

Journalists need 'new, collaborative ways to tell stories'

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User-generated content allows journalists to explore new, collaborative ways to tell stories.

(PhysOrg.com) -- User-generated content may make some in the mainstream media 'uneasy' but it allows journalists to 'explore new, collaborative ways to tell stories', according to a paper published by Oxford University's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ).

The word 'user' shows that the people once at the end of the production chain have 'upended the standard order', writes RISJ report author and award-winning columnist at The [Washington Post](#), John Kelly. He argues in his report *Red Kayaks and Hidden Gold* that journalists must respond to this changed dynamic.

Mr Kelly, Visiting Fellow at the RISJ, says: 'News was a broadcast from one to many. We live in a network age now, where the many can talk to

the many, bypassing the one completely.’ He points out that, ‘the tables have turned so much that the old producers - the newspapers, the TV news operations - are now users’, with the mainstream media continually asking citizens to have their say and citizens obliging.

Commenting on the phrase ‘user-generated content’, he writes: ‘There is much contained within the phrase to make journalists uneasy. “Content” is a word that calls to mind a commodity, something bland used to fill a hole. “Generated” isn’t much better, suggesting as it does material that’s created in some vaguely spontaneous way.’

However, the report goes on to highlight the views of supporters of [citizen journalism](#), who argue that it can improve journalism itself. ‘It can make them more interested in their communities, it can demystify the political process, it can excite them about the things the best journalism strives to do: explain, crusade, call to account.’

Mr Kelly’s report sounds a note of caution in its conclusion: ‘It can do these things. How often it does do them, and for whom, is something worthy of further study. In the meantime, the question “Should there be citizen journalism?” is beside the point. Journalists must accept that the dynamic has changed. They must see the public as more than an inert, monolithic audience. They must explore new, collaborative ways to tell stories.

‘Mainstream news outlets that neglect to allow their readers to participate will risk losing those readers. In a culture that increasingly views news as a commodity, users will look for differentiating factors as they choose their news sources. The quality and legitimacy of the product will be aspects - perhaps even the most important ones - but so too will be the extent to which the media responds to its customers and gives them useful tools to customize, share and contribute to the [news](#).’

Provided by Oxford University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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