WORLD EDITORS FORUM

WAN IFRA

Do Comments Matter?

Global Online Commenting Study 2016

%#@$#*
*$%&%!?

@$#%!!!

IMPRINT

CONTENT:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In mid-August, US public broadcaster, the *National Public Radio (NPR)* announced it was ditching its comment sections just as the World Editors Forum (WEF), the network for editors within WAN-IFRA, was concluding its second global study on how newsrooms are managing online comments.

NPR joined a growing list of organisations, including *CNN*, *The Verge*, *Toronto Star*, *Reuters* and *Popular Science,* which had decided that hosting and managing comment sections on their websites is simply not worth the effort. It was another signal that news organisations are following their audiences onto social media platforms.

This shift marks one of the most significant changes to the online publishing environment since publication in 2013 of the first study by WEF, 'Online comment moderation: emerging best practices'. In the three years since, newsroom resources have been under even greater pressure, and the temperature of online debate has risen significantly, posing real challenges for newsrooms trying to manage potentially brand-damaging and legally tricky comment sections.

Also in that time span, audiences increasingly read their news on social platforms, particularly on Facebook, forcing newsrooms to adopt specific engagement strategies there, subsequently adding even greater pressure on resources.

Against this backdrop, the 2016 WEF study set out to update best practices and find examples where news organisations are succeeding in promoting constructive conversations with their audiences.

The study sought to determine whether switching off comments on online sites is the best way of managing the problem. In an age where engagement matters, the study questioned the risks of transferring hard-earned audience gains onto social media platforms. Given the potentially toxic and brand-damaging effect of inflammatory comments, it asked whether a comment section is worth investing in and what return, if any, it generates. Are there ways to build a civil and constructive commenting space?

THE TEMPERATURE OF ONLINE DEBATE HAS RISEN SIGNIFICANTLY, POSING REAL CHALLENGES FOR NEWSROOMS TRYING TO MANAGE POTENTIALLY BRAND-DAMAGING AND LEGALLY TRICKY COMMENT SECTIONS.

OVER THREE MONTHS WE ENGAGED A TOTAL OF 78
ORGANISATIONS IN 46 COUNTRIES THROUGH A WORKSHOP,
INTERVIEWS AND AN ONLINE SURVEY.
THE RESEARCH FOUND:

There is evidence of high-profile news organisations shutting down comment sections and moving conversations to social media platforms such as Facebook. However, 82% of those we surveyed still invite their readers to comment on their sites. More than half of those allow comments on all articles, although many are doing so reluctantly and are unhappy with the quality of the comments they receive;	#1
Closing the comment section is increasingly a strong consideration and option due to the abusive tone and poor quality of comments, as well as concerns about cost of moderation, legal liability and lack of use;	#2
Most of the news organisations surveyed say comments are important, "adding to the debate" (53%), "providing ideas and input for future stories" (53%) and "encouraging diversity of opinions" (47%);	#3
While opinion pieces receive the most comments (23%) and analytical articles receive the highest quality responses (26%), topics most likely to attract inflammatory comments differ by region. In Europe immigration tops the list; in Africa, it's politics and race; in South America, it's politics; in Asia and the Middle East, it's politics and religion; and almost anything can stir up incendiary remarks in North America;	#4
Specific laws concerning the liability of reader comments and hate speech are emerging. Different societal interpretations of 'freedom of speech' and its limits, and the country's stage of democratic development influence the approach news organisations take in managing comments;	#5
Given the trend to move commenting completely to social media platforms, many are concerned that the inherent issues of comments don't just go away, compounded with additional issues on the loss of reader relationship and data, the lack of control and possibly, future sustainability;	#6
A handful of news organisations such as The New York Times and Pakistan's Dawn are able to maintain a vibrant constructive commenting community through consistent investment in comment moderation, reaping the benefits, not only in terms of reader loyalty, but also in business revenue;	#7
Despite the challenges, many news organisations continue to look for different ways to engage and solicit comments from their readers through best practices such as: • Revisiting their mission and making commenting a priority; • Reducing the number of stories open for comments, enabling tighter, focused moderation and rewarding good commenter behaviour; • Continuously looking for better technological solutions; • Building a community and incorporating comments into content.	#8

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM WITH COMMENTS

In the three years since the launch of WAN-IFRA's first online comment moderation report, dozens of news organisations have turned off their comments sections and many new digital start-ups, such as Vice's new channel for women, Broadly, and Reddit's aggregated site Upvoted, do not even include the function in their web designs from the onset.

NPR is the latest to shut down their comments. "We've concluded that the comment sections on *NPR.org* stories are not providing a useful experience for the vast majority of our users," Scott Montgomery, Managing Editor for *NPR*'s digital news said in an announcement.

Nowhere is this trend more pronounced than in South Africa, where three major news publishers closed their commenting section within months of each other last year due to online abuse.

The trend: turning off commenting

"We were confronted with potential hate speech that was not in line with our editorial position and was turning away our readers," said Andrew Trench, former Editor-in-Chief of *News 24*, the largest online news site in South Africa and first to turn off commenting last September.
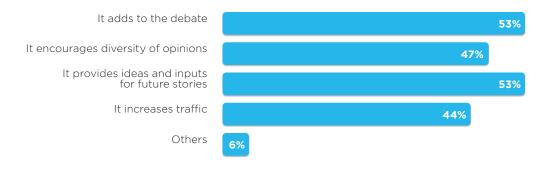
"Instances of abuse in our comments section have become untenable," wrote Adrian Ephraim, Managing Editor of the *Independent Online,* South Africa's largest English publisher, in its announcement to shut its comment section a month after *News24.*

"We are suspending our comment section until such time as we can either moderate away those who feel entitled to spew hate speech on our property, or come up with some other solution that fosters genuine engagement rather than reductive trolling," wrote the South Africa's *Daily Maverick* in its editorial, 'We tried, we really, really did'.

Globally, the number of news organisations shutting down readers' comments continues to rise, as noted in a community post on the Coral Project, a collaboration between The Mozilla Foundation, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.* Funded by the Knight Foundation, the Coral Project aims to create open-source software to build better communities around journalism and improve communities on the web.

"Every newsroom is different, but everyone sees the value of audience and understands the idealism of comments as they were originally conceived," observed Andrew Losowsky, project lead at the Coral Project, who has interviewed more than 150 news organisations in the US.

What benefits do you see from allowing users to comment on articles?

It adds to the debate	53%
It encourages diversity of opinions	47%
It provides ideas and inputs for future stories	53%
It increases traffic	44%
Others	6%

IN THE THREE YEARS SINCE THE LAUNCH OF WAN-IFRA'S FIRST ONLINE COMMENT MODERATION REPORT, DOZENS OF NEWS ORGANISATIONS HAVE TURNED OFF THEIR COMMENTS SECTIONS AND MANY NEW DIGITAL START-UPS DO NOT EVEN INCLUDE THE FUNCTION IN THEIR WEB DESIGNS FROM THE ONSET.

Our survey reflects that understanding. A large majority of participating organisations (82%) still allow commenting with half (53%) indicating that commenting "adds to the debate," "provides idea and input for future stories" (53%) and "encourages diversity of opinions" (47%).

"But the current state of comment as a space is a problem and it's a problem they don't know how to solve, so the best case is to close them which is probably true," said Losowsky.

The growing online culture of abuse and trolling

Online abuse, hate speech and trolling are not recent phenomena. They began as early as the Internet, but have intensified in recent years with the democratisation of publishing and the rise of social media. The harassment is particularly acute towards women and minorities, as The Guardian showed in a major analysis of 70 million comments left on its site.

In 2014, Gamergate, which is an online harassment campaign by anonymous supporters, targeted several women game developers and journalists to the extent that police had to be involved. The media group *Gawker* was also flooded with invective and as a result lost significant advertising revenue. *Gawker* was sold and shut down in August. Last month, *Time Magazine* ran a cover story on 'Why we're losing the Internet to the culture of hate.'

Are your journalists subject to online trolling and harassment

No ████ **18%**

Yes ███████████ **65%**

Our study confirmed the trend: Of the news organisations surveyed that allow commenting, almost two thirds (65%) experienced trolling against their journalists.

This compares with a Pew Research Center survey published two years ago which found that 40% of internet users have personally experienced online harassment and roughly one-in-five (22%) internet users that have been victims of online harassment reported that their last experience occurred in the comments section of a website. For many commenters, posting online was never about the news article, but more about brandishing their opinions and many opine without even reading the article.
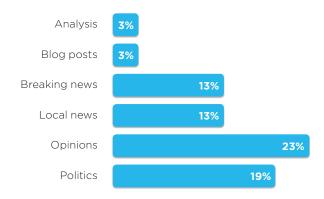
Organised trolling is also on the rise as more interest groups, corporations and rich individuals form their own newsrooms to propagate their ideas and target journalists who write articles they do not like.

Trolling also happens across borders. Several Western news organisations from Finland to the US have reported abuse by Russian trolls. Immediately after The Hague Tribunal's ruling on the South China Sea, the server of the *Philippine Star* was almost overwhelmed by the explosive increase in traffic generated by Chinese trolls.

Globally, our research showed opinion pieces receive the highest number of comments. Analytical pieces receive the best quality comments. Topics most likely to attract inflammatory comments differ by region.

In Europe, immigration tops the list, followed by politics. Russian trolls were so rampant across the continent that the European Union set up a weekly compendium of pro-Kremlin distortions and untruths. Sensitive topics such as the Ukraine crisis saw Russian trolls flooding the comments of Germany's largest national paper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* and led to the shutdown of its comment section.

What kinds of stories get the most comments?

Analysis	3%
Blog posts	3%
Breaking news	13%
Local news	13%
Opinions	23%
Politics	19%

What kinds of stories get the highest quality comments?

Analysis	26%
Blog posts	3%
Breaking news	5%
Local news	8%
Opinions	18%
Politics	13%

In Africa, politics and race attract the most inflammatory comments, while in South America it's politics. This summer in Brazil, the story of the gang rape of a teenage girl brought out waves of misogynistic comments that were so offensive, news organisations began to delete comments, only to have them pop up on other unrelated article threads.

Politics and religion are the most heated issues in Asia and the Middle East; and almost anything can stir up controversy in North America.
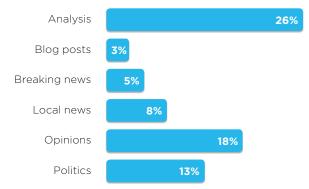
"Anything can be a basis for a high level of racial slurs," said Nicholas Dawes, former Chief Editorial and Content Officer for *Hindustan Times* in India. "Even if you commented on bus quality, you will be pulled into a discussion on the prime minister which will become poisonous."

Given that negative comments have been shown to reduce the credibility of journalism and subsequently affect the perception of the media brand, it's no wonder that many news organisations are taking action to protect themselves.

Concern about costs

In addition to potential brand damage, managing online comments is simply not a priority for many news organisations. Despite the fact that having dedicated moderation staff is a proven way of ensuring a civil

conversation, as indicated by the best practice guide in WEF's 2013 report, many news organisations simply do not have sufficient staff to manage an overwhelming flow of comments, especially if they are filled with messages from trolls.

Before shutting down commenting, Trench of *News24* considered pre-moderation for tighter control but he did not have sufficient resources. The site was receiving 5,000 comments a day and the volume was simply too much to handle. In fact, "lack of resources" is the second most cited reason for discontinuing online comments after "concern about offensive content", according to the most recent survey by WEF.

"I would close everything [commenting], and use those people for another part of the newspaper," said Marcelo Rech, Editorial Vice President of the *Grupo RBS*, one of the largest media groups in Brazil owning eight papers, 18 TV stations and 24 radio stations. "I think it is a waste of resources. So much is needed to write stories that are more useful and connected to our needs, than to read and delete dozens of offensive comments and then having to deal with people complaining. It's not a reasonable function for a newspaper."

As a solution, some news organisations close down comment threads or outsource the commenting function to external suppliers. *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland's largest newspaper, did the latter four years ago when it shipped out its entire moderating function

POLITICS AND RELIGION ARE THE MOST HEATED ISSUES IN ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST; AND ALMOST ANYTHING CAN STIR UP CONTROVERSY IN NORTH AMERICA.

to a third-party provider. What persuaded Helsingin Sanomat? "It was money. It was so much cheaper than having to own your own staff," said Jarkko Rahkonen, the paper's Head of News Archive and Moderating.

It is not the only one. *The Financial Times* has a team of moderators based in the Philippines, which works with a community manager in London. For years, companies such as Facebook and YouTube have hired low-cost temporary staff, often in other countries where labour is cheaper, to moderate content for them.

It did not help that last year the newspaper sector had perhaps its worst year since the recession, with circulation falling 7%, marking the greatest decline since 2010. With the emergence of ad-blockers, total advertising revenue among publicly traded companies declined nearly 8%, including losses not just in print, but in digital as well, according to the Pew Research Center.

As more and more news organisations abandon their own commenting platforms, some are voicing concern. "It's a symptom of something fundamentally wrong," said Emanuel Karlsten, a Swedish journalist and digital strategy consultant who has worked with *Expressen* and *Aftonbladet*. He observed that many Swedish media houses have either shut down commenting, minimised the function or outsourced it completely to external companies.

"[Outsourcing comment] makes journalists and the news organisations less interested in what readers are commenting on and it makes readers feel disconnected, which is the fundamental of our industry; we are supposed to be the servants of the community," said Karlsten.

Legal and societal constraints

Aside from the cost factor, legal concerns were cited as another reason why *News24* did not attempt pre-moderation as an alternative. According to South African law, if you do not pre-moderate, you have the defence that you are just providing a platform. As soon as you do moderate, then all liability transfers to publishers. "With 180K-200K comments a month,

with the resources we had, it was not an option," said Trench. "Bear in mind there were liability issues, so we couldn't just get interns, we had to get experienced editors."

In many countries, rules and regulations surrounding online harassment and liability for abusive comments don't exist or are still in the process of being formulated. As a result, news organisations often have to shoulder additional responsibility, which limits the way they approach online commenting.

A similar trend appears to be emerging in Brazil where recently a newspaper was fined heavily because of a comment posted on its site that was not true. "The Supreme Court considered newspapers have to, in essence, serve the public appropriate content to consume," said *RBS*'s Rech of the ruling. If the ruling becomes a trend, it could have a chilling effect on the future of news commenting in the country.

In Europe, it is still unclear as to whether or not publishers bear legal responsibility for reader comments. Last year, the European Court of Human Rights decided an Estonian online news portal, Delfi, was liable for offensive comments posted by its readers. But this year, the same court reversed that decision in a lawsuit lodged by two Hungarian websites, *Index.hu and MTE*.

While a publisher has yet to be fined in Pakistan, the country's largest English-language paper *Dawn* takes a very careful and tightly controlled approach to online commenting for fear of blasphemy. Pakistan's three-year blockage of YouTube as a result of anti-Muslim content that it did not produce, resulted in publishers exercising extra caution with regard to content. "We need to keep it restrictive," said Jahanzaib Haque, Chief Digital Strategist and Editor at *Dawn.com*.

In Kenya, the *Nation Media Group* was fined $60,000 for "not exercising control in removing the defamatory comments posted by the public." Churchill Otieno, the group's Digital Managing Editor, explained: "the aggrieved party (current president) was not named in the story but a reader named him in the comments section."

"WE HAVE NOT SEEN NEWS PUBLISHERS SUED FOR A COMMENT, BUT IT'S A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THAT OCCURS"
- JULIE POSETTI, FAIRFAX MEDIA, AUSTRALIA

In Australia, which has particularly punishing defamation and contempt laws, publishers are frequently sued. "We have not seen news publishers sued for a comment, but it's a matter of time before that occurs," said Julie Posetti, Head of Digital Editorial Capability for *Fairfax Media* in Australia.

Freedom of speech and civility

Publishers wishing to exert greater control over comments and delete those they deem unsuitable often have to deal with complaints, or worse, a potential violation of freedom of expression. "Sometimes what is regarded as offensive to one party is just freedom of speech to another party," wrote Frank Kisakye, Online Editor and Web Administrator at *The Observer Media* in Uganda.

Bassey Etim, Community Editor for *The New York Times*, deletes about 15% of the comments he receives, but does not see this action as an infringement on freedom of speech, a right enshrined in the United States constitution. "We are not a government; the *Times* has the freedom of speech to patrol what goes on its website. We are not a freedom of speech board; we are a piece of *New York Times*' content," he said.

"Freedom of speech is not abuse of speech," said Wolfgang Krach, Editor-in-Chief of Germany's *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. "[Trolls] can post anywhere they want, but I don't think it's our task to give them a forum."

In Switzerland*, Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ)* has a seven-person pre-moderation team, which deletes about 10% of its comments. A user once complained to the country's press self-regulatory body that this amounted to censorship. "They didn't even respond," said Oliver Fuchs, Social Media Editor of *NZZ*. "We are on the safe side."

The way a society values free speech and the stage of democratic development also hugely influences how news organisations manage online commenting. Editors in young democracies such as Taiwan and the Philippines, both only having gained the right to freedom of speech in recent decades, tend to take a more laissez-faire, ad-hoc post-moderation approach.

"Honestly, when I see negative comments, I feel bad, but I am not sure what to do or what to tell them," said Mario Yang, Co-Founder of Taiwan's *The News Lens*, which does not moderate its commenting section except when it receives complaints. "I really want to manage, to be a dictator and take it all out but I can't. This is not a personal blog, it's a media platform, so it should be open."

"If we close threads, we don't allow democratic exchange," said Camille Diola, Editor-in-Chief for Digital at the *Philippines Star*, which does not delete comments even when it identifies systematic propaganda and misinformation. "We just let them," said Diola. "We don't really moderate; what we do is feature comments that really contribute to the conversation."

CHAPTER 2:
THE FACEBOOK FACTOR

Before shutting down commenting, Trench of *News24* had conducted a deep data dive and found that only a small percentage – 3,000 or less than 1% – of its 5-6 million readers were actively commenting. "The number was minuscule and our view was that by shutting comments down, it would have almost no effect," said Trench. "We found that our average time on-site went down by about one second."

It was the same argument that *NPR* used to explain its decision. Less than 1% of NPR's 25-35 million unique monthly visitors were commenting on its site and even less – 0.003% or 2,600 were regular commenters while more than five million actively engage on *NPR*'s Twitter account on a monthly basis. "This [social media] is where people want to engage with us. So that's what we're going to emphasise," said *NPR*'s digital editor Montgomery.

Going to the Big Blue

Given its low usage and the cost of maintenance, moving the commenting function entirely to social media platforms has proven to be a logical choice for some, especially since a lot of readers are already there anyway.

In Reuters Institute's 2016 Digital News Report, which included data from 26 countries, half of the respondents (51%) said they use social media as a source of news each week and around one in 10 (12%) said it was their main source. In a recent survey released earlier this year by the Engaging New Project at the University of Texas at Austin, 55% of Americans have left an online comment and of those who have left a comment, 77.9% have done so via social media.
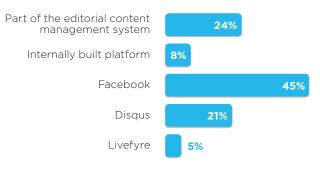
Additionally, data showed that readers may not care so much as to whether comment is available or not; only 1 in 3 Americans said it is very important that digital news sources allow people to comment on news, according to the most recent survey released in April this year by the Media Insight Project, a partnership of the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the American Press Institute.

Across the globe, Facebook is the dominant social media platform for news; 44% say they use Facebook for news, according to Reuters Institute's 2016 Digital News Report. "The strategy is to get on Facebook, it's to connect with readers where they are, instead of getting them to come to where we are," said Hana Greiner, Community Manager of *Miss* Magazine in Austria.

Facebook's expanding influence on politics was recently featured in a *New York Times Magazine article* where "it became clear that Facebook wasn't just a source of readership; it was increasingly, where readers lived" and it is becoming "a self-contained marketplace to which you have been granted access but which functions according to rules and incentives that you cannot control".

As a consequence of its increasing influence, Facebook is taking away a growing chunk of crucial online advertising on which news organisations depend. Former *Guardian* Editor Alan Rusbridger estimated that Facebook sucked up nearly 20% of the Guardian's digital advertising revenue last year.

Do you encourage conversations on other platforms (social media)?

No — 2%
Yes — 77%

What platforms do you use to enable users to post comments?

Part of the editorial content management system — 24%
Internally built platform — 8%
Facebook — 45%
Disqus — 21%
Livefyre — 5%

FACEBOOK IS BECOMING "A SELF-CONTAINED MARKETPLACE TO WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN GRANTED ACCESS BUT WHICH FUNCTIONS ACCORDING TO RULES AND INCENTIVES THAT YOU CANNOT CONTROL".

- JOHN HERRMAN, NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE

Losing touch with readers and control

However, Greiner of *Miss* recently noticed that the articles they posted were getting only half the reach or less than before, while videos and Instant Articles seemed to perform better. "Facebook changes its algorithm and does not necessarily tell us. We just notice the difference," she said.

Earlier this year, Facebook's method of selecting trending news came under attack for bias. It said it would rely more on algorithms instead of humans. Yet within three days of the change, it made a mistake, trending fake news. Facebook's newest changes in algorithm to show more links from families and friends was another blow to news organisations on which 40% of their traffic depends.

Emily Bell, Founding Director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School has consistently questioned how social media platforms are living up to their expanding role as publishers and the risk that traditional publishers are taking when ceding reader relationship and data to them.

In the most recent preliminary research on the issue, she pointed out the biggest tension at the heart of the relationship between publishers and platforms: Is a reader of *The New York Times* on Facebook a *New York Times* reader, or a Facebook user reading *The New York Times*?

"We shouldn't expect Facebook to act in the best interests of the news organisation," said Coral Project leader Losowsky. More importantly, social media sites have their own priorities and needs, which may be in direct competition with news organisations. "To outsource all of our interaction with readers to them is the wrong thing to do; you no longer have meaningful data of who these people are, how they are connecting with you and no longer meaning connection," he said.

Margaret Sullivan, media columnist of *The Washington Post* echoes the same worry. "I find value in reader comments that can't be adequately reproduced elsewhere. The argument that the conversation has migrated to Facebook and Twitter is flawed," she wrote in response to *NPR* closing its comment section. "Those are good places for discussion, but they are no substitute for having discussion take place where the story itself lives. News organisations should fix online comments rather than ditch them."

More importantly, "ceding these conversations to social platforms doesn't solve any of those problems, it simply defers any solutions and puts the conversations about our journalism even further beyond our reach, shaped instead by algorithms that reinforce the very same polarisation that bogged down the comment threads we couldn't redeem in the first place," said Amanda Zamora, the *Texas Tribune*'s Chief Audience Officer, in a recent speech at Poynter.

"By abandoning comments, news organisations are not only giving up an important role in shaping public discourse — they're giving up a key avenue toward having direct, sustainable relationships with their audiences," said Zamora in the same speech. "Those relationships are vital to any future we have in this business."

"TO OUTSOURCE ALL OF OUR INTERACTION WITH READERS TO THEM IS THE WRONG THING TO DO; YOU NO LONGER HAVE MEANINGFUL DATA OF WHO THESE PEOPLE ARE AND HOW THEY ARE CONNECTING WITH YOU"

- ANDREW LOSOWSKY, CORAL PROJECT LEADER

CHAPTER 3:
SUCCESSFUL CASES OF
THE NEW YORK TIMES AND *DAWN*

While many are turning off commenting, a handful of media organisations seem to have figured out how to manage and create good commenting spaces.

During the study, *The New York Times* was the most mentioned model to which many news organisations around the world aspire. The high quality of the comments and rich discussions are the key elements that many news organisations mentioned to WEF. The commenting community is so robust that *The New York Times* began writing about its own commenting community, profiling some of its top commenters, even featuring comments on the centre of its homepage.

Building a quality commenting community: *The New York Times*

Commenting only became possible at *The New York Times* in 2007 when comments were enabled on news stories. Currently, about 10% of its articles are open for comment on a daily basis.

"Our goal, way back, was to have a section that mirrored the 'letter to the editor'," said Bassey Etim, Community Editor. He was hired in 2008 to scale up the commenting section. "We wanted very, very good responses, and we were literally copy-editing [comments] before we put it up on the *NYT* Picks."

From the beginning, Etim's team manually pre-moderated every comment and rejected some for bad grammar or messy logic. However, as the newsroom became more digitally-oriented and the number of comments increased from 1,000 to the now 11,000 a day, the approval rate went up from 50% to about 85%, though an hour's wait for approval is not unusual.

"We still have pretty stringent standards, we try to police civility, and we've trained the trolls that you have no chance here, so the vast majority of the comments we get here are very good," said Etim.

At *The New York Times*, clear guidelines have been written about the type of comments they look for and what they delete. The paper's public editors also frequently address concerns lodged by commenters. In addition to carefully managing the commenting space, Etim tries to attract a wide spectrum of perspectives. He is also working hard to create a space where minorities are willing and feel comfortable voicing unpopular opinions by ensuring neither name-calling nor abuse takes place in the space.

"No matter how abhorrent the opinion, we try to get each strand into the conversation," said Etim at a workshop on commenting at Columbia University last year. In an example, he related his shock at some of the comments submitted on an article where a woman was abused on video. Yet, he still picked a few that were decent enough to reflect a different perspective and the resulting discourse was extremely lively. "It's a service to our reader and also a journalistic duty we have," he said.

AT THE NEW YORK TIMES, CLEAR GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THE TYPE OF COMMENTS THEY LOOK FOR AND WHAT THEY DELETE.

"ANYONE WHO IS BITCHING ABOUT COMMENTS IS MAKING A BIG MISTAKE. THEY ARE NOT LOOKING AT THE RIGHT METRICS."

- JAHANZAIB HAQUE, DAWN, PAKISTAN

Making the business case: *Dawn*

The comment section is actually adding revenue to the bottom line at *The New York Times*. "Despite all the investment we put in, it is profitable. It's not a giant profit centre but it does well on the subscription business," said Etim, meaning commenters were transforming into paying subscribers of the paper.

Research has shown that increased engagement such as commenting can lead to higher rates of subscription. By using a concept of "ladder of participation" and in prompting a visitor to gradually increase their social engagement from visitor to reader to commenter to moderator, content websites can more readily convert site visitors into paying customers, according to an MIT-Sloan article entitled "Turning content viewers into subscribers."

The New York Times is not the only one reaping benefits. Pakistan's *Dawn*, which does not have a paywall and opens all articles to commenting, prides itself as the digital platform for quality debate, especially between Indians and Pakistanis, two historic arch-rivals. "We created a space for people to talk, dialogues which were not possible face to face," said Jahanzaib Haque, Chief Digital Strategist and Editor at *Dawn*.

Haque is able to do so within a tightly managed commenting space, which was implemented in 2014. A team of four moderators reads every single one of the average 3,000 comments it receives each day before they are published, and anything that does not add to the conversation, such as a one-word comment, is deleted. The current deletion rate is about 35%. It also has a four-person Facebook team that bans users posting offensive comments.

"Because we can't delete on Facebook, it's one-strike out policy," said Haque. The commenting policy is reviewed almost every three months to adapt to the fast-paced changes in the cyberworld. "We would rather have more trolls deleted, than have more comments go through which can be part of gaming the system," said Haque.

The benefit of a tightly managed commenting space is marketing. While Haque declined to give specific numbers, he said that since the implementation of pre-moderation, the time spent onsite went from 6.5 minutes to 9 minutes per user, a significant difference for marketers and advertisers. "Anyone who is bitching about comments is making a big mistake," said Haque. "They are not looking at the right metrics."
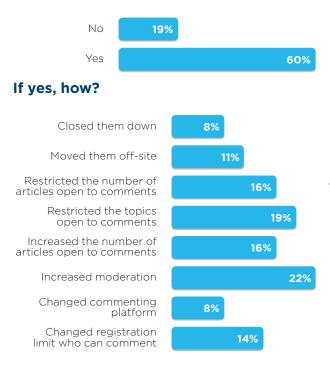
CHAPTER 4:
EVOLVING BEST PRACTICES

Between the news organisations shutting down comments and those reaping their benefits, a large majority (82%) is still trying to get comments to work.

Do you invite users to comment on your website?

No	16%
Yes	82%

In the WEF survey, more than half (60%) of the organisations surveyed have changed the way they manage and host commenting in the last three years. The most cited changes were increased moderation, limiting topics open to comments, reducing the number of articles open for commenting and restricting who can comment. Even those who have shut down commenting are continuing to explore ways to engage and connect with their readers.

Have you changed the way you manage and host comments in the last 3 years?

No	19%
Yes	60%

If yes, how?

Closed them down	8%
Moved them off-site	11%
Restricted the number of articles open to comments	16%
Restricted the topics open to comments	19%
Increased the number of articles open to comments	16%
Increased moderation	22%
Changed commenting platform	8%
Changed registration limit who can comment	14%

Think through the big questions and make commenting a priority

"In the last few years, commenting has not been very important; it has been de-emphasised. And frankly, when you don't moderate and don't invest, you don't get a lot out of it – it's a chicken-and-egg thing," said Nicholas Dawes, former Chief Editorial and Content Officer of India's *Hindustan Times,* which is undergoing a redesign of its website and is exploring ways to better incorporate commenting on its site.

The same goes for *Al Jazeera,* where Senior Digital Product Manager Dwayne Oxford is working on securing a budget to hire a team and acquire the necessary technology. "Right now we have zero people doing [moderation]," said Oxford. "We are now getting to that tipping point to have the resource to address this issue."

For Coral Project's Losowsky, the largest question surrounding comments is a philosophical one that many news organisations have been too busy to ask as they try to stay afloat: What is your journalistic vision and what is the role of the audience in that mission?

Many don't have a clear answer and gave generic ones that could be summed up in consumption terms: read our news, share it and pay us. "It has to do with the state of media, but if that is the limit of what you do, then it ignores a lot of changes in the authority and connectivity that have come with the growth of the Internet where people look for and expect a different relationship than they did before. And newsrooms have to adapt to make readers feel connected to their journalistic missions," said Losowsky.

For *The New York Times*, the goal of having a commenting section is clear. "We have to treat comment as content," Etim told the audience at the Columbia University workshop on commenting. "People come to our site specifically for our editorial judgment and so our job is to create more of that and to almost give them the impression that they are being judged by a *Times* editor, just like our journalists."

IN THE WEF STUDY, MORE THAN HALF (55%) OF THE NEWS ORGANISATIONS SURVEYED OPEN ALL THEIR ARTICLES FOR COMMENTING. IN CONTRAST, THE NEW YORK TIMES ONLY CHOOSES 10% OF THE ARTICLES IT PUBLISHES FOR COMMENTS ON A DAILY BASIS

"We can't cede all to social [platforms], there is a place for us as news organisations to play, too," said Etim. "By elevating thoughtlessness, by giving voice to stupidity, we don't promote the marketplace of ideas. If we have to force our most thoughtful visitor to adopt aggressive counter-trolling tactics, we deprive them of their ability to change their mind, to be open to perspectives and open their hearts."

Start small and be focused

After shutting down commenting due to extensive Russian trolling, Germany's *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is now organising three to five topics a day for focused discussion with its readers. It also polls its readers for story ideas and questions about its reporting. For its groundbreaking Panama Papers reports, after receiving questions from its readers, the paper reacted by answering and packaging the answers into several follow-up news reports. "It's an enormous resource," said Krach of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. "We are convinced it is worthwhile doing, maintaining this connection to readers."

WEF's research found that news organisations with a healthy commenting space tend to have clear community guidelines and take a strong proactive approach towards upholding those guidelines. They either pre-moderate every comment or have an aggressive post-moderation system in place where they closely monitor the conversation.

When do you moderate comments?

After they are published (post-moderation)	39%
Before they are published (pre-moderation)	29%
We don't moderate them	2%

"The main thing about civility, is to show that there is an adult in the room," said Etim. "We have to be willing to stop accepting content from users, if it does not reflect our mission, while understanding that the mission of a news organisation, especially nowadays, is conversations. So when readers come to your comment section, the first and every time, they have to see a reflection of the same content they arrive for."
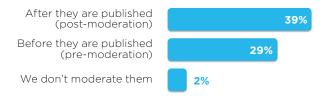
Several news organisations are also making an effort to educate their readers about what is accepted and not accepted as comments. Besides posting community guidelines or even showing them to commenters before each post, publications such as *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* have also designed games to give their readers a try at approving or rejecting comments and explaining the rationale behind each decision.

Moderation takes effort and often requires full-time staff. The key is to do what your resources allow you to do. After conducting a comprehensive study of its comments, *The Guardian* decided to cut down the number of places where comments are open on stories relating to a few particularly contentious subjects, such as migration and race, so as to keep a closer watch on conversations that are more likely to attract abuse.

In the WEF study, more than half (55%) of the news organisations surveyed open all their articles for commenting. In contrast, *The New York Times* only chooses 10% of the articles it publishes for comments on a daily basis.

The selection of the articles open for commenting at *The New York Times* depends on news value, reader interest, whether the topic has recently been open for commenting and the ability of the comment moderators to oversee the discussion. For example, stories that are explosive may not be open for commenting if similar topics have been recently commented on. Etim will also delay offering the opportunity to comment if he anticipates a story will need a lot of moderation, thereby avoiding lengthy waiting times. "We are never looking for volume, we are always looking for what's going to add value," said Etim.

Timing also matters. *The Guardian* only opens articles for three days of commenting while *The New York Times* only makes it available for 24 hours.

"We will never put an article on Israel-Palestine on Facebook on a Friday afternoon," said Stinne Andreasen, Digital Editor for Danish paper *Kristeligt Dagblad*, which closely moderates comments using the Facebook platform. "The tone and debate are very harsh and sometimes there are threats, so we definitely think twice every time we host something, we make sure there is a person who can control the debate."

Besides limiting the scope of commenting, some publications are considering limiting who can comment and potentially use that as an up-sell to their readers. *RBS* in Brazil has decided to move to a semi-closed system, to allow only subscribers to comment in the hope that a more trusted environment with real names and email would foster a better conversation.

However, requiring real name registration may not necessarily encourage better quality conversations and could potentially discourage those with minority opinions from speaking out.

Encourage and reward good commenting behaviour

Etim of *The New York Times* recommends that news organisations start small, even if just one article is open for comment a day. The aim is to attract valuable readers. "First, build up your community, then deputise them to keep that republic. What you see is that if you give people a reason to buy in, they are able to do that as long as you keep the task achievable for them."

The New York Times has a system of "verified commenter" that rewards people who comment more and with a high approval rating, because their comments can go up without moderation. A similar class system has also been used by other news organisations such as *Gawker,* which surprisingly led to improved quality and a rebound in quantity after an initial drop.

At Reddit, which boasts one of the largest online discussion communities, vetted users are given moderation powers such as deleting comments, banning users and even hosting an "ask me anything" session with U.S. President Barak Obama. When the *Financial Times* invited its commenter Nicholas Barrett to write an opinion piece after a viral post-Brexit comment, it was another example showing commenters that provide thoughtful comments could lead to something bigger.

Designing a site to be comment friendly, allowing community up-votes and down-votes, and showcasing well-written comments are also ways to promote good behaviour.

At *The New York Times,* the redesign of its website in 2011 increased the number of comments it received by nearly 80% and receiving a recommendation or being selected as a '*NYT* Pick' greatly increased the number of times a commenter posted, according to the Engaging News Project's research on commenter behaviour.

"If one of our comments has a lot of up votes, we would promote and highlight the comment on our sites, so instead of a journalist quote on the site, we would have a commenter's quote," said Karlsten from Sweden who had worked as Head of Social Media at *Expressen* and run an online experiment site *ajour.* "It would be a commenter's treat; if I put up a good comment, I would be put up on there just as the journalist [would be]."

Another proven way to improve civility in the comment space is to engage journalists in the conversation. In the WEF survey, of the news organisations that allow commenting, more than half (65%) said that their journalists and editors read the comments. Yet when pressed further, very few have their journalists regularly participate in the conversation, citing issues of time, workload and willingness.

Look continuously for a better technical solution

Most of the news organisations interviewed are using supplier solutions for managing the commenting function. Yet many are dissatisfied with the technological solutions available: the limited functionality and flexibility, and the potential conflict of interest in terms of advertising sales. Several are moving towards revamping their website, changing their supplier, looking for semantic filtering technology or developing their own commenting system.

Trench, formerly of *News24*, has now moved on to *Times Media Group,* which also has a limited commenting function and is now looking for a technical solution. While opening up select articles offers a temporary solution, he felt that it does not serve the purpose because people would get used to the fact that you are not open for comment. "What I really prefer is a more robust technical solution where you can serve comment of value rather than pouring a massive amount of manual labour into it."

In general, publishers are also looking for technology with artificial intelligence and self-learning capabilities. *La Nación* in Argentina is currently trying out semantic tools, while *Al Jazeera* is hoping to look into technology that can implement sentiment analysis and identify nasty comments. A team from Stanford and Cornell is also in the process of developing a technology which can predict if someone is a troll by reading their first five posts.

Others such as the *Philippines Star* are looking to revamp their websites and install a proprietary commenting system linked to Facebook, so that they have better control over its data and potentially a source of revenue in the future.

"For many journalists, readers are just one big opaque group. If you have a lot of commenters, how do you filter and find the best? This should not be manual. We are in a digital world; we should make technology work for us," said Sweden's Karlsten.

Coral Project is trying to do just that. The team is in the process of developing three open-source tools to help news organisations better engage with their audiences.

To help news organisations solicit comments and curate conversation in a much more efficient manner, the team has developed a tool, "Ask", which has just launched. It is also developing "Trust", which aims to solve the problem of identifying different types of commenters so as to take greater control of the commenting space, and "Talk", which will connect journalists with sources and build a network of interested communities.

Build a community and incorporate comments into content

Those that have already built a robust comment community are leveraging more of their comment into resources for content and sustainability goals.

Aligning with *The New York Times'* strategy to double its digital revenue by 2020 and to focus on its loyal readers, Etim is building an anchor website for the commenters and scaling up the number of articles open for commenting from the current 10% to hopefully 50% with the same number of staff. He is working on incorporating automation and machine-learning technology to increase his team's productivity. "We are going to try to build out an ideal version of Quora and Reddit combined that works for *The New York Times*," said Etim.

In addition, he is working on turning comments into content. "We hope we will be able to take our focus off moderating every comment on civility and more on how to package comment as a useful sidebar for *New York Times* articles," said Etim. Recently, *The New York Times* published a piece on Muslim women's reaction towards France's controversial burkini ban using almost all reader comments.

"Creating content is very expensive in a place like *The New York Times*," said Etim. "If we play it right, [comments] can add to the content level of the *Times* without spending an equal amount of money."

MOST OF THE NEWS ORGANISATIONS INTERVIEWED ARE USING SUPPLIER SOLUTIONS FOR MANAGING THE COMMENTING FUNCTION. YET MANY ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS AVAILABLE.

CONCLUSION

There is no single best way to manage comments. Each news organisation faces a distinct audience and culture, different business challenges, and varying legal and societal constraints and expectations. Yet as the online world fills with trolls, news organisations do have a role and an opportunity to create a space that is conducive to civil conversations and will contribute towards business sustainability.

As news organisations find the balance between strategic priorities and cost, it is important that each continues to try to re-engage directly with their audience and maintain control of user data, which is increasingly valuable. In the age of social media, user behaviours change rapidly and the urgency for news organisations to adapt and change is ever present.

"Given all the anxiety we all have about the extent of engagement across our platform and the loss of relationship with our audience, I do think we as publishers should come back to thinking about comments more strategically," said the Hindustan Times' Dawes. "Let's try again. That's my own thought, but I am not particularly confident what the answer would be. The audience might have moved on."

COMMENT MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR NEWS ORGANISATIONS

Think through your journalistic mission in terms of audience engagement, decide where commenting falls into that mission and allocate dedicated resources	#1
Publish commenting guidelines and update them as necessary	#2
Only allow commenting where you are able to properly uphold your standards	#3
Encourage good commenting behaviours through section design, community self-policing, rewards and editorial participation	#4
Continue to look for technology solutions that can increase productivity, allow you to distinguish between different types of commenters and help you to use the comments to produce journalism at a lower cost	#5

APPENDIX I: RESEARCH RESOURCES

(In order of appearance in the report)

Beyond comments: finding better ways to connect with you

NPR | 18 Aug 2016

One of the latest major news organisations to shut down comments, NPR's Scott Montgomery wrote about the history of the comments at NPR and explained the reason for the decision, citing lack of use and the need for focused effort on social media platforms.

http://www.npr.org/sections/thisisnpr/2016/08/17/490208179/beyond-comments-finding-better-ways-to-connect-with-you

---

Online comment moderation: emerging best practices

WAN-IFRA | 4 Oct 2013

A global report involving more than 100 news organisations from 63 countries, it outlined the status of comments, showcased the different types of moderation processes, described the issues and challenges and summarized the best practices.

http://www.wan-ifra.org/reports/2013/10/04/online-comment-moderation-emerging-best-practices

---

A brief history of the end of comments

WIRED | 8 Oct 2015

A chronicle of American news organisations that have shut down their comment functions from 2012 to the end of 2015, the article shows that not only are legacy news organisations closing comments, so are new startups and niche media companies.

https://www.wired.com/2015/10/brief-history-of-the-demise-of-the-comments-timeline/

Farewell to comments: why we are making a change

News24 | 8 Sept 2015

In a letter to its readers, News24 explained why it is shutting down comments and ways readers can continue to interact with News24.

http://www.news24.com/Columnists/AndrewTrench/Farewell-to-comments-Why-we-are-making-a-change-20150908

What an academic who wrote her dissertation on trolls thinks of violentacrez

The Atlantic | 15 Oct 2012

Having done a dissertation on trolls, the author defined what trolling is, explained the wide range of diversity of trolls, showed how trolls have evolved over the years and suggested how the permissive online culture has allowed the phenomenon to thrive.

http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/10/what-an-academic-who-wrote-her-dissertation-on-trolls-thinks-of-violentacrez/263631/

How trolls are running the Internet

TIME | 18 Aug 2016

Cover piece for the TIME magazine, the article traced how trolls come to be in the Internet, how social media upped the game and how trolling became a tool of politics.

http://time.com/4457110/internet-trolls/

The dark side of Guardian comments

The Guardian | 12 Apr 2016

An analysis of 70 million comments left on The Guardian's web page, the research found that women and minority writers are much more likely to be exposed to online harassment.

https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments

The only guide to Gamergate you will ever need to read

Washington Post | 14 Oct 2014

A primer on Gamergate with regards to how it started, why it started, how it concerned everyday Internet users, who were involved and what could be done to resolve it.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/10/14/the-only-guide-to-gamergate-you-will-ever-need-to-read/

5 facts about online harassment

Pew Research | 30 Oct 2014

The first in-depth study of online harassment among American adults, the research examined prevalence of harassment online, its various forms, where it occurs, and how people respond.

http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/10/30/5-facts-about-online-harassment/

Research confirms that for many online commenters, the article is beside the point

Quartz | 18 Mar 2016

Based on research presented by Talia Stroud, an associate professor of communications at Austin, at a South by Southwest conference panel, the article discussed news organisations' vexed relationship with user comments and ways that news organisations were dealing with the challenge.

http://qz.com/642387/research-confirms-that-for-many-online-commenters-the-article-is-beside-the-point/

The shadowy war on the press: How the rich silence journalists

Columbia Journalism Review | 16 Jun 2016

In the aftermath of Gawker's shutdown thanks to Peter Thiel's effort, the article examined how wealthy individuals and companies use their economic prowess and particularly tools of publishing, social media and Google search to target reporters they do not like at mass scale level influence and impact.

http://www.cjr.org/analysis/shadowy_war.php

The Journalist and the Troll: This Man Spent Two Years Trying to Destroy Me Online

Bloomberg | 16 Mar 2016

Chronicling the online smear campaign she has been weathering from a man that she had previously covered for an article, the author described how rich individuals can now form their own newsroom and produce seemingly credible journalistic work to tarnish the reputation of reporters, with grave consequences.

http://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-benjamin-wey/

Russia's Propaganda Campaign against Germany

Spiegel Online | 5 Feb 2016

The article examined how Kremlin manipulated a missing child's case into a political issue and explored the propaganda machine behind the effort to sway public opinion in western countries.

http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/putin-wages-hybrid-war-on-germany-and-west-a-1075483.html

Salutin' Putin: inside a Russian troll house

Guardian | 2 Apr 2015

Based on interviews with former Russians who worked as government trolls, the article detailed how the Russian propaganda machine works.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/02/putin-kremlin-inside-russian-troll-house

Effort to expose Russia's "trolls army" draws vicious retaliation

New York Times | 30 May 2016

The story follows the retaliation that a Finnish investigative reporter faced when she pursued an investigative piece on the Russian trolls.

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/31/world/europe/russia-finland-nato-trolls.html?_r=2

This story stinks

New York Times | 2 Mar 2013

Based on a study published in the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communications, two professors showed how uncivil comments not only polarized readers but often changed a participant's interpretation of a news story itself.

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/03/opinion/sunday/this-story-stinks.html?_r=1

The laborers who keep dick pics and beheading out of your Facebook feed

WIRED | 23 Oct 2014

The article shows how technological giants such as Facebook and YouTube outsource often psychologically damaging content moderation work to low-cost part-timers and developing countries.

http://www.wired.com/2014/10/content-moderation/

State of the news media 2016

Pew Research Center | 15 Jun 2016

An annual report, the Pew Research Center presented the financial state of the media industry in the United States.

http://www.journalism.org/2016/06/15/state-of-the-news-media-2016/

European Court of Human Rights holds Estonia news portal liable for user comments

WAN-IFRA | 16 Jun 2015

The first case in which the European Court has been called upon to examine a complaint about liability for user-generated comments on an internet news portal, it upheld the ruling of lower court by holding the news portal liable.

http://blog.wan-ifra.org/2015/06/17/european-court-of-human-rights-holds-estonian-news-portal-liable-for-users-comments

European Court decision allows media to be less paranoid about online comments

WAN-IFRA | 11 Feb 2016

The European Court reversed a previous decision and acknowledged that publishers cannot be held liable for comments posted on their sites if they have a notice-and-take-down system operating effectively.

http://blog.wan-ifra.org/2016/02/11/european-court-decision-allows-media-to-be-less-paranoid-about-online-comments

A New Understanding: What Makes People Trust and Rely on News

The Media Insight Project | April 2016

A comprehensive look into the issue of trust and the media, the 48-page report defined trust, measured trust in news topic and source, investigated how people decide what news to trust on which platform, why trust matters and how it can be broken.

http://www.mediainsight.org/PDFs/Trust/TrustFinal.pdf

Reuters Institutes Digital News Report 2016

Reuters Institute | 14 Jun 2016

A global overview on news, the report compared data across 26 countries in terms of segmentation, brand, audience behavior, trust and willingness to pay. It also included discussions on trust, economics model and the trend of customized recommendation.

http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital-News-Report-2016.pdf

Survey of Commenters and Comment Readers

Engaging News Project | 14 Mar 2016

Using a nationally representative sample of commenters and comment readers, the report described the demographic makeup, attitudes, and behaviors of the people who comprise the online commenting world.

https://engagingnewsproject.org/research/survey-of-commenters-and-comment-readers/

Inside Facebook's (Totally Insane, Unintentionally Gigantic, Hyperpartisan) Political-Media Machine

The New York Times | 24 Aug 2016

An insider look into the political media machine that Facebook has become and the various entrepreneurs who are using the machine to sway public opinions and earn millions along the way.

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/28/magazine/inside-facebooks-totally-insane-unintentionally-gigantic-hyperpartisan-political-media-machine.html

Who owns the news consumer: Social media platforms or publishers?

Columbia Journalism Review | 21 Jun 2016

An article on the preliminary research findings on the relationship between news organisations and distributive platforms by Columbia University Tow Centre for Digital Journalism.

http://www.cjr.org/tow_center/platforms_and_publishers_new_research_from_the_tow_center.php

Everyone seems to hate online reader comments. Here's why I treasure them

The Washington Post | 4 Sept 2016

In response to NPR closing down its comment section, Washington Post media columnist Margaret Sullivan outlined her reasons for keeping comment open.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/everyone-seems-to-hate-online-reader-comments-heres-why-i-treasure-them/2016/09/04/59869f96-704b-11e6-8533-6b0b0ded0253_story.html

Comments are changing. Our commitment to audiences shouldn't

Poynter | 31 Aug 2016

Also in response to the trend of news organisations closing down comment sections, the Texas Tribune's Chief Audience Officer Amanda Zamora argued for a recommitment to audience and readers.

http://www.poynter.org/2016/comments-are-changing-our-commitment-to-audiences-shouldnt/428399/

New York Times editor: "We have to treat comments as content"

Nieman Lab | 2 Oct 2015

The article summarized the key points presented by New York Times Community Editor Bassey Etim at a comment workshop at the Computation + Journalism Symposium at Columbia University's Brown Institute.

http://www.niemanlab.org/2015/10/new-york-times-editor-we-have-to-treat-comments-as-content/#disqus_thread

Turning Content Viewers into Subscribers

MIT-Sloan Management Review | 23 Feb 2016

Based on a five-year research project, the authors argued that social activity on a website can increase users' commitment to the site and willingness to pay for its services.

http://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/turning-content-viewers-into-subscribers/

Approve or Reject: Can You Moderate Five New York Times Comments?

The New York Times | 20 Sept 2016

An interactive piece where readers can try their hand at being a moderator, the author explained the rationale behind why each approval or rejection decision is made.

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/09/20/insider/approve-or-reject-moderation-quiz.html?_r=2

Questions and Answers on How the Times Handles Online Comments from Readers

The New York Times | 15 Oct 2012

A series of questions and answers on details of comment management at the New York Times including how articles are chosen, why certain design features were changed, who read the comments, what the standards are and for how much time a comment section is open.

http://publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/15/questions-and-answers-on-how-the-times-handles-online-comments-from-readers/

Forcing commenters to use real names won't root out the trolls

WIRED | 12 Aug 2014

The author argued that many trolls are proud of their behaviours and news organisations hoping to stamp out trolls by insisting on real name registration may have limited success.

http://www.wired.com/2014/08/forcing-commenters-to-use-real-names-wont-root-out-the-trolls/

Tough love: Gawker finds making it harder for comments to be seen leads to more (and better) comments

Nieman Labs | 13 Apr 2014

Gawker showed that by insisting on higher quality for its comments, the volume initially dropped but rebounded with better quality and quantity after.

http://www.niemanlab.org/2010/04/tough-love-gawker-finds-making-it-harder-for-comments-to-be-seen-leads-to-more-and-better-comments/

Journalist Involvement in Comment Sections

Engaging News Project | Apr 2014

Research found that the chances of an uncivil comment decline by 15% when a reporter interacted in the comment section compared to when no one did so.

https://engagingnewsproject.org/enp_prod/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ENP_Comments_Brief.pdf

APPENDIX II: PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

	Media	Country	Continent
1	Al Jazeera	Qatar	Middle East & North Africa
2	Business Mail	Zambia	Africa
3	Coral Project	United States	North America
4	Dawn	Pakistan	Asia
5	De Morgen	Belgium	Europe
6	De Persgroep	Netherlands	Europe
7	Deutsche Welle	Germany	Europe
8	Die Rheinpfalz	Germany	Europe
9	Dnevnik.si/dd	Slovenia	Europe
10	El Informador	Mexico	South America
11	El Pais	Spain	Europe
12	El Pais	Colombia	South America
13	Emanuel Karlsten	Sweden	Europe
14	Fairfax Media	Australia	Australia/New Zealand
15	Financial Times	UK	Europe
16	Haaretz	Israel	Middle East & North Africa
17	Helsingin Sanomat	Finland	Europe
18	Hindustan Times	India	Asia
19	Johnston Press	United Kingdom	Europe
20	Komsomolskaya Pravda	Russia	Europe
21	Kristeligt Dagblad	Denmark	Europe
22	La Gaceta	Argentina	South America
23	La Nación	Argentina	South America
24	La Stampa	Italy	Europe
25	Libya News 24	Libya	Middle East & North Africa
26	Mail & Guardian	South Africa	Africa
27	Mannheimer Morgen	Germany	Europe
28	Media Chinese International Limited	Malaysia	Asia
29	Mindanaonewsandviews.com	Philippines	Asia
30	Miss/Styria Medienhaus Lifestyle	Austria	Europe
31	Nation Media Group	Kenya	Africa
32	Neue Zürcher Zeitung	Switzerland	Europe
33	Oriental Daily News	Malaysia	Asia
34	PBS	United States	North America
35	Perfil	Argentina	South America
36	Philstar	Philippines	Asia

37	Público	Portugal	Europe
38	Rappler.com	Philippines	Asia
39	RBS Group	Brazil	South America
40	Rue89 Strasbourg	France	Europe
41	Suara.com	Indonesia	Asia
42	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Germany	Europe
43	SunStar Publishing Inc.	Philippines	Asia
44	Swissinfo.ch	Switzerland	Europe
45	Tempo	Indonesia	Asia
46	The Asahi Shimbun	Japan	Asia
47	The Guardian	UK	Europe
48	The Huffington Post	United States	North America
49	The Huffington Post Japan	Japan	Asia
50	The Indianapolis Star	United States	North America
51	The Irish Times	Ireland	Europe
52	The New York Times	United States	North America
53	The News Lens	Taiwan	Asia
54	The Observer Media Ltd	Uganda	Africa
55	The Standard	Kenya	Africa
56	The Star Newspapers	Zimbabwe	Africa
57	The Star Publication	Kenya	Africa
58	The Times and The Sunday Times	United Kingdom	Europe
59	The Wall Street Journal.	United States	North America
60	Times Media Group	South Africa	Africa
61	Times of Malta	Malta	Europe
62	Tinzwei.com	Zimbabwe	Africa
63	Tribun Timur/tribun-timur.com	Indonesia	Asia
64	USA Today	United States	North America
65	Valor Economico	Brazil	South America
66	VG	Norway	Europe
67	Washington Post	US	North America
68	Welt	Germany	Europe
69	Youm7 newspaper	Egypt	Middle East & North Africa
70	Zambia Daily Mail	Zambia	Africa
71	Zero Hora	Brazil	South America
72	Windesheim University	Netherlands	Academic
73	Southeast Asian Press Alliance	Thailand	NGO
74	Korean Press Foundation	South Korea	NGO
75	Cizion/LiveRe	Korea	Supplier
76	Frayintermedia	South Africa	Supplier
77	M6 Ltd	UK	Supplier
78	Vuukle	India	Supplier

WORLD
EDITORS
FORUM

WAN IFRA

World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers