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The paparazzi industry and new media: The evolving production and consumption of celebrity news and gossip websites

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Abstract

As a result of media convergence and new visual technologies, paparazzi agencies have emerged as an important force in the entertainment industry. Given the ability of such agencies to create and distribute exclusive stories, the globalization of paparazzi content has increasing ramifications for new forms of information-based entertainment. This article will explore the production, distribution and consumption of paparazzi content, and outline the structure of the paparazzi industry, processes of paparazzi website composition and the rise of the celebrity blogosphere. It draws out implications for new media theory and practice, and provides a framework for the further understanding the impact of paparazzi agencies, celebrity gossip sites and the range of industries affected by this shift in the paparazzi industry.

Keywords

audience, celebrity blogs, convergence, entertainment industry new media, paparazzi

Since 1958, when Federico Fellini's classic movie *La Dolce Vita* coined their name, the paparazzi have generated global interest in the visual culture surrounding celebrities. The name of Signore 'Paparazzo', the character of a news photographer in the film, was apparently derived from 'papataceo', a large type of mosquito, which was used to describe how these photographers are likened to swarms of pests following people, 'surrounding them, [and] attacking them with their flashes' (Wood, 1999). The paparazzi have become a staple in the rise of 'old media' entertainment journalism, generating

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evidence of celebrities in newsworthy (and publicity-rich) contexts, whether in terms of scandal, romance or action settings. Such pictures boost the economic success of the traditional news media, and, in the growing sector of celebrity magazines, paparazzi pictures have fetched ever-larger prices.

Given the rise of new media outlets, the paparazzi industry is booming, with growing numbers of agencies in major cities such as London and Los Angeles. With this expansion, the output of celebrity photographs has also increased, creating more entertainment fodder for newspapers and magazines on an international level (Howe, 2005). As Terry Flew argues:

> it is notable how prominent the celebrity, entertainment, and lifestyle formats are on the online versions of the established news media sites. There is a study yet to be done about whether the prevalence of … content is greater on these sites than it is in the print and the broadcast equivalents, and what should be made of it. (2008: 156)

Although there are many factors involved in the creation and maintenance of content of entertainment websites, for example design and layout or repurposed vs. original content (Flew and Wilson, 2008) one of the most significant factors is current, topical photographs of celebrities. However, while exclusive hard-to-obtain photographs (such as a first glimpse of a celebrity's newborn child) sell to print-based media for very large prices, these types of exclusives are few and far between. The market for the vast majority of non-exclusive pictures will be daily entertainment news, of which a substantial amount will be sold to the *online* versions of mainstream entertainment news for very low prices, given that print news can't keep up with the rapid turnover of the paparazzi's digital images. However, 'old media' printed tabloid newspapers such as the UK's *The Sun* and *News of the World*, or the American magazines *People* and *US Weekly* are still the biggest buyers of paparazzi pictures, and their large circulation numbers are a testament to the commercial power of such images.

As a result, we can identify a profound shift in the nature of the paparazzi industry. Where once the paparazzi industry was composed of freelance photographers, selling directly to picture editors at news and entertainment publications (Howe, 2005), the field is now dominated by multinational agencies with their own brand of mostly web-based entertainment news. Indeed, paparazzi activity 'is systematically encouraged by the decline in staff photographers and the increased dependence by media outlets on freelancers of all kinds' (Turner et al., 2000: 173). This shift has been accompanied by a rise in entertainment blogs written by non-corporate writers, which has intensified the circulation of images and stories about celebrities. This form of participatory journalism is a result of 'many simultaneous, distributed conversations that either blossom or quickly atrophy in the Web's social network' and can be defined as 'the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information' (Bowman and Willis, 2003: 9). Fans and critics alike are empowered by technologies such as camera phones, digital cameras and free blog hosting sites, which gives rise to a massive, non-regulated online resource for entertainment news gatherers hunting for information to include in 'old media' contexts such as newspaper, radio and television stories. In a further twist, irreverent gossip blog sites such as Perez Hilton[1] have emerged over the past few years as celebrity gossip power players, with a substantial web following. These developments have helped paparazzi agencies become major players in the entertainment industry.

As a result paparazzi agencies have expanded their use of new media production and distribution methods, from developing a commercial client base of regular media providers (business to business) to involving fans and gossip seekers through social networking applications and their own blog sites (business to consumer). This article seeks to make a preliminary chart of this evolution, and provide an overview of this dynamic field of visual culture. First, it will explore the evolution of the paparazzi from old to new media, and examine its expansion from a cottage industry to a lucrative media sector. Focusing on the increased use of digital technology in image capture and user-friendly web publishing, it examines the way in which commercial paparazzi agencies and DIY celebrity gossip blogs are at odds over content ownership. It will look at the incorporation of paparazzi images into commercial media, focusing on the success of the online photo database Getty Images. It also explores the processes of advertising and monetizing content on paparazzi agency websites. Second, the paper analyses how the increasing speed of image production, distribution and consumption practices has become an important player in the celebrity publicity industry. The final section will examine celebrity interactivity with audiences, looking at the increasing diversity of celebrity websites, and the growing prevalence of audience-generated content.

The evolution and expansion of the paparazzi industry from old to new media

> Technology has changed the working habits of the paparazzi in much the same way that it has transformed the rest of photography. Long gone are the days when poor young Italian men pushed Rolleiflex cameras into the faces of stars relaxing on Rome's Via Veneto after a hard days work filming at Cinecittá.… Today's lightweight long lenses and digital cameras capable of working in low light levels mean that … the victims often don't even know their pictures are being taken until they see them in the next edition of *US Weekly*, *People* or *Hello!* magazine. (Howe, 2005: 22)

As a 'visual form of gossip' (Squiers, 1999: 286), paparazzi photography has traditionally been held in less esteem than photojournalism (Mendelson, 2007: 170). However, in recent times, paparazzi photographs have attracted mainstream demand (from tabloid, broadsheet and broadcast sources) for candid pictures of celebrities, seemingly without limit. Furthermore, the shift from paparazzi photography has gone from being a street-based job to a technology-driven industry, as industry entrepreneurs have realized the potential of new media platforms.

There are at least two factors that explain the growing impact of the paparazzi industry on mainstream 'traditional' media. First, paparazzi images have become central to circulation battles between various entertainment magazines and tabloid newspapers. The prices for images of celebrities have reached unprecedented levels. In 2002, pictures of the Hollywood couple Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez reading about themselves in *Us Weekly* were reportedly sold for $75,000 to rival publication, *People.* Here, it was suggested that *People* were 'desperate not to let [those pictures] get out.… Were it not for those [sic], the images probably would have fetched $8,000 to $10,000' (DeFoore, n.d.). In 2005, the agency Big Pictures sold candid photographs of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt as a couple to tabloid *Us Weekly* for a then record of US $500,000.

Second, paparazzi photos have crossed over into the political sphere, both in terms of images generated and in the public demonization of paparazzi photographers, given their physical proximity to the celebrity body. Most famously, shortly after paparazzi were blamed for contributing to the death of Princess Diana, British tabloids *The Sun* and the *Mirror* recorded their lowest sales figures since 1962, undoubtedly the manifestation of the public backlash against the paparazzi (Griffiths, 1997). More recently, in late 2008, when Barack Obama was holidaying in Hawaii, 'resourceful paparazzi nabbed beefcake shots of the president-elect on the beach as well as shots of him at a memorial service for his late grandmother. All this, while the regular photo pool played by the rules and missed the shots' (Libit and Ressner, 2009). The latter example raises issues about the President's security – paparazzi long-range shots are eerily evocative of the view of a sniper – and about the type of media spin made possible by paparazzi and new media processes, with Obama seen as 'the Britney Spears of 2009' (Libit and Ressner, 2009).

At the same time as these changes have been going on, the paparazzi industry has altered to meet the challenges and opportunities of new media. The industry has evolved and expanded from being content providers for old media such as newspapers and TV, to become media destinations in their own right. Existing paparazzi agency sites such as X17 (http://www.x17agency.com) and Splashnews,[2] which started out as static, client-based old media providers have expanded, creating sister sites which are updated daily, and are interactive and audience-inclusive, for example X17 Online: Come to the Source, and Splashnews Online respectively. Additionally, a new wave of paparazzi agencies has since started up with this model already in place, such as INF Daily, Buzzfoto and TMZ. The design and layout of these sites emphasize the focus on gossip and entertainment news, and downplay the fact that they also house working – and client-dependent – agencies.

Paparazzi agencies have undoubtedly learnt from the growth of the visual content industry, as in stock photography and art photography (see Frosh, 2003), which has shown how the digitization of photographs – stored and sold online – can be commercially successful. The unchallenged market leader is Getty Images whose:

> principal aims are to digitize saleable content and as many of its transactions as possible (emphasizing especially on-line promotion and sales, or 'e-commerce'), to target existing markets with specific 'brands' while allowing for the profitable integration of content from diverse archives and agencies, and to open up new (especially Internet-based) markets, frequently through joint ventures … (Frosh, 2003: 193–4)

Just as in stock photography, advertising and synergy with other media industries is paramount on paparazzi websites and celebrity photographs will be judged on 'the range of potential cultural references for the target audience and their relative potency'. In the fluctuating market of celebrity photography, 'these cultural references will change from audience to audience' (Frosh, 2001: 634).

The traditional model of paparazzi exploitation of website images of a star is based around a steady stream of low-charge, high-volume sales, with occasional exclusive shots. At a time when advertising spending in traditional media is declining, paparazzi websites are thus trying to boost advertising sales in new media outlets (Herron, 2008). The economy surrounding a star like Britney Spears encompasses multiple industries

such as magazines, newspapers, TV and the web, but feeds ultimately from the paparazzi industry whose pictures are bought to help a story sell (Herron, 2008). For example, a picture of Britney Spears shaving her head in the early hours of the morning at a small hairdressing salon has very different cultural references from a picture of the pop singer attending the Grammy awards along with other celebrities. The scarcity and timeliness of distribution of celebrity photographs dictate the economy of the paparazzi industry. Exclusive pictures of a celebrity may sell initially to print media for $10,000, but may ultimately reap in excess of $100,000 in 'residual' fees (payments made to the photographer for subsequent use of the photo after the initial sale – for example online or in a television broadcast) (Herron, 2008).

The economic success of new media formats such as entertainment and celebrity gossip websites is thus due to the simultaneity of bringing advertising to viewers on their pages at the same time, 'typically receiving a fee for each 1,000 hits' (Herron, 2008). Here, television stations are at a disadvantage because they sell advertising weeks in advance of a show's airing, based on average expected ratings. If the predicted ratings are not achieved, the show is required to reimburse the advertiser (Herron, 2008).

By contrast, advertising on the web is seen as a potentially lucrative opportunity. Recent debate about successful social networking sites (in particular Twitter, Myspace and Facebook) has highlighted the different monetization strategies of large commercial, and smaller, more fan-based, DIY entertainment sites, specifically the comparative processes of straight web advertising versus a more direct 'paying to play' model. In particular, due to the economic slowdown, the 2008 Pubmatic Adprice Index (an industry-wide measure of online ad network pricing for publishers) indicated that 'large Web sites fared the worst while small Web sites managed to maintain their monetization rates' (Pubmatic, 2008). Blogger and start-up executive Andrew Chen makes a distinction between monetizing and advertising:

> **Direct monetization, aka Advertisers**: Direct monetizers charge money for their products, via subscription, ecommerce, virtual items, etc. They typically have a small, focused group of customers.

> **Indirect monetization, aka Publishers**: Indirect monetizers don't charge money to use their product and in fact, often give their product away. They chop their audiences into pieces (using content to differentiate between them) and sell the targeted audiences to companies who directly monetize them. (Chen, 2008)

While larger, commercial websites rely on earning from major advertisers, smaller sites may live on a grassroots-oriented monetization strategy, which has a more loyal fan following, rather than a mass-anonymous audience. As Chen suggests, this new type of advertising conversation overlays, rather than supersedes, mass and niche media, especially as older forms of media are digitized (Spurgeon, 2008: 2). In this type of converging media, users are 'able to blend conversation with other types of interactivity to further their own interests and those of their social networks, in and through direct participation' (Spurgeon, 2008: 7). With the increase in Web 2.0 firms (those which focus on the web as an interface for services, 'to facilitate advertiser and consumer participation and interaction'), the 'radically disruptive potential' (Spurgeon, 2008: 14) of conversational

advertising would become apparent. In light of this, paparazzi agency sites are utilizing advertisement material in less intrusive ways, and choosing advertisers carefully. For example, Bauer Griffin's blog site, The Blog Stops Here, includes advertisers such as Amazon and LA Buzz shop (for 'celebrity' fashion accessories). These ads are attached directly on to featured photographs, but they are small in size and can easily be clicked away. This enables users to view the site with or without advertising, though they must interact with the ads in order to choose.[3]

In the commercial world, online video is re-shaping traditional media businesses and, in particular, the way the Internet is used. As one industry analyst suggests:

> We think Google and Yahoo! have the capacity to store video content and match it up with demographically/behaviourally targeted advertising that could be digitally delivered. In short, Google and Yahoo! could become the gatekeepers of video insertion ads and the video content aggregators of the Internet. (Knowledge@Wharton, 2006)

These industrial shifts may not have direct implications for the online paparazzi immediately, but will undoubtedly have an influence, over time, on the overall conception of still and moving images on the Internet.

In October 2008, Blinkx, a large video search engine, which has indexed more than 26 million hours of audio, video, viral and TV content (Blinkx, 2008), went into partnership with Mr Paparazzi. The latter, a spin-off from Big Pictures' agency website, is a site dedicated to gossip and targeting fans and 'citizen paparazzi'. The partnership sees Blinkx placing 'contextually relevant advertising against Mr. Paparazzi's clips, and will share resulting advertising revenue with Mr. Paparazzi' (Blinkx, 2008). This joint-venture strategy synergizes the content, allowing both Mr Paparazzi and Blinkx to benefit from a cross-pollination of content and a wider audience base. CEO of Blinkx, Suranga Chandratillake argued that: 'there is a seemingly insatiable need for this type of entertainment and our partnership with Mr. Paparazzi gives our worldwide audience instant access to the latest celebrity scoop' (Blinkx, 2008).

The increasing trend to create advertising-supported digital media, has encouraged marketers to develop 'interactive advertising campaigns to draw customers into more involving intimate relationships with their products and thus potentially to leverage the social networking aspect of the Internet' (Pavlik, 2008: 157). This can be on a non-commercial scale, as with the example of tourists uploading videos and photos onto YouTube and Flickr. However, it is also happening at a more commercial scale. Another example of this move to incorporate celebrity gossip with a wider range of Internet activity is Celebuzz, a social media destination which was set up to encompass pop culture and celebrity news and the gossip world. The site: 'features a full-out social network with user-created content in addition to editorial content coming from in-house reporters, partner bloggers, paparazzi photo agencies, celebrities themselves, and "expert panelists" like celebrities' personal trainers and plastic surgeons' (McCarthy, 2008a). Members are able to save and share celebrity gossip, win prizes (such as autographed objects, iPhones and T-shirts) and connect with people who are interested in the same celebrities.

Celebuzz is significant because it demonstrates a growing sophistication in how user traffic can be switched between different sites. It is one of a number of sites hosted by

Buzznet.Inc, a media company which also runs Buzznet.com, a social media network that is focused on music. However, the firm has also partnered with several popular photo agencies (Pacific Coast News Online, Splash News Online), celebrity gossip sites (Go Fug Yourself, Just Jared, Celebslam and Socialite Life), and official celebrity websites (Nicole Richie, Britney Spears and Kim Kardashian). Photo agencies provide Buzznet with content taken by the photographers and share the profits. Ostensibly, this allows Celebuzz to be a clearing house for celebrity gossip, while at the same time inviting viewers to 'register' as members of their social networking element of the site. Buzznet also hired Alan Citron, former CEO of the successful AOL-owned celebrity news site TMZ, who became head of 'special projects', an additional strategic move in trying to gain celebrity fans and gossip-seekers (McCarthy, 2008b).

Entertainment news is an obvious choice for this new type of cross-pollination of social networking and marketing with a strategy that favours building an audience first, and seeing the business model follow (Riley, 2008). Just as Facebook advertisers can reach audiences through specific topics of conversation between friends, Celebuzz can target audiences and clients more specifically through fanbases. Although some advertisers are investing in 'digital signs', full motion videos, graphics, instant updating and billboards which actually 'talk' to individual viewers (Pavlik, 2008: 158), it is arguably more effective to have real people chat among themselves about a product, for example a new album or movie, an invaluable form of viral advertising. As well as this, members are encouraged to visit partner sites, another way in which to shepherd audiences to yet more advertising. This not only alters the way in which celebrity news and gossip is viewed, but also the way in which online social networking can be implemented as a distribution and marketing tool.

Paparazzi, digitization and the speed of celebrity photography

Celebrities must use a number of strategies to stay in the public eye, two of which are 'face-to-face performances (those presented before a live audience) and transmitted performances (such as in television or print)' (Rein et al., 1997: 236). The paparazzi pictures we see of celebrities 'on location', be they at work or on holiday, can act as tracking devices, mapping celebrity travels. Because celebrities travel so extensively, staying in places so temporarily, the fast-travelling image maximizes their public exposure, while their body is already on its way to another destination. For John Urry:

> Such virtual travel reconfigures humans as bits of information, as individuals come to exist beyond their bodies. Persons leave traces of their selves in informational space, and can be more readily mobile through space, or simply stay in one place, because of a greater potential for 'self-retrieval', for the retrieval of their personal information at another time or place. (2002: 266)

Here Urry talks about the information people can keep in cyberspace to access at any time. Celebrities, as hypermobile entities, endeavour to leave traces of their bodies (and of the information they promote in their travels), through these pictures, accessible

by a less mobile audience. In this sense, celebrities can exist 'beyond their bodies', something that is made possible by the equally mobile paparazzi, and their agencies which house celebrity pictures in online databases.

The Internet, TV and magazines will cross-feed paparazzi images, choosing and editing them to meet their own requirements. The Internet has broadened and 'elasticized' access to, and flows of, celebrity images (Marshall, 2007). Paparazzi agencies bring audiences the images of celebrities, but it is the increasingly sophisticated distribution technology – mobile phones, MP3 players, BlackBerrys – which allow the viewer to access images and information in new ways. Thus, the significance of paparazzi agency entertainment websites lies not only in the simultaneity of their production of fan-oriented content, and outsourcing to other news and entertainment agencies, but also in the web's speed and ability to reach a mass audience. With agencies now based online, paparazzi images can be uploaded and accessed within minutes of being taken. The organizational structure of the paparazzi agency is crucial here. Agencies often have more than one base, so as to cover 'celebrity heavy' destinations, such as Los Angeles and London. The technology kit of an individual paparazzi photographer is increasingly smaller, lighter and more accurate, with high-definition cameras that can take up to 300 shots a minute, as well as video cameras, which also record sound. Lightweight and wireless laptops are used to send the pictures from their cars or hotel rooms. These elements have helped to transform both the paparazzi industry and related industries which feed it. Publicists work with paparazzi agencies because they know the value of their new power, driven by the web, with pictures and news stories able to be distributed around the world in as little as 12 seconds.

Recent years have seen paparazzi operating in packs, relentlessly following celebrities and crowding around them when they appear in public spaces. Some have argued that this amounts to 'a new breed of guerrilla paparazzi' (Day, 2008). In contrast with traditionally managed celebrity photographs capturing the celebrity in the optimum light, this new breed are portrayed as pressuring celebrities with aggressive behaviour to try to provoke controversial (and valuable) images to sell tabloid newspapers and magazines. While paparazzi are accused of invading celebrities' private lives and harassing them, their pictures meet a market demand for images which capture them in 'ordinary' poses, off guard. In light of photography (and film) having always 'been credited with enabling new ways of seeing the world and changing the very cultural status of images' (Wells, 2005: 304), the paparazzi perspective on celebrity life could be seen as an important inclusion in the genre of entertainment photography and, in many cases, inevitably it acts as an informal method of public relations.

However, it is undeniable that many paparazzi photographers have set out to disrupt the stable image of the celebrity as promoted by the publicist. Celebrity news website TMZ (so-named after the unionized 30-mile movie studio zone in and around Los Angeles) has been an important actor in the popularization of this genre and has 'contributed to a different tone of much entertainment news coverage' (Weiner, 2007). TMZ launched its website in 2005 as an interactive blog with an emphasis on fans and gossip-seekers. By 2007, TMZ had again jumped scales and launched on TV, beating the well-established *Entertainment Tonight* in the ratings. In turn, celebrity entertainment

news programmes such as *Access Hollywood* have introduced companion websites to try to reclaim audience share from TMZ (Stetler, 2008).

These trends indicate a growing demand for paparazzi images that aim to be as intimate and revealing as possible, which is often achieved through deliberately grainy, 'a little bit illicit looking' shots (Howe, 2005: 132). This 'anti-aesthetic seems to exist in the best paparazzi photographs' (Mendelson, 2007: 17) and allows opportunities for 'amateur' photographers to enter the market. In fact, many paparazzi images and breaking celebrity stories are taken by citizens who snap pictures on mobile cameras. This has raised concern within the industry that 'the development of camera technology on mobile phones and the Internet [means] that ordinary people could send quality pictures to newspapers, web portals and other media within seconds anywhere around the globe, taking business away from professional celebrity snappers' (Leidig, 2007). To try to incorporate this phenomenon, agencies such as Splash and Big Pictures have set up adjunct websites especially for 'citizen paparazzi' to submit their pictures for money.[4] These sites promise to make amateur photographers money, the latter offering 50 percent of every celebrity photo or video sold. The structure of the paparazzi landscape is thus evolving to include 'citizen' photographers, who are also technologically equipped to add to the visual serialization of the celebrity's public life and, as the agencies claim, earn large sums of money for being in the right place at the right time. For example, the celebrity magazine *heat* receives 10,000 to 20,000 images daily via email from readers (Day, 2008). This has:

> created friction with the old-guard paparazzi, who often find themselves navigating throngs of amateurs at red-carpet events. The pros complain that the newcomers are partly to blame for depressed prices, since they sometimes agree to sell shots for $25 or $50 that could have commanded several hundred dollars before. (Lavallee, 2008)

The convergence of the paparazzi industry with new media distribution and communication systems is increasingly apparent in industries such as broadcasting, journalism and other news media, where content is modified and streamlined for the digital domain, and increasingly this has resulted in online media 'influencing the agenda of more established media' (Pavlik, 2008: 136). TMZ, for example, is credited with breaking several entertainment news stories, which are then picked up by mainstream news, such as the death of Michael Jackson (June 25, 2009), the divorce of Britney Spears (November 7, 2006) and Mel Gibson's arrest for drunk driving (July 28, 2006). These significant celebrity scoops have helped to establish paparazzi agencies as serious news providers, offering a specialist service in breaking entertainment news. *The New York Times* and other major newspapers have recognized this, reporting on paparazzi agencies as media destinations in their own right, covering the influence of their websites within the industry (Stack, 2007), their contribution to the economy (Carr, 2002; Herron, 2008), the personalities behind the websites (Giese, 2006), their popularity with audiences, their intrusion into the private lives of celebrities (Blankstein, 2008), and the issue of image copyright infringement (Abcarian, 2006). There is also recent evidence in the UK to suggest that celebrity magazines are declining in popularity, in part due to websites and blogs 'delivering (celebrity) news before weekly magazines hit the shelves' (Allen, 2008).

The celebrity blogosphere: the DIY production of celebrity news and gossip

> Blogs … blur the boundary between who is a source, who is an audience member, and who is a journalist. In some cases, the blog creator may be all three. (Pavlik, 2008: 75)

While the 'celebrity watcher' has been carefully documented, online paparazzi sites have created new spheres of debate for both 'traditionals' and 'antibelievers' alike, to use Gamson's (1994: 147) distinction between those who see celebrity production as based on merit and those who see it as artificial. Celebrity fans create online communities to communicate among themselves and perform their fandom (Franco, 2006; Hills, 2006). For example, unlike fan conventions 'which are restricted to specific times and places' (Hills, 2001: 148), the Internet enables fans to incorporate their interests into their daily lives. But it is also in the interest of *celebrities* to enter the online community, or blogosphere, where they can communicate directly – free from PR agents and managers – to the world at large.

We can define celebrity blogs in four ways: first, the mainstream commercial entertainment blog, such as Entertainment Tonight Online,[5] where content is a mix of gossip and thinly veiled publicity, and is regarded as an extension of the established television show; second, the DIY gossip blog, such as the commercially successful Perez Hilton or the myriad of other, less successful blogs, such as In Case You Didn't Know,[6] fan-based gossip sites, often both criticizing and praising celebrities; third, the paparazzi agency blog site where content is the agencies' own celebrity pictures, accompanied by improvised 'gossip' and news, such as INF Daily;[7] fourth, the personal social networking pages of celebrities using existing commercial sites such as Myspace (e.g. Lindsay Lohan),[8] Twitter (e.g. John Mayer)[9] or the photo-hosting site Flickr (e.g. Rosie O'Donnell),[10] as well as celebrities' own websites (e.g. Pamela Anderson's official site),[11] where they are able to post their thoughts, ostensibly bypassing public relation agents, and communicating directly with an audience.[12]

Perezhilton.com, Jossip.com and Gawker.com are known as 'extremely lucky, well-trafficked' A-list blogs (Thompson, 2006), but there are many more that are not commercially successful, such as Incaseyoudidntknow.com, Imnotobsessed.com and Celebslam.com. The success or failure of a blog is viral, driven by online word-of-mouth. It is argued that 'the top 15 percent of blogs, based on Technorati's ranking, make 90 percent of the money' (Walker Rettberg, 2008: 131), which is why it is so important that successful blogs use up-to-the-minute paparazzi pictures. Perezhilton.com uses pictures from various paparazzi agencies, which line the centre of the page, accompanied by Hilton's often derisive comments and doodles written or drawn onto the paparazzi photos. For example a photograph of Victoria Beckham is graffiti-d with a hand-written statement: 'Do I look Fat?' The textual content consists of title headings of each story, then a brief, chatty blog entry underneath. Hilton's judgement is highly personal, moving from praise for a favoured star to a sneering condemnation of a disliked celebrity. Although it is a DIY celebrity gossip blog, since its inception the success of Hilton website has been substantial, so much so that agencies began to take legal action to defend their copyright. In November 2006, X17 was amongst a group of agencies which sued

Hilton for \$7.5 million in a class action suit in November 2006, for regular infringement (use without permission or credit) on content. This was particularly significant when the image used was a potentially lucrative exclusive shot. While X17 has agreements with other blogs to allow them to use their pictures, the agency claimed that Hilton had 'used 51 photos without permission, payment or credit' (Abcarian, 2006). Hilton's defence is that his use of the pictures in a satirical and humorous way falls under the 'fair use exception' of copyright legislation.

> In January 2008, the parties reached a settlement and on April 21, 2008, the court dismissed the case without prejudice. The photos have been removed because they are no longer available on Hilton's site. The terms of the settlement are not known. (Citizen Media Law Project Staff, 2009)

This lawsuit marked a watershed for agencies, which own and generate content, to join the fray and use their own pictures to narrate stories which attract millions of unique users, and thus share in some of the success of gossip sites, many of which use pictures without crediting agencies to which the pictures belong. In 2006, X17's celebrity gossip blog site, X17online, was created in response to Hilton's success. The agency's director, Brandy Navarre stated:

> We thought given the number of people that were stealing our material and profiting wildly from it online that we need to be exploiting our own material and fighting against them.… That's not the only reason. We also started a blog because it's fun, it's dynamic.… Most online sites have low budgets. In the meantime, we will exploit our own material on our own business. (in Feczko, 2007)

Other agencies followed X17online's model, including Big Pictures (Mr Paparazzi), Splashnews (Splashnews online) and Bauer Griffin (Bauer-Griffin Online). Darryn Lyons, CEO of Big Pictures, justified the shift from client- to fan-based usage of the agency's own pictures: 'The difference [from Perez Hilton] is that we own and generate the content – he doesn't' (in Kiss, 2008).

However, despite attempts by new media providers to profit from the rise in amateur paparazzi, it is unlikely that this will replace the mainstream professional paparazzi photographer. Scoopt, which was bought by Getty Images in March 2007, was one of the first agencies to help 'citizen paparazzi' license pictures in the mainstream press. Scoopt required a 12-month exclusive worldwide licence, during which the photographer may not publish the photograph him/herself. They offered a place for that photograph on the Getty Images site, where it may be picked up by buyers as 'a news story of the day or simply make a nice "filler" picture in a magazine'.[13] The venture was closed by Getty in February 2009 amid a cooling of the hype around 'citizen paparazzi', alongside, as Scoopt founder Kyle McRae explained, the introduction of user-generated content enabled by the likes of the BBC and the fact that the level of 'newsworthy submissions was low' (PDA, the Digital Content Blog, 2010). However, some paparazzi agencies increasingly monitor free content on the likes of Twitter and YouTube, and when they encounter interesting images, they contact the author and offer to sell their image to mainstream media in return for a commission fee (usually in the region of 50 percent).

Like citizen journalism, the notion of 'citizen paparazzi' implies an absence of professionalism, and is often encouraged by news outlets so as to 'promote new stories and to generate alternative means of gathering and aggregating news and opinion online' (Flew, 2008: 144). However, while citizen journalism has the connotation of contributing towards a participatory civic discourse, an alternative to the corporate production of news, citizen paparazzi are often seen as opportunistically operating for commercial purposes. In addition, the existence of citizen paparazzi also emphasizes the tension between professional photographers who take pictures of celebrities, and a newer, less-skilled breed of photographers who have profited from innovation in camera technology and have identified the field as a potentially lucrative and exciting form of work. This parallels the de-professionalization of paparazzi photography itself. The 'citizen' part of the term implies a certain innocence or serendipity on the part of the image-maker, and, while Scoopt was not able to survive in the current photographic industry landscape, the power of citizen photography is still acknowledged by agency managers in the form of Big's Mr Paparazzi and Splash's People Paparazzi. Of course, sometimes fans and amateurs can be in the right place at the right time and capture a newsworthy photograph, and – like the autograph hunter who sells signed memorabilia on eBay – seek to gain financially from the activity.

In terms of audience interactivity and user-generated content, the new developments in the paparazzi industry seemingly work against mainstream media, and the notion of manipulation by such media. In the context of the news for example, audience participation can help to 'abolish a passive state of the audience' and kindle an organic community for the open discussion of local and global events (Ross and Nightingale, 2003: 152). This model also works in the entertainment news realm, with the 'open publishing' of celebrity news stories and pictures enabled by DIY websites such as Blogger and Livejournal. For example, the blog Oh No They Didn't, is a site where anyone with a Livejournal account can upload pictures, video and stories on celebrity gossip, fashion and news. Though non-professional, this forum's strength lies in its speed and ability to traverse geographical boundaries. Celebrity stories and pictures are cut and pasted from other sources, the site acting as a gateway for the latest daily celebrity news, corralled in the one place. Perhaps most significantly, paparazzi agency uptake of social networking applications such as Facebook, Twitter and Myspace has the potential to attract a mass audience, and provide an important new dimension to fan culture. This reflects a more general trend of the increasing power of audiences in entertainment industries (Jenkins, 2002; Ross and Nightingale, 2003: 148).

Conclusions

This article has suggested that the growing shift in entertainment news from old to new media has fundamentally altered the nature of the paparazzi industry. It has argued that, as a result of the digitization of images, the quantum increase in the amount of photos being used – both online and in print publications – shows the obvious burgeoning of the paparazzi as an industry. Accompanied by the industry's own encouragement of 'citizen paparazzi' and participatory media, this growth has also affected the shape and expansion

of social networking, advertising online, online versions of traditional publications and existing celebrity blogs.

This has three implications for contemporary entertainment news production. First, the value of paparazzi pictures is contingent on the speed at which they can be distributed, which dictates the relevance of the image to news-hungry audiences. This has ramifications for advertisers who want their message to reach the largest number of people possible. Thus paparazzi website agency sites have an advantage over gossip sites in that they are often the first to sell breaking entertainment news pictures to other media sources. Moreover, paparazzi agencies can break news on their own blog sites, courting advertisers to pay for space on their sites as well as more mainstream traditional entertainment news sites and fan blogs.

Second, this has important implications for how agencies participate in the production of entertainment news. Content, design, writing style and audience reception are increasingly changing due to the paparazzi's contribution and their influence on supporting industries. The paparazzi industry's creation, distribution and consumption of celebrity photographs is rapidly evolving. Because paparazzi photography 'is a hybrid of photojournalism, documentary, street photography … celebrity photography [and] surveillance' (Mendelson, 2007: 170) it has extreme flexibility to operate between relevant industries. With this flexibility, aided by the physical ease with which photographs can be captured and distributed, paparazzi agencies are changing the practice of celebrity news-gathering and entertainment journalism, incorporating the audience as a participatant observer. As Mark Deuze suggests:

> This convergence must be seen as recombinantly driven by an industry desperate for strong customer relationships, technologies that are increasingly cheap and easy to use, and a media culture that privileges an active audience. (2007: 3)

By extension, just as the advent of digital imagery has been dubbed a 'post-photography' era (Wells, 2005: 304), there is perhaps a convergence with current trends in entertainment news towards prioritizing reality television stars over the traditional focus on Hollywood stars, which could be seen as a move to a 'post-celebrity' era.

Third, the growing popularity of photo-driven blogs mirrors the changing nature of how audiences relate to celebrities. Under the rubric of citizen journalism, combined with increasing advances in mainstream camera technology, 'everyday' people are empowered to contribute to entertainment news, blurring the line between producers and consumers. As a result of these trends, paparazzi sites are starting to resemble a hybrid of social networking and entertainment sites, simultaneously bringing news to audiences and reaping it from them. It is here that we can see the 'industry desperation for strong customer relationships' (Deuze, 2007: 3), as agencies rapidly increase their presence in the social networking market, pushing their company brands into applications such as Twitter and Facebook. As such, celebrity photographs, gossip and information are being circulated by the audiences for which they are provided, which could be seen as a new way of organizing media markets. In this sense, just as 'old media' circulation numbers are a testament to the commercial power of these images, the increasing circulation of

celebrity information by fans and gossip-seekers through social networks is evidence of the influence of the paparazzi agency as a pioneering arbiter of celebrity culture online.

Notes

1. See: www.perezhilton.com
2. See: http://www.splashnews.com
3. Advertising practices within the paparazzi industry are changing rapidly, and as of January 2010, Bauer Griffin no longer features such advertisements attached to its images.
4. See: www.peoplepaparazzi.com and www.mrpaparazzi.com, respectively.
5. See: http://www.etonline.com
6. See: http://perezhilton.com; http://icydk.com
7. See: www.infdaily.com
8. See: http://www.myspace.com/lindsaylohan
9. See: http://twitter.com/johncmayer
10. See: http://www.flickr.com/photos/rosie
11. See: http://www.pamelachannel.com/channel/category/diary
12. As an addendum to these four types of celebrity blogs, there are, of course, also blogs written by the 'microfamous', which may not have anything to do with entertainment news or celebrity gossip, but become popular enough to make the blogger renowned (for example, Heather B. Armstrong's personal blog Dooce.com, for which she was infamously fired from her job because she had written blog entries that included people in her workplace).
13. See: www.scoopt.com

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