

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media and their principles

Joseph Nicolai
Assistant Professor, Ahmed Al-Rawi, Ph.D.

E-mail: aalrawi@sfu.ca

E-mail: jnicolai@sfu.ca

Mobile: 0017787823860

Abstract

This paper offers a critical examination of Canadian news guidelines and policies on user-generated content (UGC) posted on news-related comment sections and social media.

The outline of how news-related UGC is moderated within Canadian news is achieved by looking at the online comment policies of major Canadian news organizations like .

the CBC, CityNews (Halifax), CTV News, Glacier Media, Global News, The Globe and Mail, Narcity Media, Postmedia, QUB (Québecor), and Torstar.

Received: 2022/03/11

Accepted : 2022/04/25

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33282>

ISSN: 2617- 9318 (Online)

ISSN: 1995- 8005 (Print)

* Director of Disinformation Project , School of Communication, Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology, Simon Fraser University, Canada

The policies highlight how Canadian news organizations have practical strategies to manage news-related UGC but also call upon positive and negative social principles, to flag ill practices, foster democracy, and fight against online hate speech and libel. The analysis shows how guidelines reflect many of the key principles highlighted in the literature review but make no reference to economic principles that are emphasized as important in academic and journalist concerns with moderating news-related UGC.

Keywords: moderation policies; news organizations; Canadian news media; social media; user generated content; racism; freedom of speech

Available Online: <http://abaa.uobaghdad.edu.iq/>

استراتيجيات تعديل التعليقات في وسائل الإعلام الكندية ومبادئها

جوزيف نيكولاي

أستاذ مشارك: احمد الراوي

مستخلص

يقدم هذا البحث فحصًا نقديًا لإرشادات وسياسات الأخبار الكندية بشأن المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون والذي يتم نشره في أقسام التعليقات المتعلقة بالأخبار ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. تم تحقيق وضع الخطوط العريضة عن كيفية إدارة تعديل المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون المرتبط بالأخبار الكندية من خلال النظر في سياسات التعليقات عبر الإنترنت للمؤسسات الإخبارية الكندية الكبرى مثل سي بي سي، ستي نيوز (هالفكس)، سي تي في نيوز، كلاشير ميديا، كلوبل نيوز، كلوب اند ميل، نرستي ميدي، بوستميديا، كيو يو بي، و تورستار. تسلط السياسات الضوء على الكيفية التي تمتلك بها المؤسسات الإخبارية الكندية استراتيجيات عملية لإدارة تعديل المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون المتعلق بالأخبار، ولكنها تدعو أيضًا إلى المبادئ الاجتماعية الإيجابية والسلبية، للإبلاغ عن الممارسات السيئة، وتعزيز الديمقراطية، ومحاربة خطاب الكراهية والتشهير عبر الإنترنت. يُظهر التحليل كيف تعكس المبادئ التوجيهية العديد من المبادئ الرئيسية التي تم إبرازها في مراجعة الأدبيات ولكنها لا تشير إلى المبادئ الاقتصادية التي تم التأكيد عليها باعتبارها مهمة في الاهتمامات الأكاديمية والصحفية مع تعديل المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون المتعلق بالأخبار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سياسات الاعتدال، المنظمات الإخبارية، وسائل الإعلام الكندية، الصحافة، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي؛ عنصرية؛ حرية التعبير

* كلية الاتصالات، كلية الاتصالات والفنون والتكنولوجيا. جامعة سيمون فريزر، كندا

* مدير مشروع المعلومات المضللة، كلية الاتصالات، كلية الاتصالات والفنون والتكنولوجيا، جامعة سيمون فريزر، كندا

Introduction

As Picard (2009) writes, the mantra for modern-day news organizations is to be “anywhere, anytime on any platform.” The digitalization of news has transformed not only where and when news is published but also the way in which non-journalists and journalists interact. These changes have not been without concern. The change in speed, scale and scope of audience participation and news-related user-generated content (UGC) afforded by comment sections have been an ongoing matter of public and professional contention. While platforms for audience-feedback forums have been fixtures of news media for centuries, today’s online digital news-related UGC as having “greatly expanded [this] dynamism” (Reader, 2012, p. 495). Despite periodical calls within journalism announcing the death of news-related comment sections (Finley, 2015; Spencer, 2018), news-related UGC have not disappeared (Kovacs, 2020).

News-related UGC has been interpreted positively and negatively. On the one hand, the proliferation of UGC online has been celebrated. As Van Dijck (2009, p. 41) writes that after “decades of vilifying the passive couch potato, the press now venerates the active participant in digital culture.” Part and parcel of this change has been the broader shift toward users “demanding the right to participate within the culture” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 24) in a society increasingly organized around participatory values (Barney et al., 2016). Others see the benefits of news-related UGC in giving feedback to news makers and possibly bringing increased “attention to issues and topics that traditional news media might have overlooked” (Picard, 2009, p. 11) or because it is economically beneficial to bring audiences’ eyeballs to look at news content (Paulussen, 2011, p. 61; Spencer, 2018). On the other hand, UGC has been understood as increasing the work-load of journalists, and has been interpreted as being a part of explaining journalists and news organizations reluctance towards adopting or at the very least valuing UGC on news sites (Bergström & Wadbring, 2015; Mitchelstein, 2011; Viscovi & Gustafsson, 2013; Witschge, 2012). Since the actual implementation of news-related comment sections, Smoliarova et al. (2021) argue “high expectations on rational, responsible, and civil user commenting have quickly vanished”. UGC has

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

been perceived as abusive, hateful or offensive by news makers, and has been interpreted as everything from an ethical challenge to the antithesis of traditional journalistic news values (Conlin & Roberts, 2016; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Hlavach & Freivogel, 2011; Noci et al., 2010; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Phillips, 2015; Santana, 2014; Singer, 2009; Singer & Ashman, 2009). As Bergström & Wadbring (2015) put bluntly, from the perspective of journalists, user-generated content is “beneficial yet crappy.”

These concerns, among others, have prompted a variety of responses to theorize and operationalize responses from news providers in order to best manage news-related UGC through a varieties of strategies (Binns, 2012; Cammaerts, 2009; Engström, 2016; Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012; Hardaker, 2015; Harrison, 2009; Hille & Bakker, 2013, 2014; Hong, 2012; Jenks, 2019; Juneström, 2019; Reader, 2012; Sanfilippo et al., 2017; Weber, 2014; Wolfgang, 2018)“DOI”:"10.1080/17512786.2011.648988",“ISSN”:"1751-2786, 1751-2794",“issue”:"4",“journalAbbreviation”:"-Journalism Practice",“language”:"en",“page”:"547-562",“source”:"DOI.org (Crossref. These concerning issues have led us to ask the following questions: What are the concerns, strategies and principles associated with maintaining and moderating UGC news-related content? How do Canadian news sites claim to manage UGC content on their websites? How do these, if they do, differ from the concerns, strategies and principles discussed above?

In order to help shed light on these questions, this paper starts with a literature review of UGC strategies and principles, before examining how UGC on Canadian news sites is moderated. The literature review focuses on strategies in news-related UGC. In terms of moderation strategies, different forms of comment governance, registration and the question of anonymity, pre-moderation and post-moderation policy are discussed. In terms of principles, the economic realities, democratic ideals and principles of professional journalism in moderating are highlighted throughout. The examination of Canadian news site UGC strategies and principles is achieved by looking at the community guidelines of CBC, CityNews, CTV, Glacier Media, Global News, Globe and Mail, Narcity Media, Postmedia, QUB (Québecor), and Torstar.

Strategies and Principles in News-Related UGC

In this literature review section, we discuss democratic ideals, fears over incivility or even illegal posts, and the economic realities for the management of UGC. Also, the question of moderation strategies and social principles of UGC are highlighted. Further, UGC news regulation can be understood as operating along three major strategic plains: user policy (pre-registration, pre-moderation and post-moderation), platform selection (in-house, outsourced), and finally, moderation through a combination of users, professionals and filters (machine-based automated content moderation).

In terms of strategies, we will now review registration/anonymity, manual and automated moderation, and also moderation by the selection of platform. Anonymity has been interpreted by some academics and journalists as being a key problem for successful USG on news sites. For Reader (2012), journalists interpret the democratic promise of UGC on the requirement of real name identities for users. Anonymity has been understood as fueling incivility online (Arendholz, 2013; Donath, 1998), promoting obscenity (Reader, 2012) and irrelevant content and even abusive content (Hille & Bakker, 2014; Noci et al., 2010). Anonymity was also seen to be a link to lower quality of comments on a news site (Hille & Bakker, 2014; Noci et al., 2010). For this reason, pre-registration is interpreted as having a positive effect on the quality of comments while also, as Santana (2014) recognizes, results in an overall drop in the number of comments.

In general, news moderation can be practically performed either manually or automatically. This can involve the use of algorithm software to discover abusive comments or to let users themselves moderate other comments by using buttons to rank comments, report abuse or flag content for moderation (Crawford & Gillespie, 2016; Hille & Bakker, 2014, p. 565). Pre-moderation refers to the practice of requiring a manual moderator or automatic filter to look validate each post before they are visible to the public online. Pre-moderation involving manual moderation is both labour-intensive and economically costly (Santana, 2014). In Hille and Baker's study (2014, p. 566) of Dutch media systems and UGC governance, pre-moderation was found to be

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

much less common than all the other approaches. This could be because of the expense and time associated with this labor-intensive strategy. Post-moderation policy refers to the practice of moderating UGC after it is posted online. One way for users to participate in moderation is through the process of “flagging,” which is a mechanism for reporting offensive content to a social media platform and is currently found on many sites with UGC (Crawford & Gillespie, 2016).

Online news content providers carefully position themselves to users, clients, advertisers and policymakers as “platforms” where they seek protection for facilitating user expression yet also seek limited liability for what those users say (Gillespie, 2010). With the introduction of outsourcing comment sections to social media sites, such as Facebook, many of the associated “problems” of UGC may be partly solved. Facebook, for example, does not officially allow for accounts under pseudonyms or fake names. Aside from automatic filters, more in-depth moderation can also be partially or fully outsourced to users. As Colin and Roberts (2016, pp. 370–371) write, news organizations make two key decisions when allowing online user comments: firstly, whether to host comments using their own technology, and secondly, whether to moderate comments before or after submission. Many of the traditional channels responsible have, in recent years, relocated reader interactivity from their own websites and native commenting systems to non-native commenting systems on social media (Hong, 2012; Robinson, 2014; Santana, 2014; Weber, 2014), which has contributed to changing the ways in which news sources interact with readers (Hermida, 2010). Outsourcing UGC to social media has also been interpreted as reducing costs of maintaining in-house UGC (Hille & Bakker, 2013). Hille and Bakker (2014) argue that there is an obvious dissimilarity in the quality of comments on news sites and social media. In their analysis, they found that not only did users post more comments on new sites, where the quality was seen as being higher and the tone of the debate more vibrant, but also this challenged the idea held by some journalists that transitioning to Facebook would be a “Troll-Killer” (Hille & Bakker, 2014, p. 570). For Hille and Bakker (2014), Facebook, while diminishing the role of trolls on the news sites, provided fewer overall comments and reduced the quality of debates (Hille & Bakker, 2014,

p. 570). There could be the result of unintended consequences. For example, some of the news sources in a study by Juneström (2019), which were posted by the news outlet on Facebook, were not always accessible by Facebook users unless they had a subscription. For Juneström, this creates a situation which might “increase the risk of getting comments from people who have not read the content” (2019, p. 703).

News-related UGC can be understood as revolving around professional, economic and democratic principles. The principle of professionalism is a recurring theme. In general, news workers themselves have been understood as being enthusiastic and accepting of audience participation understood within a model of journalism where they retain firm control (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Juneström, 2019; Karlsson, 2011; Paulussen et al., 2007; Singer, 2006; Williams et al., 2010). While journalists may generally not comment on their own articles, it has been observed they nonetheless have been found to feel responsible for governing abusive UGC on their news stories, which has been interpreted as preserving the quality and authority of the news company and protecting users' respective rights to speech (Braun & Gillespie, 2011; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Robinson, 2010). In interviews with journalists, it was found that they “avoided interacting with their audience and developed simple routines and practices for moderation, including posting the rules at the top of the forum and silently deleting problematic comments or banning commenters” while they also “publicly stated an interest in promoting public discourse, but with one another spoke derisively of commenters and commenting” (Wolfgang, 2018, p. 2).

According to Picard (2009), the primordial question to raise with regards to news organizations and their relationship to their decisions is: “How will the use of a given technology generate money?”. While there has been concerns over the lack of monetization models for UGC (Thurman, 2008), others have interpreted the business-driven motivations to develop UGC as being aimed at increasing user loyalty rather than fostering democracy (Chung, 2007; Vujnovic et al., 2010). Interviews with journalists showed how there was a belief that comment moderation was better at more prestigious news sites because of bigger budgets and also saw the ability to comment as a tool too often misused (Wolfgang, 2018, p. 12) with a struggle to “balance the

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

resources needed to control editorially [UGC] with the commercial potential of user media” (Hermida & Thurman, 2008, p. 352). This has been confirmed in interviews with Canadian news editors (Paulussen, 2011, p. 61). However, there is recognition that adding this responsibility creates more work, with concerns expressed by journalists on UGC actually reducing the time journalists have to create news (Paulussen, 2011, p. 64). For some news organizations, prohibitive moderation costs translated to an absence of mechanisms for audience participation (Hermida & Thurman, 2008, p. 352). For Richard Withey, an employee of Independent.co.uk, there was a concern that moderation would “ drain resources away from what he called the good side of the newspaper model, meaning journalists researching and validating stories” (Hermida & Thurman, 2008, p. 352). For Richard Burton, editor at the Telegraph.co.uk., complained of the expenses required to effectively manage UGC and claimed that UGC was “just a complete and utter journalistic by-product” (Hermida & Thurman, 2008, p. 352). Other executives thought that UGC could be lucrative in certain spaces. For example, a travel section could be compelling for advertisers, but these opportunities were counterbalanced by fears among executives that they are of limited economic value (Hermida & Thurman, 2008, p. 352). Others saw UGC as a value because of its ability to inform newsgathering. For example, an editor wrote how TheSun.co.uk was getting three or four stories each week from readers postings content (Hermida & Thurman, 2008, p. 352). This was important as a form of newsgathering rather than as a way of allowing readers to express themselves (Hermida & Thurman, 2008, p. 352).

Academics, journalists and news executives have also celebrated the democratic principle of UGC. These involve ideals of community, participation and free speech. However, how this is understood to be realized differs greatly. Some argue that closing spaces for UGC actually improves the level of civility and online communities. Reader (2012, pp. 500–502), drawing from his analysis of U.S. news companies’ essays in closing their public online forums, anonymity was framed as producing “filth” or “swine” while closing UGC was understood as promoting the value of protecting an idealized “village square.”

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

To sum up, the policies examined here highlight how Canadian news organizations have practical strategies to manage news-related UGC but also call upon political and social principles of journalism, civility and discourse. Many of these policies emphasize the need to maintain civility in online commenting in light of possible incivility, while at the same time, they highlight the democratic ideal of open debate and freedom of speech. While these concerns are confirmed in the literature review, none of the policies themselves discuss how economic concerns play into making decisions related to UGC management, a factor that has been a consistent concern in academic work interviewing journalists and editors all over the world.

Canadian Comment Section Guidelines

As some news editors have claimed, community guidelines may only be beneficial in providing “ammunition when closing down an account or removing comments” (Binns, 2012, p. 555). However, they are also arguably beneficial in laying out key strategies and principles that news sites want readers to believe. This section in the paper focuses on a comparative critical analysis of UGC guidelines found on the CBC, CityNews (Halifax), CTV News, Glacier Media, Global News, The Globe and Mail, Narcity Media, Postmedia, QUB (Québecor), and Torstar. We have summarized the discussion below in the tables found in the appendix of this paper.

In terms of CBC (CBC Policies, 2017), CityNews (CityNews, n.d.), Glacier Media (Glacier Media Group, n.d.), Global News (Global News, n.d.), Globe and Mail (The Globe and Mail, 2018), Narcity Media (Narcity, n.d.), Postmedia (Postmedia, n.d.), Québecor (QUB, 2022) and Torstar (TheStar, n.d.), they all have a public-facing comment moderation policy which can be contrasted to CTV News (See CTV News, 2017) which no longer has comment policy since its on-site comment system was disbanded. Indeed, The Globe and Mail and the CBC have the most sophisticated explicit comment policy, while Global News’ is comparatively very short. CTV News previously had a public-facing policy system, approximately the same length as Global News, which was for its now-defunct in-site commenting system, but since then, the system and its corresponding policy page have been removed (CTV News, 2017).

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

In relation to the CBC and Global News, they provide more weight to both the negative and positive accounts, giving equal amount of attention to how comments should be posted according to general principles, be they civil and/or democratic, and/or that they specifically add to the discussion by remaining on-topic. The Globe and Mail is unique in its naming of journalists who actively moderate and participate in comment discussions (The Globe and Mail, 2018). However, they point out that journalists adding to discussions happening on comment sections is not within their job description, citing its voluntary nature and time constraints: “While our journalists are certainly encouraged to read the comments and jump into the conversation, it is completely up to them [as] time constraints are often an issue [...]” (The Globe and Mail, 2018). The Globe and Mail provide mostly a negative set of comment policies, ranging from what not to do according to legal rules to standards of bad behavior and to egregious misspelling.

All of the platforms outlined above have on-site commenting systems except for the now-defunct comment section on CTV News (See Table 1). Put another way, 90% of the major news players in Canada have on-site commenting systems on their web pages. These are often supplemented by a wide range of social media outreach (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.). It is also worth noting that the only platform that did not require first and last name registration to comment is the 2017, now-disbanded, comment section from CTV News (Table 1). Pseudonyms are, for the most part, not allowed across community guidelines, except for the fee-paying The Globe and Mail, CityNews (Halifax), Glacier Media, and the now-defunct CTV News comment section (Table 1). Both CBC and Torstar have time-sensitive comment sections. While there is no mention of the time from posting a news story to removing the comment sections on CBC’s guidelines, Torstar explains how posts are generally up for comment for 48 or 72 hours (Table 1).

Half of the comment guidelines examined here confirm relying on third-party automatic moderation to help support their in-house moderating strategies, but not

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

all mention the specific software or services that are employed (Table 2). All in-site commenting systems, except the CBC and the now-defunct CTVNews on-site commenting, have a user flagging section whereby users can flag content that they perceive to break community guidelines (Table 2). Globe and Mail is also the only one with a featured comment section that is curated by staff (Table 2). When scrolling at the bottom of a news story on the Globe and Mail, one lands on the “Featured” comment section where top comments are highlighted. Only by clicking on the “All Comments” section can one see the other comments on the system.

In terms of positive social principles (See Table 3) in the guidelines, that is, principles called upon as the normative vision of how and why the comment sections operate, a wide range can be seen. All except the Globe and Mail and Postmedia make references to the democratic principles of debate, self-expression or freedom of speech, and only Postmedia and Torstar make reference the goal of honesty in posts online. CBC, City News (Halifax) and QUB are also the only ones to call on comments to have an entertainment value.

In terms of negative social principles (See Table 4) highlighted in guidelines, that is, principles called upon as those which the guidelines do not want to see users transgress. Across the board, all of the user guidelines highlighted the danger of illegal, vulgar and violent content. While many guidelines highlight the problem of trolling, CBC, CityNews (Halifax), Torstar and the now-defunct CTV News guidelines make specific reference to the problem of misinformation.

Some content guidelines have special caveats for certain subjects. Only Glacier Media and QUB do not specify that they sometimes close in-site comment sections for certain topics (See Table 5).

In those that do close in-site comment sections, many highlight the legal dynamics in reporting some stories – how user comments can provide information that goes against the law, and also highlight the possible racism and vitriol that can be found in some comment sections if left open on certain subjects. CBC highlights closing in-site comments on indigenous and some other racial issues in order to keep their platform

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

civil and legal. CityTV (Halifax) highlights closing comments on “race, immigration, religion and sexual identity among them,” including legal issues (CityNews, n.d.). CTV News, Narcity Media, Postmedia and Torstar guidelines explain that while they do close comment sections on certain news stories, but they do not provide an explanation of which news stories or why. CBC has a special policy to close their in-site comment sections when it comes to news related to indigenous issues and close comments pre-emptively (Office of the GM and Editor in Chief, 2015). Further, CityNews Halifax explains how news related to certain subjects, “race, immigration, religion and sexual identity among them,” attract “a high number of offensive and abusive comments that could be potentially libellous” and therefore comments on these subjects may be closed pre-emptively (CityNews, n.d.). As for Postmedia, it explains how “comments are not enabled on all articles based on our internal guidelines” (Postmedia, n.d.).

Finally, none of the news organizations explicitly acknowledge in their community guidelines how their selection or change of content moderation platforms or software is due to legal changes, and none specify import of economic realities on their moderation choices for their platform.

Discussion

This paper examines the Canadian news guidelines on user-generated content (UGC) by providing a synthesis of these policies with a critical review of the principles associated with news-related comment sections. Many of the issues highlighted in the literature are reflected in the guidelines themselves. The near omnipresence of comment sections on these sites reflects the general direction of news today. The highlighting of democratic and related principles and stated concerns over illegal or unsavory principles are evident in both. At the same time, there are some omissions of some principles in the guidelines that are present in the literature review.

To answer the paper’s research questions, we found that 9/10 news sites examined here currently have on-site comment sections (Table 1), showing the ubiquity of UGC on news sites today and the demands for participation in a society increa-

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

singly organized around participatory values (Barney et al., 2016; Jenkins, 2006). At the same time, with only 2/10 guidelines examined not stating that they close comment sections for certain topics (Table 5), it suggests that leaving UGC available for certain topics is a threat to these participatory democratic values. Relating this to the literature review, it seems that even with the availability of UGC on news-sites, and novel ways for public participation, news sites still maintain a gatekeeping function that has extended in to the comment sections themselves.

With only 1/10 of the news sites examined requires paid subscription to the news site make comments on their on-site system (Table 1), it seems that news sites value the access to UGC which may in turn promote user interactivity on the site. As discussed in the literature review, increased interactivity may translate to consumer brand loyalty and economic benefits to the site (Chung, 2007; Vujnovic et al., 2010). At the same time, there seems to be a recognition that such access should not be without caveats. With all except the now-defunct CTV News comment sections (9/10) requiring real name registration (Table 1), it confirms the problem of anonymity much is extensively discussed in the literature review. This seems to suggest that news sites balance the desire for interactivity and eyeballs (Paulussen, 2011; Spencer, 2018) and the fear of uncivil or illegal contributions (Hille & Bakker, 2014; Juneström, 2019).

With only the now-defunct CTV News guidelines not enabling user flagging, it shows the ubiquity of the practice (Table 2). In the guidelines over half (6/10) of the guidelines state that they use automated moderation tools, with only 3/10 making public what tools these are in the guidelines (Table 2). Both the use of automated tools and outsourcing moderation to users could be because these help to cut costs in the form of requiring news staff to manually examine comments. Accidentally infringing on copyright or allowing libelous comments to remain online may lead to legal expenses for the news site. This also helps explain how only the Globe and Mail has staff comment curation (Table 2) given the corresponding otherwise prohibitive labour costs.

The principle of UGC fostering democracy is highlighted by almost all the guidelines (8/10), far outweighing both calls to civility (6/10) or community (5/10),

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

suggesting a strong perceived role for news-related UGC as a component to democracy (Table 3). This confirms to some extent discussions in the literature review, where a primary concern for journalists and academics is the democratic value of UGC. It is also worth noting that low presence of honesty (2/10) and entertainment (3/10) principles in guidelines suggest that they are not the primary motivations for allowing UGC on Canadian news sites (Table 3). While most of the concerns with UGC are related to incivility, libel and the like, and not so much honesty per-se, journalists rarely commented that UGC should be entertainment beyond the confines of the economic principle of having consumers spend and interreact as long as possible on new sites.

Finally, two omissions have been revealed during the course of this critical review. In our analysis of the literature, there was no discussions on how time sensitive comment sections affect UGC. Despite this, they are a major feature of some the guidelines examined (2/10) (See Table 1). This made us question the reasoning behind making all comment sections open for a limited amount of time. The second omission is that for all the discussion on economic imperatives and the difficulties of news companies today to operate in a digital landscape, none of the user-facing guidelines outlined this economic aspect. This could be because of a sense of self-described professional ideals highlighted throughout the literature review where journalists interpreted themselves as having an important public role in delivering the news. In other words, admitting to economic realities that constrain this work might harm their self-perception.

One of the limitations of this paper as it lacks direct feedback from news moderators' editors and journalists regarding their professional views on news moderation. Another research gap that needs to be filled is cross-national comparative research on news moderation policies covering different countries.

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

Appendix

Tables

Table 1: Moderation User Policy

Name	On-Site Commenting	Paid Subscription Required	Real Name Registration	Pseudonym Usernames Allowed	Time Sensitive Comment Section
CBC	●		●	*	** ●
CityNews ((Halifax	●		●	●	
CTV News ((2017				●	
Glacier Media	●		●	●	
Global News	●		●		
The Globe and Mail	●	●	●	●	
Narcity Media	●		●		
Postmedia	●		●		
QUB	●		●		
Torstar	●		●		*** ●

*Except for “except in children and youth-oriented communities” (CBC Policies, 2017).

** Unstated time limit.

*** The Star (n.d.) guidelines provide two timelines for how long a comment section will generally be open for comment. They write typically 48 or 72 hours.

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

Table 2: Moderation by Professionals, Users and/or Algorithms

Name	Staff Comment Curation	User Flagging	Third-Party Automatic Moderation	
CBC		●	●	Viafoura
CityNews ((Halifax		●	* ●	
CTV News ((2017				
Glacier Media		●		
Global News		●	●	Facebook
The Globe and Mail	●	●	●	Coral Project & ICUC
Narcity Media		●		
Postmedia		●	* ●	
QUB		●	* ●	
Torstar		●		

* The specific software(s) used are unstated in the respective community guidelines

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

Table 3: Positive Social Principles in Guidelines

Name	*Democracy	**Civility	Community	***Honesty	****Entertaining
CBC	●	●			●
CityNews (Halifax)	●		●		●
CTV News (2017)	●				
Glacier Media	●	●			
Global News	●	●			
The Globe and Mail		●	●		
Narcity Media	●		●		
Postmedia		●	●	●	
QUB	●				●
Torstar	●	●	●	●	

* These include the principles of debate, self-expression, freedom of speech, and the like.

** These include the principles of being polite, intelligent, respectful, insightful, and constructive.

*** These include the principles of transparency and truthfulness.

**** These include the principles of entertainment and enjoyment.

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

Table 4: Negative Social Principles in the Guidelines

Name	*Trolling	**Vulgarity	***Violence	****Misinformation	*****Illegal
CBC		●	●	●	●
CityNews (Halifax)	●	●	●	●	●
CTV News (2017)		●	●	●	●
Glacier Media	●	●	●		●
Global News	●	●	●		●
The Globe and Mail	●	●	●		●
Narcity Media	●	●	●		●
Postmedia	●	●	●		●
QUB	●	●	●		●
Torstar		●	●	●	●

*Comments that are perceived to be trolling, spam, written in all-caps or “SHOUTING”.

** Comments that involve vulgarity, pornography, pedophilia, obscenity or sexually explicit content.

*** Comments that embody or call upon violence, abuse, hate speech, personal attacks.

**** Comments that involve misinformation, disinformation, clearly inaccurate statements, misleading, reasoning based on demonstrably false statements and/or inauthentic content or activity.

***** Comments that break copyright, unlawful, illegal, trademark, libel, threatening or calling on illegal activities that break other provincial or federal laws.

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

Table 5: Pre-Emptive Closing of Comment Sections on Select Topics

Name	Closed Comments on Select Topics	Provides Examples of Select Topics
CBC	●	●
(CityNews (Halifax	●	●
(CTV News (2017	●	
Glacier Media		
Global News	●	●
The Globe and Mail	●	●
Narcity Media	●	
Postmedia	●	
QUB		
Torstar	●	

Works Cited

Arendholz, J. (2013). *Appropriate Online Behavior: A Pragmatic Analysis of Message Board Relations*. John Benjamins.

Barney, D., Coleman, G., Ross, C., Sterne, J., & Tembeck. (2016). *An Introduction*. In *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age* (pp. vii–xxxix). University of Minnesota Press.

Bergström, A., & Wadbring, I. (2015). Beneficial yet crappy: Journalists and audiences on obstacles and opportunities in reader comments. *European Journal of Communication*, 30(2), 137–151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323114559378>

Binns, A. (2012). DON'T FEED THE TROLLS!: Managing troublemakers in magazines' online communities. *Journalism Practice*, 6(4), 547–562. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2011.648988>

Braun, J., & Gillespie, T. (2011). Hosting the public discourse, hosting the public. *Journalism Practice*, 5(4), 383–398.

Cammaerts, B. (2009). Radical pluralism and free speech in online public spaces: The case of North Belgian extreme right discourses. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12(6), 555–575. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877909342479>

CBC Policies. (2017, February). *CBC/Radio-Canada Content Submission Guidelines for CBC/Radio-Canada Owned or Controlled Platforms (Content Submission Guidelines)*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/aboutcbc/discover/submissions.html>

Chung, D. S. (2007). Profits and Perils: Online News Producers' Perceptions of Interactivity and Uses of Interactive Features. *Convergence*, 13(1), 43–61.

CityNews. (n.d.). *Community Guidelines*. CityNews Halifax. Retrieved June 11, 2022, from <https://halifax.citynews.ca/other/community-guidelines>

Conlin, L., & Roberts, C. (2016). Presence of online reader comments lowers news site credibility. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 37(4), 365–376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739532916677056>

Crawford, K., & Gillespie, T. (2016). What is a Flag for? Social Media Reporting Tools and the Vocabulary of Complaint. *New Media & Society*, 18(3), 410–428. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814543163>

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

CTVNews. (2017, May 28). Commenting. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/commenting>

Donath, J. S. (1998). Identity and deception in the virtual community. In P. Kollock & M. Smith (Eds.), *Communities in Cyberspace* (pp. 27–58). Routledge.

Engström, M. (2016). The trolls disappear in the light: Swedish experiences of mediated sexualised hate speech in the aftermath of Behring Brevik. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 5(2), 96–106.

Erjavec, K., & Kovačič, M. P. (2012). “You Don’t Understand, This is a New War!” Analysis of Hate Speech in News Web Sites’ Comments. *Mass Communication and Society*, 15(6), 899–920. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2011.619679>

Finley, K. (2015, October 8). A Brief History of the End of the Comments For years, comment boxes have been a staple of the online experience. Now many media companies are giving up on them. *Wired*. <https://www.wired.com/2015/10/brief-history-of-the-demise-of-the-comments-timeline/>

Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of “platforms». *New Media & Society*, 12(3), 347–364.

Glacier Media Group. (n.d.). Terms of Service (Copyright ©2020 Glacier Media Group). Bowen Island Undercurrent. Retrieved June 6, 2022, from <https://www.bowenislandundercurrent.com/other/terms-of-service#usercontent>

Global News. (n.d.). Global News Commenting Policy. <https://globalnews.ca/pages/global-news-commenting-policy/>

Hardaker, C. (2015). “I refuse to respond to this obvious troll”: An overview of responses to (perceived) trolling. *Corpora*, 10(2), 201–229. <https://doi.org/10.3366/cor.2015.0074>

Harrison, J. (2009). User-Generated Content and Gatekeeping at the BBC Hub. *Journalism Studies*, 11(2), 243–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700903290593>

Hermida, A. (2010). Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 4(3), 297–308.

Hermida, A., & Thurman, N. (2008). A clash of cultures: The integration of user-generated content within professional journalistic frameworks at British newspaper websites. *Journalism Practice*, 2(3), 343–356.

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

Hille, S., & Bakker, P. (2013). I like news. Searching for the 'Holy Grail' of social media: The use of Facebook by Dutch news media and their audiences. *European Journal of Communication*, 28(6), 663–680.

Hille, S., & Bakker, P. (2014). Engaging the Social News User: Comments on news sites and Facebook. *Journalism Practice*, 8(5), 563–572. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.899758>

Hlavach, L., & Freivogel. (2011). Ethical Implications of Anonymous Comments Posted to Online News Stories. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 26, 26(1), 21–37.

Hong, S. (2012). Online news on Twitter: Newspapers' social media adaption and their online readership. *Information Economics and Policy*, 24(1), 69–74.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York Univ. Press.

Jenks, C. J. (2019). Talking trolls into existence: On the floor management of trolling in online forums. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 143, 54–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2019.02.006>

Juneström, A. (2019). Emerging practices for managing user misconduct in online news media comments sections. *Journal of Documentation*, 75(4), 694–708. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-09-2018-0143>

Karlsson, M. (2011). Flourishing but restrained. *Journalism Practice*, 5(1), 64–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2010.486605>

Kovacs, K. (2020, March 5). Comment sections aren't dead (yet). DCN. <https://digitalcontentnext.org/blog/2020/03/05/comment-sections-arent-dead-yet/>

Mitchelstein, E. (2011). Catharsis and community: Divergent motivations for audience participation in online newspapers and blogs. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 2014–2034.

Narcity. (n.d.). *Narcity Media Community Guidelines*. Narcity Media. Retrieved June 9, 2022, from <https://www.narcity.com/community-guidelines>

Noci, D., Javier, P. M., Domingo, D., Mico, J. L., & Ruiz, C. (2010). Comments in News, Democracy Booster or Journalistic Nightmare: Assessing the Quality and Dynamics of Citizen Debates in Catalan Online Newspapers. *International Sym-*

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

posium on Online Journalism, 2(1), 1–20.

Office of the GM and Editor in Chief. (2015, November 30). Uncivil dialogue: Commenting and stories about indigenous people. CBCNews. <https://www.cbc.ca/newsblogs/community/editorsblog/2015/11/uncivil-dialogue-commenting-and-stories-about-indigenous-people.html>

Paulussen, S. (2011). Inside the Newsroom: Journalists' motivations and organizational structures. In J. B. Singer, A. Hermida, D. Domingo, A. Heinonen, S. Paulussen, T. Quandt, Z. Reich, & M. Vujnovic (Eds.), *Participatory Journalism: Guarding Open Gates at Online Newspapers* (pp. 59–75). Wiley-Blackwell.

Paulussen, S., Heinonen, A., Domingo, D., & Quandt, T. (2007). Doing it together: Citizen participation in the professional news making process. *Observatorio Journal*, 1(3), 131-154.

Paulussen, S., & Ugille, P. (2008). User generated content in the newsroom: Professional and organisational constraints on participatory journalism. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 5(2), 24–41.

Phillips, W. (2015). *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture*. MIT Press.

Picard, R. G. (2009). Blogs, Tweets, Social Media, and the News Business. Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard: Nieman Reports. <https://niemanreports.org/articles/blogs-tweets-social-media-and-the-news-business/>

Postmedia. (n.d.). Community Guidelines (Effective January 16, 2019). Retrieved June 4, 2022, from <https://pages.postmedia.com/community-guidelines/>

QUB. (2022, avril). NÉTIQUETTES. <https://legal.qub.ca/qub/netiquettes>

Reader, B. (2012). Free Press vs. Free Speech? The Rhetoric of “Civility” in Regard to Anonymous Online Comments. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 89(3), 495–513. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699012447923>

Robinson, S. (2010). Traditionalists vs. Convergents: Textual privilege, boundary work, and the journalist-audience relationship in the commenting policies of online news sites. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 16(1), 125–143. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856509347719>

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

Robinson, S. (2014). The active citizen's information media repertoire: An exploration of community news habits during the digital age. *Mass Communication & Society*, 17(4), 509–530.

Sanfilippo, M. R., Yang, S., & Fichman, P. (2017). Managing Online Trolling: From Deviant to Social and Political Trolls. *Proceedings of the 50th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 10.

Santana, A. D. (2014). Virtuous or Vitriolic: The effect of anonymity on civility in online newspaper reader comment boards. *Journalism Practice*, 8(1), 18–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2013.813194>

Singer, J. B. (2006). Stepping back from the gate: Online newspaper editors and the co-production of content in campaign 2004. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83(2), 265–280.

Singer, J. B. (2009). QUALITY CONTROL: Perceived effects of user-generated content on newsroom norms, values and routines. *Journalism Practice*, 4(2), 127–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512780903391979>

Singer, J. B., & Ashman, I. (2009). “Comment is free, but facts are sacred”: User-generated content and ethical constructs at The Guardian. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 24, 3–21.

Smoliarova, A., Bodrunova, S. S., & Ivantey, E. (2021). Commenting or Discussing? Comment Sections of German Russian-Speaking News Media on Facebook. *Social Computing and Social Media: Experience Design and Social Network Analysis . HCII 2021. Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, 12774, 167–178. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77626-8_11

Spencer, K. A. (2018). Chapter 5: The Social Web, The Tyranny of the Comments Section. In *A People's History of Silicon Valley: How the Tech Industry Exploits Workers, Erodes Privacy and Undermines Democracy*. Eyewear Publishing.

The Globe and Mail. (2018, September 10). Privacy & Terms: Community Guidelines. The Globe and Mail. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/privacy-terms/community-guidelines/>

TheStar. (n.d.). Conversations: Code Of Conduct. Toronto Star. <https://www.thestar.com/about/community-guidelines.html>

Comment moderation strategies in Canadian news media

Thurman, N. (2008). Forums for citizen journalists? Adoption of user generated content initiatives by online news media. *New Media and Society*, 10(1), 139–157. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085325>

van Dijck, J. (2009). Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content. *Media, Culture & Society*, 31(1), 41–58.

Viscovi, D., & Gustafsson, M. (2013). Dirty work: Why journalists shun reader comments. In T. Olsson (Ed.), *Producing the Internet: Critical Perspectives of Social Media* (pp. 85–102). University of Gothenburg.

Vujnovic, M., Singer, J. B., Paulussen, S., Heinonen, A., Reich, Z., Quandt, T., Hermida, A., & Domingo, D. (2010). Exploring the Political-Economical Factors of Participatory Journalism: A First Look into Self Reports by Online Journalists and Editors in Ten Countries. *Journalism Studies*, 4(3), 285–296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512781003640588>

Weber, P. (2014). Discussions in the comments section: Factors influencing participation and interactivity in online newspapers' reader comments. *New Media & Society*, 16(6), 941–957. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813495165>

Williams, A., Wardle, C., & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2010). Have They Got News for Us? Audience Revolution or Business as Usual? *Journalism Practice*, 5(1), 85–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512781003670031>

Witschge, T. (2012). Changing audiences, changing journalism? In P. Lee-Wright, A. Phillips, & T. Witschge (Eds.), *Changing Journalism* (pp. 117–134). Routledge.

Wolfgang, J. D. (2018). Taming the 'trolls': How journalists negotiate the boundaries of journalism and online comments. *Journalism*, 146488491876236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918762362>