really only one gateway.

According to Fiji-based IT specialist Chris Hammond-Thrasher, 'in the new deregulated environment, FINTEL will remain the sole agent for access to the SCCN (Southern Cross Cable Network – the main avenue through which Fiji's internet access is gained)'. He says 'FINTEL maintains a practical monopoly on wholesale internet access until a competi-

tive sea-floor cable is run to Fiji or satellite connections become more reliable and affordable' (Hammond-Thrasher, 2008).

Despite this control by FINTEL on wholesale internet access, over the past few years consumers in Fiji have had the choice of three main competitors that retail internet packages for home or office. This has seen cheaper and better internet access options for Fiji residents, which, in turn, has opened up greater online opportunities to comment, interact, review, or add detail to news stories and other offerings.

Furthermore, from a newsroom perspective, this new digital era and the rise in citizen or participatory journalism through anonymous blogs in Fiji post-December 2006 coup (Foster, 2007) means that mainstream media in Fiji cannot sit back and wait for greater levels of internet access before improving their online publications and avenues for citizen interaction. Adaptations are necessary, and these are necessary as soon as possible.

This study specifically seeks to analyse attitudes within the media industry towards greater interaction between 'the former audience' (Gillmor, 2004: ix) and journalists or media companies through advances provided through the internet. In order to do this, the study looks at options provided by media companies through their websites for audiences to interact with them and each other. The approaches taken by media executives and attitudes among journalists regarding the greater utilisation of the internet and higher levels of citizen involvement in journalism is also scrutinised in this study.

The study is important because it will allow for a stocktaking of sorts for the industry in Fiji, and explore options for the future. Such a study will be helpful to not just journalists and their managers, but also educational institutions concerned with training future journalists and re-training working journalists.

Literature review

Throughout the history of journalism, technology has forced changes to the way that news is gathered, produced and presented. In today's climate, that challenge is being presented by the Web; its greater interactivity and its ability to turn anyone with a computer into a publisher (Stephens, 2007: 34).

An 'enormous new power is devolving in the hands of what has been a mostly passive audience' but that this new potential for reader feedback and participation presents a great opportunity for journalism – not a threat (Gillmor, 2003: 79).

Lennon agrees, saying that the digital climate can reinvigorate mainstream media (MSM) by allowing it to tap into a vast source of information in what was traditionally the audience. This form of participatory journalism will not just become the norm in future, but it also has the potential to add credibility and trust to media organisations that embrace it (2003: 76-79).

Some news organisations have been slow to rise to this new digital challenge, or indeed accept the benefits it offers. If mainstream media is to stay relevant in the digital age, it will have to start making changes. Journalism practitioners will have to change their mindset to take advantage of the new age of 'unconventional journalism' (Outing, 2005: 79). Grabowicz says that the era of digital technology will break down barriers that exist between journalists and the public, forcing mainstream media to re-examine the way it goes about its business. The new emphasis will be on diversity and dialogue, personal writing style and greater levels of communication in any online journalistic venture (2003: 74-6).

There are already lessons for mainstream media in the roles that both journalists and non-journalists can play in the digital age. Cox says because good reporting is an 'all-encompassing' exercise, non-journalists will not easily take over in-depth analytical writing. He says his experience with citizen-journalist submissions has been that they tend to focus on opinion pieces, basic profiles and community affairs (2006: 76-78).

Pisani has found that technological developments have meant that non-journalists can contribute to news through uploading of text, photographs, audio and video (2005: 53-55).

Without a doubt, advances in the digital age mean that the traditional role of journalists will have to be re-looked at in light of greater citizen participation in newsgathering and presentation (Bentley, 2005: 26). Bowman is of the view that the implications for journalism from the rise in citizen participation are profound, but argues that mainstream media can learn to adapt and evolve their businesses to take advantage of the digital age (2005: 6-10).

Methodology

Qualitative methods were used to analyse the level of online involvement of mainstream media organisations in Fiji – specifically their current online positions and attitudes towards greater citizen involvement in journalism.

The study was approached in three ways – survey/interviews with media executives to gauge official company policies towards online pub-

lications and non-journalist involvement, a survey of journalists themselves to ascertain attitudes towards participatory journalism, and a look at avenues presented by media companies through their websites for interaction with the audience. Furthermore, the case of online social network, *Sotia Central*, was also studied to see what lessons could be learned by media companies.

Mainstream media information was gathered through interviews with executives of Fiji's media industry. The interview questions were taken from a study conducted of German newspapers in May 1997 (Neuberger et al, 1998). The results of that German study were published in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* in September 1998 titled, 'Online--The Future of Newspapers? Germany's Dailies on the World Wide Web'. Specific sections which were relevant and used for this local study included the German study's look at online staff demographics, activities they performed, differences between the organisation's traditional and online publications, additional features used in the online version and questions on finance and strategies. By applying these to local newsrooms, this study looked to analyse how local newsrooms had adapted to the new age of online and participatory journalism, their plans for the future, and any impediments to greater citizen involvement.

A survey was also conducted among working journalists to gauge their openness to the online challenge, including attitudes towards greater interaction with members of the 'audience' and changes that online publications have made to routine newsgathering (Stephens, 2007: 34). The survey drew heavily on questions raised by Singer (1998) in her analysis of issues relevant to the changing roles of journalists in the online world. Issues she raised regarding the theory of diffusion of innovation within newsroom situations, particularly journalists' adaptation to changing newsroom environments, were heavily drawn upon for the local survey. Singer's questions on the culture of news work in the online age including greater citizen involvement were also absorbed into the local journalists' survey.

An analysis was also conducted of websites of media companies in Fiji to assess what online options were provided for non-journalists to participate in journalism as part of the process of changing the one-to-many publishing process to a many-to-many process (Li, 1998: 353).

The categories themselves were drawn from a study by Schultz (1999), which looked at how newspapers in the US were using the internet's potential for greater interactivity with their audience and how media companies facilitated this through their websites.

To peruse local media company websites, the specific areas taken

from the Schultz example included finding out whether the company facilitated letters to the editor (traditional), letters to the editor (email), letters to the editor (online), comment on stories (online), email links to editors on individual stories (online), email links to reporters who wrote stories (online), weblog (online) or some other interactive option such as chatrooms.

Finally the case study of the national award-winning social networking site Sotia Central – which belongs to the biggest newspaper company in the country, The Fiji Times Limited - is looked at, including decisions that led to its implementation and its meteoric rise in popularity especially in the local media market.

Results

Media Executive Survey Interview

Despite numerous attempts to engage executives from all six media companies whose websites were used in this study, the response rate was only 50 per cent. The respondents included executives of *The Fiji Times*, *Fiji Sun* and radio/online company Communications Fiji Limited. Executives of the Fiji Broadcasting Commission, *Fijilive.com*, and Fiji Television did not respond, citing work commitments and conflicting schedules.

All the media company respondents currently deliver news through the internet. Two-thirds of the respondents agreed that there had been an effect on newsroom routines (such as how information is collected and disseminated) as a result of the online venture. For example, one of the media executives said ‘news staff members are more focused now on collecting multi media material and considering writing longer form stories’.

Only one out of the three companies currently has separate staff working on the online publication. However this media organisation is looking at also integrating journalists from the traditional publication into providing online updates. The other two-thirds use staff from the traditional publication (radio and newspaper journalists).

Online Management and Make-up

All the respondents currently have the online management structure incorporated into the traditional newsroom management structure reporting to the editor/editor-in-chief.

All the respondents cited as ‘tremendous’ the opportunities that are available for journalists with the growth of online ventures. One local media company executive said this was ‘particularly for journalists who

are able to build multimedia skills and knowledge. We need people who can develop stories with audio, print and video in mind’. Another said there was ‘enormous’ potential, and recognised that ‘there are going to be many other types of journalists now... (including) community-based people who are just submitting material that they’ve seen... there’s enormous growth for journalists, potential for established journalists and trained journalists but we also will be stretching the definition of journalism and what is a journalist’.

The media company executives who responded (*The Fiji Times*, *Fiji Sun* and Communications Fiji Limited) are altogether responsible for 106 full-time journalists and newsroom staff members. These constitute the majority of those who work in newsrooms of mainstream media. Those executives who did not respond (*Fijilive.com*, Fiji Broadcasting Commission and Fiji Television) have smaller editorial teams.

One of the three respondents did not have editorial staff working on the online edition because the online publication was simply the same version as the traditional publication of the day uploaded by IT staff. Thus the questions on the make-up of online editorial workers did not apply to that company.

Of the two remaining, one had staff members who were mid-junior range while the other only used senior-mid-level editorial staff on the online publication. The reason for only using senior-mid-level staff was online publishing did not allow for any ‘fallback position’ such as that existing in the traditional publication where sub-editors check copy before publication. ‘The formal review process doesn’t exist so you have to get it right straight away. You can change it really quickly but it does mean that you have published something that somebody, somewhere, would have seen,’ the media executive said.

Those results were also reflected in the age of people who worked on the online version with editorial staff either in their mid-40s and late 30s and web designers in their early 20s-late teens. Of those, one newsroom had all women working on their website while the other had six women in their newsroom, though none were involved in web work.

On the training level of those working on online publications, all companies provided on-the-job training. Half had industry-organised training programs, journalism school certificates/diplomas and university qualifications such as a degree.

The interactive feel of sites

All online editorial staff are involved in selection of texts, editing

outside texts, writing/editing their own articles, electronic research through the internet and databases as well as handling and answering emails.

Fifty per cent were also involved in 'technical preparation of texts for the internet and programming web pages', artwork, graphics, layout, administrative and organisational work for the online publication, and a user help service/hotline service.

None of the staff members were involved in the more technical areas of maintenance of internet servers, database or network administration, marketing, providing internet access or non-electronic research.

Of all the features of online publications provided in a list, local media executives said they never implemented email links to readers' letters and to authors of stories. All respondents said they seldom added links relevant to the story for the online edition.

Three other features (email links to editors, revision of style for the online edition and shortening of stories for the online edition) were never done by 66.7 per cent.

The features that were adopted often in the online edition (by 66.7 per cent) included the order of stories being altered, stories extended to include additional information and articles from the traditional publication edited for the online publication.

None of the respondents used animation, while 66.7 per cent never used music, and seldom used video sequences. But they always provided links to other sites. All respondents either always (66.7%) or often (33.3per cent) provided links that allow the user to navigate within the website. Spoken text and sounds were never or seldom used (66.7 %).

On additional features available in the online venture, all respondents provide information on travel and other local information. None provide ticket ordering services, wire services, entertainment such as games or a list of links for computer/net research. Two-thirds provided an events database, archive, and their own PR onsite. Only a third provided special offers for young people and advice/service not related to computers.

Online Growth Impediments

All respondents carried advertising online. Two-thirds of the respondents said the biggest obstacle to improving profitability of the online venture was convincing the advertising market of the potential offered through the web. 'We have a very immature advertising market in Fiji at the moment - we always have', one executive stated. 'It's always

about 10 years behind everybody else. It's just an education process. So we believe that the value of the advertising that's coming on the site now is much higher than the money we're getting for it.'

When asked why the company decided to go into online activity, all respondents either said this was 'wholly' to get into a promising sector as soon as possible (66.7 %) or 'mainly' because of that (33.3 %). In all cases, respondents agreed that the venture was 'mainly' to enter an interesting advertising market as early as possible, increase the company's range of services and improve the company's image. Two-thirds cited gaining an audience for the traditional edition and making news more up-to-the-minute as being 'less' influential reasons for deciding to go online.

66.7 per cent believed that it was necessary for newsroom staff to have special training to prepare for the online challenge. One executive stated that 'the biggest challenge is to get the team to accept online activity as a core part of their responsibilities'. Another said increasing the urgency and breaking the rule of balancing the story before publication was also a lesson that traditional journalists had to come to grips with:

We had some traditional journalists in the early days of the site who would spend an hour and a half getting all the sides of the story, going back, checking this, going back and then put up 16 paragraphs on the web. What we were saying was that we only needed two (paragraphs). Say a bus has crashed, five people are believed to be dead, updates coming—that's it.

Media executives were also asked if they believed their journalists were ready for a new phase of greater citizen involvement/participation/commentary that online journalism could present. Two-thirds said yes, 'it's part of our newsroom core culture'. The one-third that disagreed said journalists were not ready until they could 'understand the value of citizen journalism and how to encourage people to communicate with us without being dismissive... a phone will ring and everybody will ignore it even though it could be someone outside saying we have just seen the prime minister's car go off a cliff. The newsroom culture we have at the moment is 'I'm busy and if it's a story, too bad'.

In two-thirds of the responses though, there was still major excitement among media executives of the potential that the internet could offer. 'The arrival of broadband has opened up a range of possibilities. It has certainly allowed us to offer a wider range of services,' one said. Another said: 'We are embracing online (technology) thoroughly and completely and it's across all departments. It's a valid, growing form of publishing'.

Journalists' Survey

There was a 30 per cent response rate to the journalists' survey, which was disseminated and returned via email. Email was chosen because of the difficulties in nailing down journalists whose schedules can change throughout any given day. Indeed, conflicting schedules and lack of time were cited as the main reasons for not filling out the survey.

Of those who did respond, 83.4 per cent were either senior or mid-level within the newsroom structure. Fifty per cent were in their 20s, 33.4 per cent in their 30s and 16.6 per cent in their 40s, with 75 per cent of respondents being female.

On level of training attained, 83.3 per cent had received on-the-job training, 50 per cent had also undergone industry-organised training programs, 16.7 per cent had certificates or diplomas from journalism schools, 25 per cent also had university degrees, while 8 per cent had undergone Training of Trainers' programs.

All the journalists belonged to companies that deliver news through the internet, with sites updated at least daily.

Fifty-eight per cent of respondents provided stories or newsgathering for the online publication, and two-thirds of those were involved in online news provision by default in that the articles they wrote for the traditional publication were later published in the online version with no further effort necessary on their part. One-third of those with some online involvement also gathered news that someone else wrote and placed online. Only 8 per cent were directly involved with the online publication including editing and posting scripts and pictures on the web.

All the respondents said they used the internet for research, with 75 per cent of them accessing the internet several times a day for this purpose.

When respondents were asked who helped them most in learning how to use the internet effectively for journalistic purposes, 75 per cent said they mostly taught themselves, while 25 per cent said they were helped by senior journalists and IT staff.

Journalists' Attitudes to Participatory Journalism

On who should be the contact point for readers/audience over stories/news tips/extra information that they may wish to provide, the most commonly chosen responses (41.7 per cent) were the chief-of-staff and directly with the journalist working on the story. One-third of the respondents said the editor should be available, while 25 per cent said some

other senior journalist should take that responsibility.

On whether the journalist would like readers/audience to email them directly responses to the stories they wrote, 91.7 per cent of respondents replied in the affirmative, citing feedback, news tips, impact of story and public interest as the reasoning behind this.

When asked if there was greater pressure now for journalists to provide extra newsgathering or stories for both the traditional and the online publication, 75 per cent replied in the negative. When asked to explain, the reason most cited was that only brief updates were required of them for the online publication.

The vast majority of respondents (91.7 per cent) believed that it was necessary to have special training to prepare for the online challenge. Specific areas of need cited included online news style (such as providing geographical details for the online version that would not be needed in the traditional publication), multi-media use and application, and adapting to faster deadlines online.

Despite this, 83 per cent said they were ready for a new phase of greater citizen involvement/participation/commentary that online journalism could present. In the words of one respondent, 'citizen participation is the way to go. No longer can they just be passive receivers of information'. Of the 17 per cent that said they were not ready, most believed that 'acquiring multi-media skills' would help them prepare better.

Other issues raised by journalists with regard to greater online involvement included the need to consider shift-work for 24-hour web monitoring and updates, concern over the lack of internet access for the poor and rural populations, thus denying them an online voice, demand for more writing and newsgathering skills and the fact that not everyone in newsrooms supported the online publication.

Media Websites

In the media websites considered, the avenues most often offered (by 66.7 per cent) for the audience to provide feedback or commentary were traditional letters to the editor, email links for letters to the editor, and online comment on stories.

Only one-third offered online letters to the editor, online weblogs, managed forums for visitors and online polls.

None of the websites offered the audience online links through which to email editors directly on individual stories or email reporters who wrote the stories.

Case Study: *Sotia Central*

Fiji-based social networking site — *Sotia Central* (www.sotiacentral.com) — was launched in June 2008 by The Fiji Times Ltd. It's popularity surprised even the company itself, with The Fiji Times Online development manager Jachin Sheehy referring to *Sotia Central*'s growth over the four-month period from June to October as 'the fastest launch take-up we've ever had'.

The company has several online offerings¹ but began with Fiji Times Online (www.fjitimes.com.fj), which Sheehy says averaged over three million page views per month over the 2006 period. Fiji Times Online established itself as a reliable source of news and information on developments in Fiji during the last month of 2006, he says, when the military took over government in Fiji. Fiji Times Online then grew to five million page views a month. While the news-based site Fiji Times Online took three years to reach the 1.5million mark, the social networking site *Sotia Central* went from zero to 1.5million page views per month in just three months (Sheehy, 2008). It's a meteoric rise that has many lessons that the company is looking to apply to its news-based online and traditional publications.

Main Components

Sheehy believes there has been a change in the market since Fiji Times Online first came on the scene several years ago. As of October 30, 2008, *Sotia Central* had 11,184 members. New members were signing up at 1000 a week during 2008.

The site has 36,000 photos, with over 2,000 discussion topics. 'We would never have predicted that there would be such activity there,' says Sheehy. 'Right now we don't understand why this forum works when others didn't, but it's taken off'.

Sotia Central has an 'events' section where people can share calendars. The site has 622 blog posts and 230 groups, which are like networks within networks grouped by high schools, location, status, occupation, religion, province or village. Around 50 people have been banned from the site for posting porn or harassing other people. Sheehy considers the number of miscreants to be quite low considering *Sotia Central* has more than 11,000 members.

¹ These were: <http://rugby.fjitimes-.com/>, [http://classifieds.fjitimes.com](http://classifieds.fjitimes.com;); www.1degree.com.fj; and www.myfijiguide.com.

Membership

According to its home page, *Sotia Central*'s main aim was to be 'dedicated to absolutely everything in regards to Fijians serving in foreign legions, including the British Army (and navy), UN peacekeeping forces from Fiji and security people in Iraq and around the world'. With remittances one of Fiji's top five foreign exchange earners since the turn of the century, with \$F322million sent into the country in 2006 (Sada Reddy, 2008), security workers were a niche market perfectly suited to making a local online social network workable.

For Fiji Times Limited, the benefits of running a free social networking site, aimed at linking the foreign-based local soldiers and security workers with family and friends, far outweigh any costs. According to Sheehy, it is a massive marketing list and a hugely captive audience for niche advertisers with the average visitor staying on the site for 20 minutes at a time. Fiji Times also gets a social brand out of it. The closest thing you can compare it to is the company's weekly teen newspaper *Kaila!*

Sheehy (2008) says not everyone who signs up for free membership is a soldier. 'Before the public launch of *Sotia Central* in mid-June, we invited 100 selected people – most of whom were soldiers or had soldiers in their families. That's all we did and then we sat back and watched to see what would happen. These people invited another 700 people on their own and the network started to take off. So when we had the public launch and promotion using radio, television, newspapers, and our own online sites, it really exploded. But even today the vast majority of new members are generated by invites from current members. To date, the 11,000 members have 13,000 outstanding invitations for membership.'

Demographic differences have also shown up between Fiji Times Online and *Sotia Central*. 'From when we launched Fiji Times Online up until today the vast majority of visitors are from outside Fiji', says Sheehy.

In fact 32 per cent of FTO users are from within Fiji, [...] the biggest single country of origin, it's still less than all the internationals which make up 68 per cent. But it's the opposite with *Sotia Central*, which has 60 per cent of members within Fiji and the remainder from wherever in the world Fiji soldiers and security officers hang out. This reflects the niche market that *Sotia Central* is in as obviously there are more soldiers' families within Fiji than outside (Sheehy, 2008).

The Success Formula

When Fiji Times Ltd decided to offer a social networking site, it started planning six months out at the start of 2008, Sheehy says. 'Ideas were tossed around until May and then at end of May we decided that we had over-planned it and so we threw out a lot of what we'd done and launched a simple platform in two weeks. It was the best thing we did – to throw everything out and launch simply, adding features as people demanded it. One of the popular features now is Chat, which was added as an experiment. But once it was there, people knew they wanted it and let us know immediately if it fails to function properly.'

Sheehy says a key part of finding what the success formula has been with Sotia Central is looking at the discussion lists:

They discuss the weirdest of things to the most normal – from infidelity, to how to keep your family together, to whether British Army boys can be trusted. This really is the closest thing you'll ever get to an online grog session. We find a lot of discussions involve what people normally discuss in their personal social circles. A lot of that is people who really just want to know if their experience is common in society, "hello this is me, has anyone else out there had this happen to them". It's like they are looking for connection, for an informal support group.

Lessons for News Sites

One of the best lessons learned off the Sotia Central experience for Fiji Times has been watching the explosion of citizen participation in discussions that are not always centred on news or politics, but where people just want to connect to other people and share views on just about anything. 'There are elements from Sotia Central that will cross over into a participatory environment for news,' says Sheehy. But he believes that one of biggest challenges for Fiji Times as a news-based business will be coping with the idea of 'letting go and not trying to control discussion'.

Obviously this raises interesting questions surrounding slander, defamation, libel and what type of news may be suitable for discussion in any open network. Court stories offer a special challenge in this regard. 'We have to be very careful how we report court stories, and so any public discussion we foster has to abide by certain rules,' says Sheehy. 'But many social networks don't care about rules. They sit around the grog bowl and discuss how a grandfather who raped his grandchild should be slung up over a tree – and this is what they expect to be able to say in social networks. So it's a challenge for us.'

Where to Next – Content Generation?

The Fiji Times is already experimenting with tying its Sotia Central success in with one of its traditional publications – *The Sunday Times*. At present, every issue of *The Sunday Times* has a one page feature where all its content is drawn largely from Sotia Central, including highlighting certain active members, forum topics, discussions and the like. According to Sheehy, journalists are finding interesting people in Sotia Central and giving them a way to connect with the rest of the country – who may not be online – through *Sunday Times*.

It works in two ways: Sotia Central provides content for the print product while members of Sotia Central, knowing that if they have something interesting to say and they have been model Sotia Central citizens, it may result in publication in *The Sunday Sun*. The Sunday Times page is posted on the site so people can see who gets mentioned (see Appendix A for an illustration). 'It's a small start towards a little bit of synergy between the print product and online,' says Sheehy.

Even if Sotia Central did not generate a lot of income for the company, it would still be 'a worthwhile content farm – a place to find human interest and colour pieces'.

The next stage the company is looking at is marrying social networks and news around the area of sports. 'We're already noting interesting trends on the Comments Section for Rugby Times,' says Sheehy. 'It's not quite as social as Sotia Central because they just have a name and a history of comments, but it's seen a lot of heated discussions'.

Sheehy reckons Sotia Central has succeeded because it's become a daily feature in the lives of many families who use it to keep in touch with family members in the armed forces offshore. 'A social network is always going to get used in more ways than you envisaged. It goes where the community needs it to go to fulfill certain needs. We initially thought chat would be a throwaway feature – but people now depend on it. It's a bit scary being relied on like that, but at the end of the day, if we fulfill their communication needs, keep them on site and continue to be able to show them advertising, we can keep it going'.

Discussion

Over the next few years, media organisations and newsrooms within Fiji will continue to see major change as a result of the advent of the internet. Media organisations in Fiji are embracing the potential offered online but many have been slow in up-take. One of the challenges for

media companies will be to ensure that their websites are profitable and thus there is a need for a wider education campaign for advertisers and the general public on online statistics and web traffic. Already there are major lessons media companies can learn from the experiences of social networking sites, such as Sotia Central.

Our readers and audience want to be able to tailor their content and be able to provide feedback on events or issues that affect them. While the attitudes towards participatory journalism within newsrooms and among their managers are positive, there are also other issues that need to be addressed immediately. These include fostering a more open attitude to direct contact with members of the public, the need for better rostering to enable constant online monitoring of chatrooms and comment sites, and the need for journalists to be better skilled in time management, personal communication and analytical writing.

Online journalism and participatory journalism offer significant opportunities for journalists and non-journalists to interact better in a multi-media environment.

Higher levels of internet use in Fiji and better interactive options offered by local media companies through their online publications could go a long way towards enabling the creation of the public sphere so highly desired by Jurgen Habermas. This can also allow for the creation of greater accountability among officials and newsrooms and higher levels of good governance and accountability overall.

Conclusion

The interactive options offered as a result of the increasing use of the internet within Fiji and outside of the country means that the issue of participatory journalism will be one that will rise in importance for the industry in Fiji and other stakeholders concerned with media and democracy.

Though the media industry in Fiji is slowly taking up the online challenge, there is a need for greater emphasis to be placed on preparing journalists and their audiences to better utilise interactive options. Fiji is just scratching the surface of online interactive publishing at this moment, and the possibilities for the future (provided there is greater uptake of cheaper and faster internet across Fiji) are virtually endless.

As a result it is fair to conclude that this study has only looked at the tip of the iceberg in Fiji in terms of online media activity and audience interactivity. Further research in this area, especially through a proper content analysis of Fiji media websites, a wider interview and survey process

of attitudes within the media industry to citizen participation, or a case study of any one of the media companies' adoption of online publishing, would provide greater means with which to sufficiently analyse participatory journalism in Fiji and the future of online publishing. There is also room to explore attitudes and practices of internet users in Fiji, specifically those that utilise media company websites.

Appendix A:

Sotia Central - Page 14, Sunday Times – October 19, 2008

sotia central

Members work up a sweat

By **Pauline** **SLACKSON**

It was a hot day with a lot of physical vigor. Some members of the Sotia Central members club worked hard to get their sweat-soaked shirts off. They were participating in a fitness program that was part of the club's activities. The members were encouraged to get out there and work up a sweat. The program was designed to help members stay fit and healthy. It was a great way to spend time with friends and family. The members were encouraged to get out there and work up a sweat. The program was designed to help members stay fit and healthy. It was a great way to spend time with friends and family.

What is so healthy about it? The members were encouraged to get out there and work up a sweat. The program was designed to help members stay fit and healthy. It was a great way to spend time with friends and family.

When did you start with it? The members were encouraged to get out there and work up a sweat. The program was designed to help members stay fit and healthy. It was a great way to spend time with friends and family.

How do you feel about it? The members were encouraged to get out there and work up a sweat. The program was designed to help members stay fit and healthy. It was a great way to spend time with friends and family.

What are the benefits? The members were encouraged to get out there and work up a sweat. The program was designed to help members stay fit and healthy. It was a great way to spend time with friends and family.

How often do you go? The members were encouraged to get out there and work up a sweat. The program was designed to help members stay fit and healthy. It was a great way to spend time with friends and family.

What is the future? The members were encouraged to get out there and work up a sweat. The program was designed to help members stay fit and healthy. It was a great way to spend time with friends and family.

What is the conclusion? The members were encouraged to get out there and work up a sweat. The program was designed to help members stay fit and healthy. It was a great way to spend time with friends and family.

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