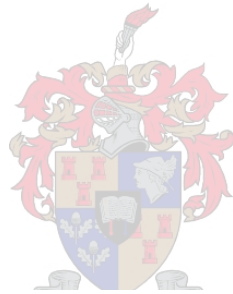


**Blogs in the Mainstream Media: An exploration of a
code of ethical conduct for j-bloggers
at *Die Burger* Western Cape**

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**Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy (Journalism) at Stellenbosch University**

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March 2008

Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: 1 November 2007

Abstract

With the advent of new communication technologies, traditional journalism has continually had to adjust to new contexts. In 2006, the Western Cape daily newspaper *Die Burger* established a blogging section as part of its website. Presently j-bloggers (journalists who are bloggers) still work according to *Die Burger*'s current ethical code of conduct. Yet the establishment of j-blogs at *Die Burger* has raised a number of questions regarding the ethical conduct of journalists in this medium. This study attempts to show that the mainstream ethical concepts of accuracy, fairness and the use of anonymous sources may be interpreted differently in the medium of blogging and explores the feasibility of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*.

Die Burger's code of conduct is compared with various bloggers' codes of conduct. The study argues that *Die Burger*'s code of conduct offers more comprehensive guidelines for journalists than most bloggers' codes. These guidelines include protecting the newspaper's reading public from harm. However, it was also found that the different interpretations of ethical concepts on blogs need to be considered in a code of conduct for j-bloggers. In this study, the composition of a code of conduct for j-bloggers was discussed with j-bloggers, print journalists and several other stakeholders at *Die Burger*. The participants in this study argued that a code of conduct for j-bloggers may be feasible but that it should operate in addition to *Die Burger*'s current code of conduct.

Furthermore, this study argues two normative theories of the press – the social responsibility and democratic-participant theories – intersect in a discussion of ethical codes for j-bloggers. Using this theoretical framework, the study aims to describe specific guidelines for the ethical conduct of j-bloggers at *Die Burger*.

Opsomming

Die ontwikkeling van moderne kommunikasietegnologie bring mee dat die tradisionele hoofstroommedia by nuwe kontekste moet aanpas. In 2006 het die Wes-Kaapse dagblad, *Die Burger*, 'n blog afdeling as deel van sy webwerf gestig. Die j-bloggers (joernaliste wat blog) werk tans volgens die bestaande etiese kode van *Die Burger*. Die instel van blogs by *Die Burger* het egter heelwat vrae oor die etiese gedrag van joernaliste in dié medium laat ontstaan. Die studie toon onder meer aan dat etiese konsepte soos akkuraatheid, regverdigheid en die gebruik van anonieme bronne anders benader word by blogs en ondersoek die moontlikheid van 'n etiese kode vir j-bloggers by *Die Burger*.

Die Burger se etiese kode is as deel van hierdie studie met verskeie etiese kodes vir bloggers vergelyk. Die studie kom tot die slotsom dat *Die Burger* se bestaande kode meer omvattende riglyne vir joernaliste bied as talle etiese kodes vir bloggers. Dié riglyne sluit stappe vir die beskerming van die koerant se lesers in. Die studie het egter ook bevind dat daar verskillende interpretasies van bogenoemde etiese konsepte in terme van blogs bestaan, en dat dit in ag geneem behoort te word in 'n etiese kode vir j-bloggers.

Die samestelling en inhoud van 'n etiese kode vir j-bloggers met joernaliste, j-bloggers en verskeie ander belanghebbendes by *Die Burger* bespreek. Die deelnemers in die studie meen 'n etiese kode vir j-bloggers is toepaslik, maar dat dit as deel van *Die Burger* se huidige etiese kode moet funksioneer.

Die studie argumenteer voorts dat etiese riglyne vir j-bloggers aspekte van twee normatiewe etiese teorieë – die sosiale verantwoordelikheid en burgerlike deelname model – bymekaar bring. Die gebruik van hierdie normatiewe teoretiese raamwerk ondersteun die bespreking van spesifieke etiese riglyne vir j-bloggers by *Die Burger*.

Acknowledgements

This study is dedicated to:

- My parents, Marilyn and Wesley de Vries

To them I wish to express my most heartfelt gratitude for their tireless support of all my academic pursuits.

I wish to thank my sister Blanche de Vries and my friend Charlene Rolls for their motivation and emotional support.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Mr Gabriël Botma for his guidance, insight and sound advice during the completion of this thesis.

Definition of terms

Blog

Blog is short for the word “weblog” and can be defined as “a frequently updated website with writing (posts) arranged in reverse chronological order, so new entries are always on top [...] the creation of software that allows users to quickly post entries on pre-designed templates led to an explosion of these [online] short-form diaries” (Blood, 2003b:61).

Blogger

A blogger is often the sole author, editor and publisher of the work on a blog. Bloggers decide on the content and set the tone for the blog. According to Lasica (2003a:71) a blogger is a term referring to “individuals playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, sorting, analysing and disseminating news and information [online] – a task once reserved almost exclusively to the news media”.

Blogosphere

The blogosphere can be described as a network of blogs and “a densely interconnected conversation [online], with bloggers linking to other bloggers, referring to them in their entries, and posting comments on each others’ blogs” (Herring, Kouper, Paolillo, Scheidt, Tyworth, Welsch, Wright, and Yu, 2005:1).

Code of conduct

Codes of conduct are formulated by the media “because the media are accountable to society” (Oosthuizen, 2001:166). Such codes “usually make provisions for the avoidance of reportage that could lead to crime, violence or public disorder” (Oosthuizen, 2001:166). Journalistic codes of conduct may contain stipulations concerning accuracy and fairness in stories, for example, which serve as guidelines for journalists.

J-blog

A j-blog is similar to a blog (as defined above) except that a journalist is the blogger. “A cross between a column, a news story and a journal, the journalist’s weblog (or j-blog) has started to serve as daily news in the mainstream online press” (Robinson, 2006:65).

J-blogger

“Journalists affiliated with mainstream media outlets are adopting the (increasingly popular) blogging format” (Singer, 2006b:173). These bloggers are usually journalists who write a blog for a mainstream media outlet as well as contributing to the traditional publishing platform of these publications.

Mainstream media

The mainstream media are comprised of inter alia, newspaper and magazine titles and radio and television stations. These media outlets usually employ a team of journalists led by senior editorial staff and often try to reach a wide audience. In South Africa, they often subscribe to organizations such as the South African National Editors’ Forum (SANEF) and are bound by codes of conduct such as that of the Press Ombudsman of South Africa and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa. “Traditional values that mould the entire (journalistic) profession stem from mainstream journalism (where) journalists must abide by codes to be objective, independent, accurate and truthful. (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001).

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Chapter 1

Introduction, problem statement and research aims

1.1 Introduction

My interest in the topic of j-blogging (a practice where a journalist blogs for a mainstream news outlet) stems from personal experience. In 2006 when the blogging section of the Afrikaans daily newspaper *Die Burger* came into existence, several of the newspaper's own reporters were asked to participate in this format of writing. At that stage blogging was still in its experimental phase at the paper. As a working journalist at *Die Burger* newspaper, I was asked to start contributing to a blog that was specific to my own beat of writing consumer news stories. Together with other blogs, this formed part of a list of blogs hosted on the newspaper's online presence. To date the list of blogs on *Die Burger*'s website (www.dieburger.com) hosted by journalists working for the newspaper has grown considerably. This phase of experimental blogging also raised a number of questions regarding the ethical conduct of *Die Burger*'s journalists in this medium.

The preamble to *Die Burger*'s ethical code (see Addendum I) supports the notion of freedom of speech which is one of the driving forces that moved the newspaper to establish blogs on its website. For a traditional journalist, blogging may be liberating because it encourages informality and more interaction with readers. *Die Burger* is one of many mainstream news outlets that has "reacted reactively to the trend of blogs by establishing blogs of their own" (Paulussen, 2007:4). According to Gillmor (2003:115) "the format encourages informality and experimentation, not to mention the invaluable interaction with the audience that makes coverage better". In fact Lasica (2003a:72) posits that there are several benefits that blogging brings to newsrooms, including keeping stories alive for longer than the traditional media would and presenting thoughts and opinions that does not always fit the contours of a traditional news report. Despite these advantages, *Die Burger* closed down one journalist's blog because his posts were deemed as too controversial and I was asked to be careful when I write articles on my blog which could have placed the fastfood giant KFC in a negative light. The contradictory nature of blogs – a vehicle for more freedom but also subject to some of the

more traditional limitations – at *Die Burger* awakened questions about journalistic conduct in this medium and motivated this study.

The debate about journalistic conduct in any medium more often than not takes place within the field of media ethics. Debates of this nature intensify especially when publishing platforms of the media change, adjust or expand. With the creation of blogs at mainstream news outlets, journalists have also seized the opportunity to blog thereby opening up a new ethical debate. The main difference between a blog and a traditionally published work of journalism is that organised and specialised practices such as sub-editing and copy reading, which are mostly associated with the work of a traditional media outlet, do not take place on a blog. Without the stages of specialised editing and due to the more informal manner of communication with audiences, mainstream blogs, like those of *Die Burger* could (unintentionally or not) cause public harm or result in a loss of credibility for the newspaper itself.

Bloggers for the newspaper were instructed by management to adhere to the standard ethical code of conduct of *Die Burger*. Bloggers were asked to blog in the light of this code, though according to the multimedia editor of *Die Burger*, De Waal Steyn, journalists are permitted to discuss various issues on their blogs in the manner of their choosing. Because of the experimental nature of blogging at *Die Burger*, the decision to refer bloggers to the traditional ethical code makes sense in the short term, but this does not address the fundamental tension between new and traditional journalistic practices, freedoms and restrictions, which has been foregrounded by the introduction of blogs at the newspaper.

In 2005, Adam Cohen (2005) wrote in *The New York Times* editorial that bloggers in general may need to institutionalize ethics policies. “But the real reason for an ethical upgrade is that it is the right way to do journalism, online and offline” (Cohen, 2005:1). Cohen’s reasoning seems to have been reinforced by a number of proposals for ethical codes of conduct for bloggers (e.g. Blood, 2003a, Dube, 2004 Kuhn, 2005). Calls for bloggers’ codes of conduct were also made by O’Reilly (2007) in the United Kingdom

after blogger, Kathy Sierra's life was threatened by commentators on her blog. This incident as well as the bloggers' codes of conduct is elaborated on in Chapter 2.

As Paulussen (2007:4) mentioned, many mainstream news organizations have adopted blogs as part of their online presence. But despite the proliferation of j-blogs at mainstream media outlets internationally (for example, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*) and in South Africa (for example, *The Mail and Guardian* and *The Times*) very few have addressed the practices of their bloggers in their codes of conduct. However, media outlets like *The New York Times* and *The Herald Tribune* in the USA have formulated short policies for their bloggers in their ethical codes.

Like j-bloggers who adhere to the standard ethical code at *Die Burger*, j-bloggers at *The New York Times* are "subjected to the newsrooms standards of fairness, taste and legal propriety", (*The New York Times' Company Policy on Ethics in Journalism, 2007*) while *The Herald Tribune* expects that "weblog posts meet the same standards of journalism expected for articles published in the newspaper [...] this includes the same standards of objectivity, sourcing and accuracy" (*The Herald Tribune's Blog Policy, 2007*). But unlike *Die Burger*, j-bloggers at *The New York Times* may not publish anything on their blogs "under the name of the company unless it has gone through an editing and moderating process" (*The New York Times' Company Policy on Ethics in Journalism, 2007*) and "editors (at the *Herald Tribune*) must review entries written by bloggers before they are posted" (*The Herald Tribune's Blog Policy, 2007*).

The topic of journalist's conduct on their blogs has not yet been addressed in full at *Die Burger*. Furthermore, the two incidents mentioned above calls into question whether the existing code of conduct at *Die Burger* covers the work of its j-bloggers sufficiently. This relates to whether the existing code of conduct at *Die Burger* allows bloggers to enjoy the fullest possible range of freedom of speech in the medium of blogging while meeting the requirements of ethical journalism for the protection of both the newspaper's reputation, as well as its commercial brand and the interests of readers.

1.2 Focus of the study

Ethical codes of conduct are enforced in many newsrooms to provide the journalist with guidelines when facing the difficulties associated with news reporting. Although according to Harris (1992:66) it is the members of the public who are most often identified as benefiting from the existence of a code of conduct. In its ethical code *Die Burger* identifies and elaborates in detail on several ethical concepts and possible scenarios to avoid, most notably focusing on the journalistic concepts of accuracy and fairness. It further stipulates several criteria for the use of anonymous sources in covering stories and emphasises the independence of its journalists. However, does this code fully enable bloggers to use the freedom of the medium or is it overly restrictive? Harris (1992:67) notes that though an elaborate code of conduct with detailed sets of regulations will further increase the chances of protection toward the public, the result could see journalists treating anything that is not detailed and specified as permissible. In contrast, short codes consisting of a few broad principles can often be applied to new types of situations, which could not have been envisaged when drawing them up,” says Harris (1992:67).

Changes in the media platforms have occurred continuously over the past few decades. A j-blogging section as part of its website did not exist when *Die Burger*'s code of conduct was drawn up in 2002. Therefore as Steyn confirms, *Die Burger*'s current code of conduct does not take blogging into account in any specific or general terms. In comparison to *Die Burger*'s code of conduct, many codes specifically drawn up for bloggers (Blood, 2003a; Dube, 2004; Kuhn, 2005) are less elaborate and stipulate only a few guiding principles for bloggers to work from. Yet, one could argue that these codes for bloggers do not take the setting of mainstream journalists into consideration.

This study therefore explores the feasibility of a code of conduct for mainstream journalists who are bloggers (j-bloggers) at *Die Burger*. The majority of the blogs on *Die Burger*'s website are hosted by the multimedia editorial staff and journalists of the newspaper. Often, one or two guest bloggers contribute to the blogging section, but these

change too often for it to form part of the study. The study seeks to explore whether there are particular guidelines which could accommodate the requirements of the journalists who blog at *Die Burger* while still protecting its readers and the interests of the newspaper in general. More specifically the study will determine whether a tailored code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* is needed and if so, what such a code of conduct would look like.

Some studies, like Murley and Smith (2004:1–26), have found that bloggers in general see no need to operate under the tenets of traditional journalism. This includes adherence to a code of conduct, such as that proposed by traditional media outlets. *Die Burger* expects its j-bloggers to maintain the same standards as those that apply to other journalists operating on more traditional media platforms. In terms of an ethical framework, blogs at *Die Burger* are therefore part of both the new so-called blogosphere and mainstream journalism. The following section discusses media ethics with particular reference to j-blogs.

1.3 Ethics in a changing media landscape

John Merrill (1975:5) argued that the area of journalistic ethics is a “swampland of philosophical speculation where eerie mists of judgment hang low over a boggy terrain”. In spite of the unsure footing and poor visibility, there is no reason not to make the journey, wrote Merrill (1975:5). He continues:

In fact, it is a journey well worth taking for it brings the matter of morality to the individual person and forces the journalist, among others, to consider his basic principles, his values and his obligations to himself and others.

Changes in media publishing platforms often bring about debates regarding the conduct of the journalists assigned to work in those platforms. Regardless of these changes, however, ethical conduct remains a rudimentary aspect of being a journalist. According to Retief (2001:4):

Even minor journalistic exercises have ethical implications. Why? Because everything a journalist writes or says, or neglects to write or to say, has an influence on people. And influences can be good or bad.

As Merrill (1975:5) suggests, ethics in journalism has always been a difficult subject to apply in practice. Retief (2001:4) maintains that it (ethics) is not easy because it “rarely, if ever, amounts to a mere choice between right and wrong” and “each and every ethical decision is by definition, subjective”. As the world of journalism evolves, for example, in part due to the convergence of print newspapers and online publications, it has been suggested that the ethical considerations that apply to the press should apply for new forms of journalism as they emerge. Mark Deuze (1999) for example, proposed several ethical decision-making skills for journalists working online, thereby showing how the online news environment would be considered credible if practical ethical guidelines were adapted for journalism on the Internet. Deuze suggested guidelines that included hyperlinking to sources as a form of reference. Yet many scholars have argued that bloggers in general are not keen to associate themselves with the ethical considerations that are proposed by the mainstream media. Murley and Smith (2004:17) assert that bloggers see no need to operate under the traditional forms of journalistic objectivity. But at the moment j-bloggers at *Die Burger* do not have the luxury to choose and must combine the freedom of the new medium with the ethical responsibility required by their owners, editors and managers.

Even before the establishment of the first blogs, Jay Black (1994) warned that “new technologies and delivery systems make it necessary for journalists to develop more sophisticated, ethical decision-making skills and a balance must be struck between freedoms and responsibilities” (Black, 1994:133). Black’s warning suggests that journalists in particular would need to strike a more definitive balance between freedom of expression and responsibility. As a new technological form of conveying information, blogs, or more specifically j-blogs in the mainstream media, may therefore require ethical decision-making skills that are more specific to the medium of blogging. Boczkowski (2002:277) maintains that the single most examined issue in the shift from newspapers to an online presence has been the issue of interactivity. Furthermore, the concept of

interactivity has been difficult to define in that different attributes are linked to different dimensions of interactivity (for example, interactivity may constitute sending e-mails or participating in a chat room). Boczkowski (2002:277) asserts:

Some studies have focused on users communicating with online newspapers' staff as well as with fellow users employing tools such as chat rooms or e-mail. Those investigations that have examined staff-user communication have shown that journalists have not been very keen about it.

Interactivity between j-bloggers and audiences is particularly important on a j-blog and will be discussed in this study. Interactivity with the audience signals a shift in communication flow from mainstream media in that hitherto, communication with audiences has mostly leaned toward a top-down approach (Morozov, 2005). This change could influence the guidelines for ethical decision-making skills that are appropriate to blogging.

Some codes of conduct for bloggers (Blood, 2003a; Dube, 2004; Kuhn, 2005) propose several broad guidelines. Similar guidelines are also found and elaborated on in *Die Burger's* code of conduct for mainstream journalists. These similarities, including guidelines pertaining to accuracy, anonymity and fairness, show that there are certain ethical guidelines that blogs share with the mainstream press. Furthermore, these similarities may serve as key points from which to launch a discussion on a possible code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*.

The ethical concepts identified in both the codes of conduct for bloggers and *Die Burger's* code of conduct are accuracy, fairness and the anonymity of sources (to be discussed in Chapter 2).

Die Burger, which is owned by the international Naspers group, has as its declared mission statement to be the "preferred information partner to the whole family on various platforms". The paper reaches more than 300 000 readers daily (www.m24.co.za). The

blogging site, established as part of *Die Burger*'s website (www.dieburger.com) offers its readers the opportunity to read reviews, conversations or behind-the-scenes views on the blogs hosted by journalists who work for the mainstream publication. "With blogs, we allow our readers to feel part of the newspaper", says Steyn (2007). However, the shift in the relationship between journalists and readers also suggests the alternative interpretation of several other ethical guidelines as set out by *Die Burger*'s current ethical code. This aspect will be discussed in the following section.

1.4 Literature study: Ethical concepts and j-blogs

Readers are allowed to comment on the blog posts of *Die Burger*. Although verification elements exist in order to track and identify the source of a comment, the comments from readers could appear under a pseudonym. Letters in the newspaper may also appear anonymously but only if the editor knows the full name and address of the correspondent. Bloggers may in turn respond to these sources and/or use their comments as the basis for a new post. Allowing anonymous sources is one obvious area of conflict introduced by blogs. *Die Burger*'s code of conduct regulates the use of anonymous sources as a practice to be utilised only in "exceptional circumstances particularly if the source has explicitly asked for confidentiality" (*Die Burger*'s Code of Conduct, 2002).

For the journalist, a j-blog can be seen as a form of bringing 'attitude' to news events (Cunningham, 2003:7) because organised and specialised stages of editing are usually not part of the process of publishing a j-blog. This suggests that bloggers can convey information in a conversational manner and that the editorial processes that apply to the mainstream version of the news, are not applied to blogging. J-bloggers at *Die Burger* write their posts and publish them immediately afterward – without having any of the information checked or rewritten, for instance. Editing and fact-checking stories are processes considered part of the mainstream media's responsibility toward readers. One central function of reporters is to report responsibly – an ethical value held in high regard at most mainstream media outlets throughout the world, including *Die Burger* (*Die Burger*'s Code of Conduct, 2002). One way to attain responsible reporting is to verify the facts of a story before it is published. According to Goodwin (1987:11) the most

rudimentary basis of journalism today lies in the achievement of truth through storytelling. Goodwin (1987:11) argues that the facts journalists produce can sometimes add up to the truth, but they are seldom able to put sufficient facts together at a given time to be able to tell the truth about some news subjects. Even so journalists are expected to maintain the ethical standard of accuracy in their pursuit of the truth. The ethical standard of accuracy could therefore be defined as “being truthful both in the gathering and presentation of facts and information” (Goodwin, 1987:11). However, if no copy reading, fact checking or editing takes place on a j-blog, then the reader has only the credibility of the j-blogger to rely on. *Die Burger* places an emphasis on accurate reporting in its code of conduct and employs several sub-editors to check copy before it goes to print. But as was already indicated, the posts of the j-blog do not go through the same procedures as copy for the newspaper does.

Blogs in general have been described as “liberating” (Gillmor, 2003:115), “self-referential” (Lasica, 2003a:71) and “privileging individual opinion” (Singer, 2006b:178). This calls into question specifically the ethical value of fairness, as it is defined currently in *Die Burger*’s code of conduct. *Die Burger* highlights the concept of fairness by asking journalists to pay attention to the facts and context within which a story is written. Retief (2001:84) defines fairness as an attempt to balance a report in such a way that no party is misrepresented either by choice of words or by the lack of proper context. All parties should be allowed to have their say in a story. However, if blogs privilege individual opinion, then the chances that a post will be fair may appear to diminish.

Robinson (2006:79) asserts that j-bloggers are making audiences complicit with the re-establishment of the ethical norm of objectivity. In other words, a j-blog could be host to various opinions (the j-blogger’s and the readers’), thereby altering the traditional sense of objectivity where balance is sought by the journalist at the outset. Robinson (2006:68) refers to the situation where both the writing on the j-blog and the approach to reporting is different from the mainstream media since the audience “helps construct the story and its meaning”.

Yet, does the current ethical code for the mainstream publication protect *Die Burger's* blog audience from harm in this “new rhetorical space?” (Kuhn, 2005:2). Is there a need for a specific code of conduct that addresses the practice of j-blogging and if so, what would such a code of conduct entail?

For media practitioners and academics alike, the proliferation of blog sites has raised interesting questions about the role of ethical codes in this medium. The ethical consequences of writing without editorial assistance on a blog, the right to unfiltered expression and the subjectivity of the medium are some of the issues that have been raised. Although the j-bloggers at *Die Burger* are expected to work according to the code of conduct set out for the mainstream journalists, the discussion thus far suggests that there are some ethical issues that could be interpreted differently in the j-blogging medium at *Die Burger*. This discussion will now continue with a proposed theoretical ordering of the main ethical issues already identified.

1.4.1 Objectivity and fairness

Jane Singer (2006a:9) asserts that “if there is one thing that the blogger has, then, it is independence, particularly in the existential sense of being capable of defining oneself solely through one’s actions – or words”. On the other hand, Fourie (2001:462) maintains that newspapers apply promotional mechanisms of professionalism by “separating objective from subjective news and using sources to contribute to the overall meaning and structure of a story”. The question as to how to bring these two seemingly conflicting mediums together in an ethical discussion about journalism thus arises.

According to Singer (2006a:9), “a blogger need not be held accountable precisely because he or she serves the self”. With this she refers to the claim that blogs are considered highly subjective mediums and that there are no promotional mechanisms of professionalism that separate a subjective opinion from an objective or fair story on a j-blog. Objectivity in the mainstream media has been defined as the idea that “readers can best make up their minds about issues when they are given verifiable facts and that these facts are delivered by independent and neutral observers” (Miraldi, 1990:15). Separating

objectivity and subjectivity on blogs is less clear as opposed to the traditional media's approach because as Steyn (2007) confirms the case at *Die Burger*, more often than not j-bloggers will express an opinion on their j-blogs (Steyn, 2007).

The value of objectivity or fairness, among others, are addressed in most ethical codes for the mainstream media both internationally and in South Africa, but codes of conduct have been formulated and adopted only to a limited extent in the blogosphere (see Chapter 2). Singer (2006b) and others have found that "bloggers in general often reject the mainstream media's preoccupation with fairness and objectivity" (Harper, 2005:24). It can therefore be argued that the ethical values of objectivity and fairness are particularly problematic in the medium of blogging.

1.4.2 Accuracy and open-source journalism

Die Burger's ethical code of conduct states that journalists should be absolutely sure of any facts in a story, and that if they are not, the fact should be verified with other sources (*Die Burger's* Code of Conduct, 2002). Accuracy on j-blogs, however, may also involve readers as fact-checkers. The importance of audience participation on j-blogs is apparent by the incorporation of the notion of open source journalism on j-blogs. Open source journalism occurs used when readers' comments are published and used to verify facts written on a post (Rosen, 2004:1) and where a j-blogger links to other sources online as a form of reference (Morozov, 2005). The reader may correct the j-blogger or comment on the accuracy of the post through comments. "The notion of a source –and what they can say – is being altered in the blog form," writes Robinson (2006:74). Where traditionally a source is quoted by name in the mainstream media for the purposes of accuracy, j-bloggers may use anonymous sources or hyperlinks to sources as a "truth-finding function" (Morozov, 2005:4). It is important to note that these types of anonymous sources most often occur when a reader comments on a j-blog using a pseudonym which may be used as a follow-up. Hyperlinking has been found to exist as a form of referencing whereby the j-blogger highlights key words in the text that link to other sources online and could serve as a form of referencing or attribution in the j-blog context (Morozov, 2005).

Susan Robinson (2006:69) finds that mainstream journalism blogs (j-blogs) are occupying a role that serves to reify traditional norms, even as j-bloggers shift those standard values. She argues that j-bloggers engage in a form of what she refers to as postmodern reporting. “Mainstream journalism blogs tend to be non-linear and interactive, with multiple entry points and several endings [...] incorporating long reader comments and a more conversational approach,” writes Robinson (2006:78). We can deduce from Robinson’s assertion that j-bloggers allow, and indeed rely on feedback from their readers, more than a traditional journalist would. Furthermore, mainstream journalists do not rely on the readers of the newspaper by way of instantaneous feedback or forms of verification in the same way that j-bloggers do. By incorporating long reader comments aided by the interactivity of the medium, j-bloggers are engaging readers with the posts and drawing from their comments in follow-up posts.

Rather than the traditional top down approach (Bowman and Willis, 2003:9) of the mainstream media, readers can contribute to the story on a blog in a bottom up process. Bowman and Willis (2003) maintain that this process can be alluring for journalists. The bottom up process entails increased interactivity with readers in the j-blogging format in the form of feedback and comments on a j-blog. The open-source journalism function is important because it allows readers to shape the story by commenting on possible factual inaccuracies and hyperlinking can be seen as an alternative way of linking to other sources, thereby referencing their work online (see Chapter 2).

1.4.3 Anonymity

Another aspect that many ethical codes touch on is that of the anonymity of sources. The mainstream media are especially careful when using anonymous sources and purport to do so only if the source’s life is in danger or if there is no other means of verifying the facts of a story (The *Mail and Guardian*’s Code of Professional Practice, 2006).

Robinson (2006:75) maintains that the notion of a source has changed in the context of j-blogs and that j-bloggers allow readers to become contributors and co-authors to the blog

site. In this regard it is important to distinguish between the reader as commentator and the reader as contributor. Though many readers of j-blogs may comment on a j-blog, a reader only becomes a source when his or her comments are used in a follow-up post or for the purpose of verification (Robinson, 2006:75). Contributors to *Die Burger*'s blogs have done so by using pseudonyms (Steyn, 2007) and this highlights the need to define a source in terms of j-blogging. According to Steyn (2007) there are means of identifying and tracing a source through the required e-mail address and a separate verification system. However, the use of anonymous sources in cases where readers are contributing to a j-blog post could be altered in a set of guidelines for j-bloggers as discussed in Chapter 2.

1.4.4 Problem statement

From the above discussion above it can be assumed that j-blogging is not objective in comparison to mainstream journalism because “it (blogging) explicitly privileges rather than subliminates individual perspectives and opinions presented by its contributors” (Singer, 2006b:178). Furthermore, j-bloggers use a form of verification known as open-source journalism which includes making use of the comments posted by readers to check the accuracy of facts. These readers may post comments or contribute to the writing on j-blogs, but these sources are usually anonymous or use a pseudonym – an issue that is considered with great care at *Die Burger*. It is assumed that journalists who work daily at getting a story for the mainstream newspaper work with the publication's ethical code of conduct in mind, reporting the facts, accurately quoting sources and fairly disseminating the news that he or she has gathered. As pointed out earlier, the value of objectivity may need to be redefined in the j-blogging medium. Furthermore, the ethical values of accuracy and the use of anonymous sources may be problematic in the j-blog medium as the literature overview in Chapter 2 will show.

Die Burger's approach to ethics in the j-blogging format is problematic because it subjects j-bloggers to the same guidelines as those that apply for the mainstream publication (Steyn, 2007) and does not necessarily consider the alternative view of the ethical concepts outlined. Steyn (2007) asserts that how the facts are portrayed on a j-

blog is up to the j-blogger, but that unethical practice will lead to the termination of the j-blog. The creation of an ethical code of conduct for j-bloggers may enable j-bloggers to work more accurately and serve as a more specific guideline in protecting readers from harm.

The following section sets out the theoretical framework, with a brief discussion of the relevant media theories that apply to this study.

1.5 Theoretical framework

The normative ethical framework of the media is distinct from a general field of meta-ethics, “a purely theoretical field of study that focuses on the nature of ethics and searches for the meaning of abstract terms such as good, justice and fairness” (Retief, 2001:7). The theoretical field of meta-ethics stems from philosophical debates dating back to Greek philosophy.

Normative media ethics is a much more recent area of interest, but some researchers have argued that this comparatively young field seriously lacks development (Van Niekerk, 2004:18). While Van Niekerk was referring to the lack of development of normative media ethics in crime reporting, the issue of new media technologies, such as blogs in the mainstream media, and the questions they pose have yet to be addressed. Current developments in philosophical debates in the field of media ethics may be lacking because the media environment is constantly changing. Starck (2001:134) asserts that the history of journalism ethics is still being discovered. With the development of new media platforms, like j-blogs, this seems to be a fair statement because journalism ethics must continuously adjust as aspects of the media environment changes.

Though there have been various discussions about codes of conduct for the Internet (Hamelink, 2000:40) and on blogs by the proposal of codes of conduct, these are only voluntarily accepted by bloggers. Although *Die Burger*, which foremostly operates as a mainstream daily newspaper, has developed a code of conduct for its mainstream journalists, that is applicable to both the reporters of the newspaper and the j-bloggers.

However, this study seeks to determine the feasibility of a code of conduct specifically for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*. In the process this study will establish a theoretical departure point which could hopefully contribute to development of the fast-changing field of normative ethics.

1.5.1 Theoretical discussion

In considering meta-ethics and normative ethics, Merrill and Odell (1983) maintain that the former is devoted specifically to the “evaluation of ethical theories, while the latter is concerned with what people ought to do in different situations” (cited in Oosthuizen, 2002:6). Where meta-ethics suggests general theories and principles for ethical decision-making, normative ethical theories are revealed in theories of the media in general and in journalistic codes of conduct in particular (Retief, 2001:11). Normative theories are the ideal views [...] about the role of press in society” (Fourie, 2001:269):

Normative theories are mainly concerned with the freedom of, or restrictions on, the newspaper industry in various situations and how this impacts on the functions of the press.

Normative media ethics stem from the first attempt to establish four fundamental theories of the press that would “clarify the link between mass media and political theory” (Skjerdal, 1999:1). These were put forward by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1963) in *The Four Theories of the Press* of 1963. However, Retief (2001:11) maintains that there are, broadly speaking, only two theories of the media: the authoritarian and the libertarian, and that there are “important variations of these [...] including the social responsibility model, the developmental model and the democratic-participant concept”.

The press theory of social responsibility originated in the USA after the findings of the Hutchins Commission were publicised in 1947 (Retief, 2001:14). Siebert *et al.* (1963) assert that under the social responsibility theory the press has six fundamental functions that include

1. servicing the political system by providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs;
2. enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government;
3. safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog against the government;
4. servicing the economic system primarily by bringing together the buyers and sellers of goods through the medium of advertising;
5. providing entertainment; and
6. maintaining its own financial self-sufficiency so as to be free from the pressures of special interests (Siebert *et al.*, 1963:74).

Siebert *et al.* (1963:75) maintain the social responsibility theory has its roots in the libertarian press theory but that “it is still largely a grafting of new ideas onto traditional theory”. Siebert *et al.* (1963:75) claim the press theory of social responsibility is regarded as a “composite of ideas” which was found to be a new and more integrated theory after the reports of the Hutchins Commission were published in 1947. While the libertarian theory asserts that individual people are rational beings who can distinguish between wrong and right, the underlying rationale of the social responsibility theory of the press reconciles the idea of press freedom and independence, write Ostini and Fung (2002:42).

The four theories of the press have for the most part tried to describe what the media’s relationship to a particular government should be depending on the type of government. The mainstream commercial media in South Africa, and thus also *Naspers* and *Die Burger*, are largely independent of direct government control and usually regulate themselves by establishing codes of ethical conduct. Oosthuizen (2002:17) concurs with Ostini and Fung (2002:42) and posits that the emphasis in the theory of social-responsibility is on the media’s ability to regulate itself. In the preamble to its ethical code *Die Burger* emphasises its independence from authority on all levels and supports an economic environment within which an independent media industry can compete and flourish. These points further illustrate the foundations of the social responsibility theory within which *Die Burger* and many other media outlets in South Africa mainly operates.

According to Retief (2001:22) “The social responsibility concept is found to a greater or lesser extent in all the important media circles in South Africa”.

Buchinger (2006:13) asserts that the South African Constitution and media laws largely support a democratic and unbiased media landscape and effectively many of the self-regulating codes of conduct of different media organisations are based to a greater or lesser extent upon the social responsibility theory. The social responsibility concept asserts that the “media should be a common carrier of ideas because the press should be under an obligation to present all the voices and views in a particular community” (Retief, 2001:16). The media should therefore reflect the views and opinions of all parts of society. In this regard the preamble to *Die Burger*’s ethical code explicitly stipulates that it encourages the prosperity of all sections of the South African population through its reporting. The presentation of all voices and views in society amounts in this context to accurate, fair and balanced reporting – concepts which are well deliberated on in *Die Burger*’s code of conduct. The discussion of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* newspaper is therefore firstly grounded within the normative theoretical framework of social responsibility.

However Mak’Ochieng (1995:3) notes that the work of Siebert *et al.* (1963) has been subjected to criticism by various media scholars, including McQuail (1994) who proposed an abandoning of theories of the press because of their high levels of generality and lack of connection to actual media systems. However, Mak’Ochieng (1995:3) argues that the theories of the press are indeed relevant for discussions about the media’s role in society as they suggest how a particular society’s media should be organised:

In spite of its weaknesses, we find Siebert *et al.*’s typology important because, modified to accommodate the criticisms leveled against it, it provides a good starting point for the development of arguments for normative media analysis as a prescriptive and analytical tool.

Hence, the characteristics of the social responsibility theory are particularly applicable for this study because the practice of j-blogging at *Die Burger* falls within the ambit of

traditional journalistic practices at this mainstream media outlet. However, because of the above-mentioned unique features and challenges which blogging brings to journalism, some other theoretical aspects also need to be considered.

For instance, the democratic-participant media theory proposed by McQuail (1983) emphasises the multiplicity of media and the reciprocal role of communicator and recipient (Fourie, 2001:274). Aspects of this theory, therefore seems applicable specifically to the practice of j-blogging at *Die Burger*. According to Blevins (1999:2) McQuail (1983) proposed both the democratic-participant and developmental theories to complement the work of Siebert *et al.* (1963):

[The] democratic-participant theory echoed the 1947 Hutchins Commission's concern that media alienated citizens from democratic processes. The Commission felt that all citizens needed to have an unhindered scope of information and means to attain it, as well as means to disseminate it [...]. Fifty years after the Hutchins Commission's prediction of an unrestricted flow of information, it may possibly be realised with the development of the Internet.

According to Fourie (2001:274) the democratic-participant theory was proposed primarily in reaction to the trends toward monopoly formation in privately controlled mass media and seems as Blevins (1999:2) argues, to echo some of the principles of social responsibility theory. McQuail (1983:96) maintained that some of the tenets of the democratic-participant theory are in fact, already to be found in other theories of the press. One could argue that the advent of new media like j-blogs would see the practical manifestation of some of the principles contained in the democratic-participant theory. According to McQuail (1983:97) one central point of this theory lies with the needs, interests and aspirations of the "receiver" in a political society. Furthermore, Fourie (2001:274) argues that the democratic-participant model emphasises horizontal communication between communicator and recipient, as well as interaction and involvement with audiences – all characteristics which are evident with the j-blog. Vatikiotis (2004:6) posits that the empirical manifestations of the democratic-participant

theory are many and varied and include alternative press and community cable television. Vatikiotis (2004:8) further argues:

New communication technology has fostered new spaces for access and participation [...] and created public spaces, arenas for the free engagement of citizens in deliberation and public debate. In addition these new forms of communication can facilitate communication which is more horizontal than vertical.

The elements of new communication technology which Vatikiotis (2004) refers to seem to be applicable to the role of j-blogs at *Die Burger* since the approach to communication between the j-blogger and the audience can no longer be considered what Morozov (2005) refers to as authoritarian top down.

Cover (2004:174) claims that generally “new media is defined by non-linearity whereas the range of media theories and their subsequent research tools and methodologies [...] continue to presume a linearity to the process of media communication that relies on a fixed idea of authorship, text and audience”. The non-linearity of new media is also applicable to j-blogs since the interactivity of the medium allows for immediate participation with the text by both the j-blogger and the reader. Furthermore, the interaction with the text on a j-blog may also be non-linear by way of hyperlinks that may cause a reader to navigate away from the j-blog. The features and characteristics of the j-blog therefore signal that the democratic-participant media theory is quite relevant in a discussion about a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*.

Drawing on the above argument, a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* could result in an empirical manifestation of aspects of both the social responsibility theory and the democratic-participant media theory.

McQuail’s proposal of the developmental media theory may also be relevant to the South African media (McQuail, 1983). According to Retief (2001:17) the developmental theory has many faces based on different political and social conditions. The themes of nation-

building and patriotism lie at the heart of this concept. In this model “the media is seen to be central to the achievement of national integration and economic development” (Retief, 2001:17). In other words, the media should make a positive contribution to national development. The establishment of the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) in 2000 shows that, to some extent, the South African media landscape have adopted the developmental position for the role of the media. The MDDA supports media diversity in South Africa. Fourie (2001:274) points out that the developmental theory allows for government restrictions of the media if the economic interests and the development needs of society are at stake. Since the mainstream commercial media in South Africa are largely independent of direct government control and regulate themselves through codes of conduct, the developmental media theory is not relevant to the discussion about a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*.

While self-regulation is a term used to describe the South African media’s relationship to government, it is also useful to note Verhulst’s (2002:439) comments that the initial problem inherent in every approach to self-regulation lies in the definition thereof. According to Verhulst (2002:439) governments, industries and users apply the term self-regulation frequently and almost indiscriminately:

It is assumed to have a pre-determined meaning when it does not. A study of self-regulation in the media sector and European Community law noted that the term “self-regulation” is often used as a matter of course as if it were (1) a specific and defined term and (2) an equally specific and defined regulatory practice. Yet in general this is not the case.

In addition to these considerations regarding the concept of self-regulation, Verhulst (2002:441) notes that codes of conduct provide an indication of the nature of the self-regulatory authority, including whether or not to impose sanctions for breaches of codes, and upon whom. Therefore, the following section will discuss the role of codes of conduct in the media industry.

1.5.2 The need for a code of conduct for bloggers

As discussed in Chapter 3, *Die Burger's* ethical code of conduct reflects several guidelines for informed decision-making by journalists. In an attempt to be accountable toward society, *Die Burger* has articulated this determination by outlining ethical guidelines which reflect its willingness to uphold journalistic professionalism in the form of an ethical code of conduct.

Hulteng (1976:229) argues that enforcing a code of conduct in the media does not carry the same leverage as a legal or medical code of conduct since the latter are enforced by licensing agencies. Harris (1992:68) asserts that enforcing a code of conduct for journalists is not practical since some journalists need to come close to acting in breach of professional codes, particularly in their watchdog function. Most codes have a let-out clause that allows for obtaining information by what would otherwise be questionable means (Harris, 1992:68).

While “not all journalists are [...] enthusiastic about written codes of ethics for the news media,” (Goodwin, 1987:15) because ethical codes could impede on the media’s freedom of speech, Singer (2006a:13) claims that “if ever a medium cried for the notion of social responsibility as applied to journalists and journalism, it is the Internet”. According to Singer, the Internet affords every individual user complete autonomy over personal communication (for example, j-blogs) but no inherent social responsibility is connected with that action. The normative theory of social responsibility considers the media’s responsibility toward its public, among other factors (Retief, 2001:13). As we have already established, *Die Burger's* current ethical code is framed mostly within the theory of social responsibility, which according to Oosthuizen (2002:17) accepts certain professional standards for the supply of information, including reporting truthfully, accurately and fairly.

In considering a possible code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*, this study will focus on the ethical values embedded in *Die Burger's* current code of conduct; those that are articulated with the most emphasis; and those that seem to have much in common

with a number of other general codes for bloggers. As previously discussed, the three ethical values of accuracy, fairness and the use of anonymous sources are used similarly in *Die Burger's* code of conduct, as well as codes for bloggers in general.

Siebert *et al.* (1963:85) assert that the concepts in an ethical code of conduct must reflect the goals of the social responsibility theory which highlights independence through self-regulation, a forum for different viewpoints and the media's ethical responsibility toward society. However, principles of the democratic-participant theory are relevant discussion, because in practical terms, j-blogs address some of the specific principles proposed in this theory, such as horizontal and more interactive and reciprocal communication between the communicator and the recipient (Fourie, 2001:275). The application of both these media theories to the discussion indicates that self-regulation through codes of conduct for both new and old media may be explained on a theoretical level.

On a practical level, the incorporation of elements of the constantly modifying digital world, like j-blogs, into codes of conduct which govern traditional media, such as *Die Burger*, can result in enforcing a form of control over the end product produced by j-bloggers and their audiences. A code of conduct for j-bloggers should therefore consider the unique requirements of the j-blogger as opposed to the newspaper reporter. An understanding of ethical values, such as accuracy and fairness, as they are interpreted on the j-blog may be required (see Chapter 2).

1.5.3 Research questions

This study examines the necessity of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* in the light of guidelines that already exist as proposed by *Die Burger's* ethical code of conduct.

Following from the above discussion, the research questions formulated for this study are:

1. Does the current ethical code at *Die Burger* cover the interests of the j-bloggers and the readers when compared to bloggers' codes of ethics?

2. What is the feasibility of a code of ethics for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*?
3. What would a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* look like?

1.6 Methodology and outline of the study

By accessing various literature sources, this study firstly examines the code of conduct currently in use at *Die Burger* and compares it with other codes of conduct for bloggers in an attempt to establish whether it enables j-bloggers to practise ethically in this medium and whether it protects readers from unethical conduct. Using a qualitative content analysis, the current code of conduct of *Die Burger* will be described from the perspective of the normative media theory of social responsibility, as well as the democratic-participant theory to establish whether it effectively covers the interests of both j-bloggers and readers alike. This comparative analysis will help shed light on the first research question.

Du Plooy asserts that the use of in-depth interviews occurs when we want to uncover participants' perspectives on a particular issue or phenomenon (1995:112). The next part of the research process consists of unstructured, in-depth interviews with j-bloggers at *Die Burger*, including the editor, ombudsman and multimedia editor and print media journalists about whether they think a separate code of conduct should be formulated for the specific practice of j-blogging. The current code of conduct for journalists at *Die Burger* will be discussed and possible expansions or inclusions from the literature of this research will be identified. This will shed more light on the second research question.

The third part of the research is suggested by the third research question, where proposals for a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* will be considered in an effort to find out what such a j-blogger's code of conduct at *Die Burger* would look like.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review and an overview of ethical codes for the mainstream media, as well as ethical codes of conduct proposed for the blogosphere. Salient aspects will be identified in the literature and will be discussed with the subjects in this study.

Chapter 3 analyses the current code of conduct for *Die Burger*'s journalists from the perspective of the normative media theories of democratic-participant and social responsibility and compare it to various bloggers' codes of ethics to establish whether it adequately covers the operation of j-bloggers at *Die Burger* and protects the reading public.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the in-depth interviews with j-bloggers at *Die Burger*, print journalists, as well as the editor, ombudsman and multimedia editors of *Die Burger* in order to establish whether a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* is needed and what it would look like from their perspective.

Chapter 5 concludes this study with suggestions for the content of a code for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* in terms of the findings from the literature study and interviews and concludes the research.

1.7 Summary

My personal experience as a j-blogger at *Die Burger* serves as the impetus for this study. This chapter discussed how changes in media platforms bring about debates about the ethical conduct of journalists in these new mediums. It is argued that new mediums, such as blogs, may introduce different ways of interpreting certain traditionally understood ethical concepts. These concepts are accuracy, fairness and the use of anonymous sources. The topic of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* serves as the focus of this study. The theoretical discussion in this study thus far indicates that such a code of conduct may result in an empirical manifestation of aspects of both the social responsibility theory and democratic-participant theory.

Chapter 2

Literature overview

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 discusses ethical issues as set out by the codes of conduct for various mainstream publications in order to evaluate the existing code at *Die Burger* with reference to j-blogs (see Chapter 3). The ethical aspects of fairness, accuracy and anonymity are discussed with reference to the mainstream media and j-blogs. The chapter concludes by outlining possible practical guidelines for a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*.

2.2 A code of conduct for bloggers

In South Africa, an anonymous male named Skye sparked fury as he conveyed his alleged sexual experiences with several prominent South African men on his blog in April 2007. In newspaper articles, the blogger was labeled a bully (Fitzpatrick, 2007) because apparently he was ruining people's reputations by writing about sexual encounters with politicians, a priest and journalists, among others, and doing so under a pseudonym. A court case against the alleged blogger was eventually withdrawn but the incident sparked a renewed call by some of the affected parties for the regulation of blogs by government and/or a code of conduct for bloggers. This reaction indicates the extent to which writing on blogs could lead to cases of defamation and damage of reputation. However, the deputy chairperson of the Online Publishers Association, Matthew Buckland posits that control of the blogosphere should come in the form of self-regulation. "If a blogger performs illicit acts on his or her blog, then the law should take its course", he said (cited in Pillay, 2007:1). Minimising harm is one of the reasons why ethical codes of conduct are formulated (Retief, 2001:5) and this example highlights some of the dangers that blogging poses.

The call for a bloggers' code of conduct was also heightened in England in March 2007 when the British media reported an incident in which Kathy Sierra, author of the blog

Creating Passionate Users, was threatened by readers on her blog. According to the BBC news site (www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/6502643.stm; 24 April 2007) “she was hounded by death threats on her blog for being a woman in a male-oriented technological world” and consequently another call for a code of conduct came from “one of the web’s most influential thinkers” Tim O’ Reilly. In the proposed code of conduct, O’ Reilly (2007:1) asked that bloggers accept responsibility, not just for what they write, but also for the comments they allow on their blog. Blogs (and j-blogs) often allow anonymous comments.

Die Burger’s j-bloggers are journalists who work for the newspaper and who have their names displayed on the j-blog. This rules out the possibility of harmful posting taking place under the guise of a pseudonym. The comments posted by readers are however, more often than not, posted anonymously. The open-source journalism function, already referred to in Chapter 1, includes the case where a comment may be used for a follow-up post or verification. The anonymous comment may thus become an anonymous source on the j-blog if used in a follow-up post. According to *Die Burger*’s code of conduct, a story has to be exceptionally important for allowing anonymous sources to be used. This means that it is generally frowned upon to use anonymous sources liberally. O’ Reilly’s call for bloggers to take responsibility for their own writing, as well as the comments allowed, is therefore important to note in a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* and this point will be discussed later in this chapter.

A standardised code of conduct for the blogosphere and for the media in general cannot be enforced. Voluntary codes of conduct at mainstream newsrooms are expected to be accepted as part of the work contract for reporters. Although a code of conduct is not enforceable for the blogosphere as a whole, because it exists mainly outside the ambit of mainstream media, many journalists, scholars and other observers agree that a code of conduct would be beneficial.

Marci McCoy-Roth (2004:2) did a survey among 57 professional journalists in the USA to find out how they viewed the blogosphere just after the USA elections during that year. Her study found that journalists think it is important for mainstream journalists who are

bloggers to be willing to work within the framework of a code of ethics for j-blogs: According to McCoy-Roth (2004:29):

Journalists catalogued many drawbacks of blogs, including a lack of ethical standards and a tendency to spawn rumors or innuendo but suggested that as more standards are created, some of the more detrimental effects of blogs may be eliminated.

As mentioned earlier, some mainstream media organizations, like *The New York Times* and the *Herald Tribune* in the USA have formulated short policies for their j-bloggers. Both these newspapers' policies emphasise that the standard code of conduct also apply for their j-bloggers and that the posts of the j-bloggers have to be edited before it is posted. While these policies are important to mention, the focus of this study is on the feasibility of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*. Furthermore, with the exception of a stipulation in the *Herald Tribune*'s policy about linking to other websites, these policies do not take the alternative interpretations of the ethical concepts mentioned thus far, into account. Thus, even though the possible alternative interpretation of these concepts are not in *The New York Times* and *Herald Tribune* policies, it is useful to note that these mainstream organisations have adopted policies that take their j-bloggers into account.

But while some mainstream organizations have started taking their j-bloggers into account in their ethical codes, several proposals for a bloggers' code of conduct illustrate the concern for guidelines in the blogosphere as a whole. Rebecca Blood proposed a code of conduct for bloggers in 2003. She emphasised that bloggers should take care to publish only facts and not speculation. Similarly, Kuhn (2005:22) advocated for striving after factual truth in blog postings in his Code of Blogging Ethics (C.O.B.E), while Dube (2004:1) in his Blogger's Code of Ethics (2004) maintains that bloggers should never publish inaccurate information. Dube adapted his Blogger's Code of Ethics from the Code of Conduct for the Society of Journalistic Professionals (SJP).

Striving for truth through accurate reporting is a journalistic tenet that is echoed in several codes of conduct for mainstream media organisations in South Africa and internationally. The *New York Times* newspaper states in its ethical code that its readers will receive the unvarnished truth as best as it (the newspaper) can learn it (The *New York Times* Ethical Guidelines, 2007). Similarly, *Die Burger*'s first guideline on accuracy is introduced with the words: "Search for the truth and report on it as comprehensively as possible" (*Die Burger* Code of Conduct, 2002).

Journalistic ethical values may be elaborated upon in some codes of conduct and merely mentioned in others. Policies for j-bloggers at *The New York Times* and the *Herald Tribune* mention that the ethical values fairness and accuracy still apply on its j-blogs, but like various mainstream media codes of conduct, these codes differ in their emphasis of other ethical concepts. For example, The *New York Times*' Company Policy on Ethics in Journalism (2007) emphasizes that j-bloggers should avoid conflicts of interest, while the *Herald Tribune*'s Blog Policy (2007) does not mention conflicts of interest at all. Claassen (2005:136) emphasises that codes in the mainstream media are centred on three major issues: accuracy, fairness and conflict of interest. "In South Africa, most news organisations have an ethical code of conduct and although these codes differ, these three areas are emphasised in all of them" (Claassen, 2005:136). Retief (2001) outlines the same ethical issues that are addressed in ethical codes in South Africa, illustrating that most codes contain notions of accuracy, fairness, anonymity and conflict of interest as the most important guidelines. While there is an emphasis on avoiding conflict of interest in most mainstream media codes of conduct, this ethical concept is not relevant for discussion in this study, as the literature for this research specifically identifies accuracy, fairness and the use of anonymous sources as the three notions that could be interpreted differently on a j-blog.

The following sections of this chapter discuss the notions of objectivity, fairness, accuracy and the use of anonymous sources as they are understood in codes of conduct for the mainstream media. While many codes of conduct identify several ethical issues as guidelines for journalists, the literature highlights how the three ethical notions mentioned above may be understood differently on the j-blog. Therefore, the discussion

about the identified ethical concepts will be contrasted with how these ethical values may be interpreted and how they might function on a j-blog. From these discussions, guidelines for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* may become clearer.

2.3 Objectivity and fairness

The following section creates an understanding of the journalistic terms objectivity and fairness as they are understood in mainstream journalism and as they may be interpreted on j-blogs. An ethical code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* could consider alternative interpretations of these concepts for mainstream journalism and on j-blogs.

2.3.1 Objectivity and fairness in mainstream journalism

Retief (2001) maintains that the choice of words in a news report is important, as is the context in news reports. Retief (2001:86) defines being fair as an attempt to:

1. Balance your report in such a way that no party is misrepresented either by your choice of words or by the lack of the proper context (that would be unjust).
2. Ensure that all parties have their say (equality).
3. Give coverage to different parties in relation to their importance (moderation).

Goodwin (1987) maintains that fairness in journalism is a better term for objectivity, which has been termed an “unfortunately dim silhouette of journalism’s foremost practice” (Miraldi, 1990:14). Apart from the fact that many media theorists believe it is not possible to be objective, Brent Cunningham (2003:5) maintains that objectivity, as journalism’s dominant professional norm, needs to be re-thought. According to Cunningham (2003:7) journalists are often accused of being biased if they do not use “the shaped and polished words dished out by public relations officers”, for example. Cunningham’s comment illustrates the need for journalists to maintain levels of professionalism through balanced reporting.

It can be argued that objectivity and fairness are almost similar in their ideals, since essentially it is thought that the journalist must remain the neutral observer in a situation that is to be reported on. Goodwin (1987:11) suggests that the standard of fairness is part of and in a way an offspring of objective reporting: According to Goodwin (1987:11):

The idea that news should be unbiased, balanced and fair became and remains widely accepted in the field, even though the word objectivity has fallen into dispute.

Retief (2001:41) concurs and maintains that the notion of objectivity is a thorny one. Retief does not distinguish between the words “objectivity” and “impartiality” in his explanation thereof, casting both alongside each other and thereby implying that essentially, they mean the same thing. The “main reasons for impartiality being a thorny issue is because it is almost impossible to define”; and due to the “subjective nature of human beings [it] is impossible to achieve” (Retief, 2001:41). Yet, the ideal of impartiality, according to Retief (2001:41) is of utmost importance if the media is to be credible.

Many of the mainstream media’s guidelines in terms of objectivity and fairness are defined and outlined differently. While this indicates that the notions of objectivity and fairness are important as ethical guidelines in the media, it also shows that the definition of these ideals may differ from one code of conduct to another. Thus, the British *Guardian*’s Ethical Code of Conduct (2003) stipulates that the more serious the allegations or criticisms (of a news subject) the greater the obligation to allow the subject to respond. The code of conduct for the *New York Times* (2007) proposes that their reporters be neutral in any given situation. The South African the *Star*’s Code of Conduct (1999) proposes that journalists be both fair and impartial, stipulating that every effort should be made to report all sides of a controversy.

The US Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) states in its Code of Ethics that it is the duty of the journalist to seek truth and to provide a fair and balanced account of current affairs in context (Society of Professional Journalists, Code of Ethics, 1996). A balanced

account informs the public of both sides of any story and objectivity therefore remains “the cornerstone of a journalist’s professional credibility” (Society of Professional Journalists, Code of Ethics, 1996).

Retief (2001) posits that the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) has an ethical code recording that the electronic media shall be obliged to report with “due impartiality”, implying that only a reasonable amount of impartiality can be attained in reporting. According to Singer (2006b:177) “the profession of journalism has come to see its niche as connected to the often misunderstood concept of objectivity, which refers not to the absence of personal bias, but rather to journalistic method”. The method Singer refers to implies that ethical guidelines expect a reporter to give context to a story and to apply accuracy and fairness as set out in ethical codes of conduct. Furthermore, being objective is “true in as far as reporting is concerned, and even more so when commenting on news” (Retief, 2001:41) According to Retief (2001), just about all codes of ethics in South Africa and abroad stipulate that comment shall be presented in a manner that clearly states it is a comment, thereby attaining the goal of neutrality. However, the notion of comments in this regard, as well as objectivity per se, is problematised in the medium of j-blogs. The following section of this chapter discusses objectivity and fairness with regard to j-blogs.

2.3.2 Objectivity and fairness on j-blogs

“Privileging individual opinion” (Singer, 2006b:177) is one of the more defining characteristics of a blog in general. Steyn (2007) asserts everything that is written on a j-blog at *Die Burger* should be based on fact, but that how the fact is conveyed is up to the j-blogger. The assertion indicates that perhaps the thorny issue of objectivity is problematic on the j-blog. If j-bloggers are allowed to convey facts without the rigorous editing associated with the practices of the newspaper, posts about any topic on a j-blog could be written in a biased manner and be published as such. Yet objectivity is “the fuel that fires journalism’s engine, an ideal and an ideology” (Miraldi, 1990:15). In other words, the concept of fairness is an important practical ideal in professional journalism.

The practical realisation of the concept of objectivity may therefore need to be reformulated in a code of conduct for j-bloggers.

In a proposal for a bloggers' code of conduct Dube (2004) asserts that j-bloggers be "honest and fair" (2004). Similarly, Kuhn (2005) suggests in his Code of Blogging Ethics that j-bloggers should be accountable for information posted on their blogs. None of the proposals for a blogger's ethical code discussed above explicitly mention impartiality or objectivity as an ethical consideration. Perhaps this is an indication that objectivity and fairness are the two ethical values that are mostly shunned by bloggers in general, specifically because blogs are considered a highly subjective medium.

Murley and Smith (2004:17) claim that the respondents in their study of bloggers saw no need to operate under the traditional forms of journalistic objectivity. Harper (2005:12) maintains bloggers often reject the mainstream media's preoccupation with fairness and objectivity. These findings again suggest that the thorny issue of objectivity (Retief, 2001) may need to be reformulated in a code of conduct for j-bloggers. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, scholars, such as Goodwin (1987) have argued that fairness is in fact the offspring of objectivity as it suggests offering both sides of the story especially, in the case of controversy. This was also stated by Retief (2001) and the *Star's* Code of Ethics and Conduct (1999).

Miraldi (1990:15) contends that the meaning of objectivity has evolved over the decades and today objectivity has come to have different meanings from publication to publication. Miraldi (1990:15) continues:

However, whether it is couched in words like fairness, accuracy or impartiality, or in phrases like separating fact from comment, there is some uniform agreement on the principles of objectivity.

According to Miraldi (1990:15), the theoretical rationale for the notion of objectivity is that readers can best make up their minds about issues when given verifiable facts that are delivered by independent and neutral observers, that is, reporters who provide the

reader with competing versions of the truth, in short, a marketplace where ideas do battle. However, Robinson (2006:74) observed that some j-bloggers are re-establishing the ethical norm of objectivity by making readers complicit in shifting this norm:

By employing the reflexive attributes of the blog, j-bloggers address a modern question about values and standards in the media industry.

Along with the notion of open-source journalism, where the audience can contribute to the story on a blog (discussed in the following section), the notion of objectivity on j-blogs implies that the audience battles (Miraldi, 1990:15) with the ideas of the j-blogger as they are posted on the j-blog, in the form of comments. For example, if a j-blogger posts an opinion about an issue, the opinion or facts may be flogged and discussed even further by the audience, thereby shaping the story. Grabowicz (2003:75) contends that “instead of a highly structured narrative designed as a finished product for passive consumption, the blog [...] is approachable and invites readers to participate”. Harper (2005) concurs, claiming that blogs are an important expanding tool for the mainstream media that enables discussion and interactivity between journalists and readers.

Singer (2006b:180) asserts that the blog “ideally suits the normative goal of transparency because everything the j-blogger writes is now subject to public analysis, comparison and fact checking”. This lends credence to Robinson’s claim (2006:68) that j-bloggers are aiding in “audience agency” as they link to various truths in the form of hyperlinking, for example. Singer (2006b:187) claims that j-bloggers can enhance their accountability and transparency through the provision of extensive hyperlinks to sources and related material. The notions of objectivity and fairness are seemingly shifting in the form of the j-blog. Morozov (2005:22) maintained that the online journalist can “empower the public to engage in participatory communication through active information search, selection and sharing”. In the context of a proposed ethical code of conduct for j-blogs at *Die Burger*, the ethical notions of objectivity and fairness may include considering offering an opinion on a j-blog, but requiring the j-blogger to post opposing views or comments by the audience or linking to an opposing opinion in an attempt to be fair and objective.

2.4 Accuracy

The ethical concept of accuracy as understood in mainstream journalism and a possible alternative interpretation thereof for j-blogs will be discussed since it has a bearing on a proposed ethical code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*.

2.4.1 Accuracy and correcting errors in the mainstream media

According to Retief (2001:49) accuracy can only be achieved if the relevant facts are put into the proper context. Retief (2001:49) maintains that inaccurate reports are very likely to affect the media's integrity, as well as their credibility. Retief (2001:51) continues:

Accuracy starts with the ability to gather all the relevant facts and check and verify these by using more than one source.

Providing context is exceptionally important to attain accuracy because context conveys more than the facts in a story. Retief posits that a story is insufficient without context.

The *Guardian*, which subscribes to the British Press Complaints Commission (PCC), posits that no inaccurate, misleading or distorted material is to be published and that all inaccurate information is to be corrected promptly (The Press Complaints Commission's Code of Conduct, in the *Guardian's* Professional Code of Practice, 2003). The South African daily newspaper the *Star* proposes that its journalists will be accurate, fair and frank in their reports and comments and that facts should be checked carefully (the *Star's* Code of Ethics and Conduct, 1999).

According to Goodwin (1987:10) "American journalists have had a hard time agreeing on many things but virtually all of them have come to accept accuracy as the most important of their professional standards". Accuracy entails being truthful both in the gathering and presentation of facts (Goodwin, 1987:10). This would necessarily include verifying information and providing the context in a story as Retief (2001:51) also suggests.

Accuracy is considered an important ethical value in the mainstream media and serves as a guideline to ensure that reporting is practised and presented as truthfully as possible.

Correcting errors in the mainstream media is a combination of the ethical values of accuracy and fairness and points to the willingness to report responsibly. Where possible, the correction of errors in the media should be given due prominence. Flint (1925:181) posits that “dissatisfaction with the practical working out of the editor’s profession of fairness originates also in a lack of agreement between the editor and the public as to what constitutes a correction”. The conventional demand of the public is that the correction be run in the same position in which the error was printed and that it be given the same heading of equal size (Flint, 1925). However varied the mainstream media’s attitude toward these demands, most mainstream media ethical codes propose the correction of errors in their editorial. For example, the Press Ombudsman of South Africa’s Professional Code (1998) states:

A publication should make amends for publishing information or comment that is found to be harmfully inaccurate by printing, promptly and with appropriate prominence, a retraction, correction or explanation.

The following section discusses how accuracy and correcting errors have been formulated in proposals for a blogger’s code of ethics and suggests alternative ways of interpreting this ethical value in the context of j-blogging.

2.4.2 Accuracy on j-blogs

The bloggers’ codes of conduct suggested by Blood (2003a), Kuhn (2005) and Dube (2004) propose accuracy on blogs. For example, Blood (2003a) suggests publishing a fact that you believe to be true. “If your statement is speculation, say so”, (Blood, 2003a).

Jonathan Dube, who adapted the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) for bloggers, (see www.cyberjournalist.net) maintains that bloggers should never publish inaccurate information. “If something is questionable, make it clear that it is in

doubt”, states (Dube, 2004). Blood (2003a) further asserts that [hyper]linking to sources is important on blogs:

If material exists online, linking to it allows readers to judge for themselves the accuracy and insightfulness of your statements.

In his Code of Blogging Ethics (C.O.B.E) Kuhn (2005) suggests that bloggers should “prioritise factual truth” indicating the role that accuracy should play on blogs. Blood (2003a) suggests bloggers should publicly correct any misinformation on their blogs and write each entry as if it could not be changed. The following section suggests that there are alternative means of verifying information, as well as correcting errors in the blog form.

2.4.3 Accuracy and open-source journalism

During the 2004 presidential election campaign in the USA, Bryan Murley and Kim Smith (2004) examined the intersection of blogging and journalism by means of an online questionnaire that drew 59 respondents. In their review of the growth of the blogosphere, Murley and Smith (2004:11) argue that bloggers today are not much different from the pamphleteers of the 18th Century. They point out that these pamphleteers “helped mould public opinion against the king of England and played a crucial role in preparing the minds of people for independence” (Murley and Smith, 2004:12). In their study, Murley and Smith (2004:14) outline existing ethical codes for bloggers like those of Blood (2003a) and Dube (2004). They argue that bloggers struggling to establish legitimacy can look to the past for well-grounded ethical guidance (Murley and Smith, 2004:14). Murley and Smith (2004) see bloggers as learning from journalism and maintain that the major media houses need to find a way to let the new journalists in.

Murley and Smith (2004:21) conclude that there may be some evidence of a paradigm shift among bloggers, since there is an indication of open-source journalism as an editing function among bloggers. Open-source journalism may be one other way in which

information could be verified online. Jay Rosen, an academic at New York University discussed the idea of open-source journalism in December 2004 on his website (Rosen, 2004).

According to Rosen (2004:1) the term open-source journalism indicates that the journalist who writes on a blog relies on the audience “who always knew more than the journalist about a great many things”. Open-source journalism advocates that bloggers open themselves up to comment from readers and links to other sources online. The audience is able to correct or add information to what has already been written on the blog in the form of comments. If an error is made, the j-blogger could post the correct fact on the j-blog. This suggests that correcting errors on the j-blog is another way of ensuring accuracy in this medium. *Die Burger* promptly corrects factual mistakes through its ombudsman in the newspaper, but with j-blogs, the onus is on the j-blogger to ensure that factual inaccuracies are corrected. Linking to other sources may also help to confirm statements made on a blog post. Foust (2005:83) states that the Internet is without a doubt the largest repository of information that the world has ever known. Foust (2005:83) continues:

Yet the Internet itself is merely a conduit to millions of individual sources of information, some of them relevant and some of them not. The challenge for the journalist is learning to separate what is valuable from what is not [...] in many ways this task is no different from what journalists have always done – with the telephone, by in-person meetings with potential story sources.

Together with hyperlinking to other online sources, open-source journalism is also a tool for j-bloggers to consider to ensure accuracy and to correct errors. The use of comments from readers could serve as an additional form of accuracy in an ethical code for j-bloggers while simultaneously correcting factual errors by posting the correct fact on a post as a follow-up.

Furthermore, the j-blogger using links to other sources should learn to discern credible online sources from those that are not. Credible online sources may include linking to other news sources including those of competing media organisations, which the *Herald Tribune* recognises in its Blog Policy (2007) or websites that are often quoted in the media. For example, Stanford University's Web Credibility Project (2002) stipulate that the credibility of websites may include checking that accuracy of information is easily verifiable and display contact numbers or e-mail addresses.

Harper (2005:18) states that the generally accepted newsroom practices of accuracy, fairness and objectivity demonstrate the significant divergence between the mainstream media and blogs. Murley and Smith (2004) found that accuracy is important to many bloggers, primarily because the Internet has a self-correcting feature to it in the form of other bloggers, as well as contributions and comments from readers through which corrections can be made.

Robinson (2006:70) found that j-bloggers try to reference their work through hyperlinking and that "journalists are now linking various truths in the j-blog form – but many do not include context, interpretation and verification" (Robinson, 2006:70). According to Robinson (2006:70) journalists can and should allow their audience to share in the shape and structure of the post, thereby attempting an alternative practical method of objectivity and fairness as well.

Andrew Morozov (2005) found that audiences are using the "open architecture" of the blog form when he conducted an exploratory study to examine the role of online journalism with respect to traditional journalistic practice. By "open architecture" Morozov refers features such as hyperlinks and attributes of the Internet which may facilitate interaction between bloggers, readers and the text. Morozov (2005:5) found that bloggers use a different editing mechanism in the form of what he calls a "publish-then-filter" system on their blogs. This system is essentially the same as the open-source journalism function suggested by Murley and Smith (2004) and Rosen (2004). According to Morozov (2005:5), "blogs use a diverse online audience as an editing and verification system". Morozov found that blogs serve the same fundamental purpose as the

mainstream media of informing the public, but that they accomplish this through different means. According to Morozov (2005:17), bloggers utilise the unique “open architecture” of the blogging medium. Morozov (2005) states that the hyperlinking function is rooted in the idea of the type of audience participation that the blog lends itself to and it may serve as a form of accuracy on blogs.

We can therefore argue that being accurate on a j-blog could entail including the audience’s version of a story as a means of verification, as well as in trying to correct errors on the blog, although the j-blogger is expected to be accurate from the outset. Furthermore, hyperlinking can also be considered as a way to verify facts as Blood (2003a) and Morozov (2005) suggest because it will allow readers to judge for themselves the accuracy and insightfulness of the blogger’s statements.

With regard to an ethical code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*, the ethical notion of accuracy may include allowing the posts on the j-blog to be discussed by the audience who may verify the information posted, and then posting this information or correcting possible errors on the j-blog. This suggestion is similar to the suggestion that in practical terms objectivity and fairness may include allowing and using the opinions of the audience for a more balanced post or follow-up post. It makes the audience complicit with what is being written on a j-blog. Readers may thus become a source if their own comments are used in follow-up posts on a j-blog. In most ethical codes of conduct the mainstream media is clear on the journalist’s relationship to sources, especially with reference to anonymous sources.

The following section discusses the use of anonymous sources in the mainstream media and highlights the fact that most sources in the j-blog context supply comments anonymously.

2.5 Anonymity

The use of anonymous sources as understood in the mainstream media and as interpreted on j-blogs will be discussed. The importance of audience participation on j-blogs further

indicates that the use of anonymous sources in stories on j-blogs is approached differently when compared to mainstream media. A code of conduct for j-bloggers would have to consider these different interpretations.

2.5.1 Anonymity in the mainstream media

The media highlight anonymity in their codes of conduct in order not to compromise their integrity and credibility. Kendyl Salcito (2005:1) cites several examples from North American journalism where reporters abused the anonymity of sources:

Most newsrooms dictate the claim of anonymous sources should be substantiated by at least one other source, but in the rush to beat the competition, journalists have ignored those newsroom rules.

Salcito (2005) maintains there are various reasons why anonymous sources may be used. This includes protecting someone who puts his or her life at risk to tell a story. However, Retief (2001:118) maintains that it can be dangerous to use anonymous sources because “they can tell a journalist anything without having to provide a single source of evidence”.

While the mainstream media seem especially careful of using anonymous sources, there are some cases in which confidentiality is permitted to protect sources for news stories. According to Goodwin (1987:115):

Some sources will not talk on the record for various good reasons, including losing their jobs, being physically harmed or even killed but some of the major exposés of modern journalism would not have been possible without information that was obtained by reporters only because they agreed to extend confidentiality to protect the identity of some of their sources.

The first point in the *Guardian's* Code of Conduct emphasises that the use of anonymous quotations are recognised if it “will help people speak more honestly but that these should

not be used lazily or indiscriminately” (The *Guardian* Code of Professional Practice, 2003). The South African *Mail and Guardian*’s code of conduct stipulates that unnamed sources should be avoided unless there is absolutely no other way to handle the story and if the source is backed by others (The *Mail and Guardian*’s Professional Code, 2006). Similarly, the *Star*’s Code of Ethics and Conduct (1999) maintains that sources of news should be identified unless there is a good reason not to.

It can therefore be argued that anonymity is used carefully in the mainstream media and that it is usually only used to protect a source in the case of a news story. The following section discusses the notion of anonymity on blogs and j-blogs.

2.5.2 Anonymity on j-blogs

In his C.O.B.E, Kuhn (2005:22) suggests that bloggers should reveal their identity on their blogs. However, this point is directed at general bloggers, who for the most part do not necessarily reveal their true identities on their blogs. The anonymity of the j-blogger is not specifically in question in the case of *Die Burger* as all the j-bloggers who work for the mainstream newspaper are identifiable by having their names online.

However, the notion of anonymous sources on j-blogs is in question. Robinson (2006:74) found that the “notion of a source – and what they can say – is being altered online”. According to Robinson, the readers of blogs are key sources and “as an end result, audience agency is changing” (Robinson, 2006:75). Furthermore, Robinson maintains that j-bloggers routinely use readers as both sources and co-authors, which in turn is another example of how the method of open-source journalism is being applied. The “open architecture of the Internet” (Morozov, 2005) allows increased interactivity between the journalist and the readers, something which is not entirely possible with the newspaper. Robinson’s assertion points to the idea that the audience helps to shape the story on the j-blog through comments albeit anonymously.

In his proposal for a blogger’s code of conduct Tim O’ Reilly (2007:1) maintained that bloggers should not allow anonymous comments on their blogs. In the case already

referred to at the beginning of this chapter where a British blogger, Kathy Sierra, was seriously threatened online, not allowing anonymous comments on blogs could be seen as a form of minimising harm for readers and/or writers – another goal set out by several ethical codes of conduct, according to (Retief, 2001). But such a move could inhibit readers to comment and detract from the interactivity and “open architecture” of j-blogs.

Commentators on blogs have, for the most part, done so anonymously on *Die Burger*'s j-blogging site (Steyn, 2007). Readers are contributing to a post and thereby shifting the notion of what a source might be on a blog (Robinson, 2006) but they are doing so anonymously. *Die Burger*'s blogging site requires that its commentators fill in an e-mail address before posting a comment. However, what appears online is an anonymous comment usually in the form of a pseudonym. In the case of *Die Burger* commentators as possible sources are also asked to use a verification system before the comment will appear with the post online. This allows the administrators to determine the name and number of the computer from which a comment is posted. The verification system will be discussed in Chapter 4.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has highlighted the suggestion by Robinson (2006) and others that the j-blog may be referred to as an audience-centred type of journalism. The practical application of objectivity, fairness, accuracy and anonymity on j-blogs have emphasised that a j-blogger's audience may contribute to the shape and structure of the posts written on the j-blog by way of their comments, something that is not entirely possible in the mainstream media because of the smaller role that interactivity plays in the traditional news environment.

Objectivity and fairness as ethical norms must be considered in a possible ethical code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*, but may contain more specific definitions and practical guidelines. Accuracy and correcting errors will also be considered in the code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*, but like objectivity and fairness, may include practical guidelines that reflect the function of open-source journalism. The use of

hyperlinks as a form of referencing and accuracy will be considered as a guideline in this code of conduct since this too presents the j-blogger with a form of referencing that is not entirely possible in the mainstream version of the newspaper.

The notion of a source and its role has been altered on the j-blog. J-blogs further compound the issue of anonymity because the audience, who may be considered as a source if its comments are used in follow-up posts - as explained in terms of the notions of objectivity and accuracy in this study - may post comments anonymously by means of a pseudonym.

Die Burger's current ethical code of conduct illustrates its responsibility toward society through setting professional standards – a premise of the press theory of social responsibility – and through its emphasis on objective reporting.

However, a significant divergence from the traditional understanding of objectivity in the form of the j-blog at *Die Burger* occurs with the changing relationship between the j-blogger and the reader. The j-blog is not only more approachable and open-ended than a printed article in the newspaper, it also encourages instant interactivity and debate with the audience through the option to comment. Reader comments may consequently offer a different understanding of objectivity on the j-blog. Thus, even though the j-blog offers the j-blogger the opportunity to express an opinion, reader debates and links to other sources online could constitute a form of objectivity on the j-blog. The interaction between the j-blogger and the readers on the j-blog show the reciprocal role of communicator and recipient, as well as horizontal communication between journalists and readers which is indicative of the democratic-participant theory of the role of the media in society.

Furthermore, the suggestion that the j-blog is more centred on the contributions of the audience through their comments to achieve accuracy and fairness as opposed to the mainstream media shows that the democratic-participant theory of the media is relevant for discussion in this study. According to McQuail (1983:97) the democratic-participant theory has to do with the right to relevant information and the right to answer back. The

idea that readers may become sources on j-blogs further illustrates how tenets of the democratic-participant theory are relevant in this study. This illustrates to an extent the intersection of the democratic-participant theory with the social responsibility press theory which, among other premises, is based on the media's obligation to fulfil functions, such as the creation of a forum for different viewpoints (Fourie, 2001:272) The discussion of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* (in Chapter 3) is thus framed within both the democratic-participant and social responsibility press theories.

Chapter 3 examines *Die Burger's* current code of conduct as used by its mainstream journalists. J-bloggers are thought to blog "in light" of this ethical code (Steyn, 2007). *Die Burger's* ethical code will be compared to other bloggers' codes of conduct to determine whether it adequately covers the operation of j-bloggers.

Chapter 3

The ethical code of conduct of *Die Burger*

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 discusses *Die Burger*'s ethical code in the context of the normative ethical framework of social responsibility and attempts to show how elements of this theory intersect with some of the tenets of the democratic-participant theory in the discussion of a code of conduct for j-bloggers. The chapter also attempts to find out if the current ethical code of conduct at *Die Burger* covers the interests of j-bloggers and readers by comparing the code to other codes for bloggers that have already been developed.

3.2 Theories of the press

Some scholars argue that the four theories of the press set out by Siebert *et al.* (1963) were designed to facilitate an introduction for discussing the media in society (Nerone, Berry, Braman, Christians, Gulback, Helle, Liebovich and Rotzoll, 1995:17). There have been several critiques of the four theories, including the assertion that “the four theories do not have the same level of historical concreteness” (Nerone *et al.*, 1995:19) and that “good media theories are not limited to short periods of time” (Skjerdal, 1999:4). These critics refer to the fact that the theories were developed in the 1950s and question their relevance some fifty years later.

Other theories, such as the developmental and democratic-participant theories, introduced by McQuail (1983:96), have also been employed to describe the South African media landscape, as well as the changing relationship between communicator and receiver. Retief (2001:22) argues that many permutations of the different theories of the press may exist when describing the role of the media in different societies. With the advent of j-blogs at *Die Burger*, I would argue that principles of both the democratic-participant theory and the social responsibility theory should be employed to discuss the feasibility of a code of conduct for j-bloggers.

The intersection of the democratic-participant and social responsibility theories is apparent with the role of j-blogs at *Die Burger*. While Morozov (2005:10) notes that the theory of social responsibility saw freedom of expression as a necessary condition for adequate public discussion, McQuail (1983:97) argues that the democratic-participant theory proposes that all media should exist primarily for their audiences and not for media organisations, professionals or clients of the media. The following section discusses *Die Burger's* code of conduct within the normative framework of social responsibility and attempts to show the relevance of the democratic-participant theory.

3.3 Social responsibility and democratic participation

According to Retief (2001), the Hutchins Commission of the USA in the 1940s had a remarkable influence on the media in South Africa, as is evident in the role that the theory of social responsibility, which it proposed, still plays in the codes of conduct of various mainstream media institutions. Retief (2001) maintains that there is a growing emphasis on the social responsibility of the South African media. As was previously noted, the social responsibility theory stipulates that the media is expected to present all voices and views in a particular community and that justice for all (group) rights takes precedence over individual rights. The introduction of j-blogs at *Die Burger* may be regarded as another way in which to present different views and voices in the media.

The notion of social responsibility in the media recognises that “freedom of speech is necessary for a proper working of democracy” (Retief, 2001:219) but that this is “controlled” (Retief, 2001:221), for example, by a code of ethical conduct. In effect, most of the South African mainstream commercial media regulate themselves through their own codes of conduct. Codes of ethics in the media “derive their legitimacy from the voluntary acceptance of the document by every worker and implies that journalists subject themselves to the code and are willing to be guided (and corrected if necessary) by the code,” maintains Retief (2001:35).

Social responsibility is identified by Retief (2001) as an ethical issue that focuses on the idea that the media has an enormous influence over its public and that the media should

therefore exercise its freedom of speech responsibly. This would include “protecting children” (Retief, 2001:217) and considering the influence that violence, blasphemy and obscenity may have on the public. Many mainstream media outlets in South Africa uphold the notion of social responsibility within their codes through recognition of their own independence and freedom of speech, as well as their responsibility toward the public. The *Sunday Times* recognises its “responsibility for the effect of what [we] publish,” (The *Sunday Times* Code of Ethics, 2001) while the *Star* recognises its responsibilities toward the public by being “accurate, fair and frank in its reporting and comment” (The *Star*’s Code of Ethical Conduct, 1999).

The Press Ombudsman of South Africa’s Code of Professional Practice makes provision for the protection of the public where it stipulates, for example, that “the identity of rape victims and other victims of sexual violence shall not be published without the consent of the victim” and that “due care and responsibility shall be exercised by the press with regard to the presentation of brutality, violence and atrocities” (Press Ombudsman’s Code of Professional Practice, 1998).

The Press Ombudsman’s Code (1998) further recognises the freedom of the press and “that it is indivisible from and subject to the same rights and duties as those of the individual and rests on the public’s right to be informed and freely to receive and disseminate opinions”. The guidelines in *Die Burger*’s ethical code of conduct echo some of the guidelines in the Press Ombudsman’s Code of Professional Practice and recognises the notion of social responsibility in the guidelines set out for journalists, photographers and graphic artists of *Die Burger*.

However, the advent of new technologies may allow “individuals to participate more actively in the marketplace of ideas” (Nerone *et al.*, 1995:108) and such changes would “produce great changes in communication structures in which scarcity will yield to abundance in communications [effectively] rendering the responsibilities of the [old] media obsolete” (Nerone *et al.*, 1995:104). Nerone *et al.* (1995) argue that new technologies can enhance the potential, opportunities and capacities for the general public to influence content, delivery, form and results of media communication, as is the case

with j-blogs at *Die Burger*. Such technologies, Nerone *et al.* (1995) argue would corrode the privileged status of communications professionals. It can be argued that the introduction of j-blogs at *Die Burger* has led to a situation in which many of these predictions have now come true.

The role of the j-blog in the mainstream media highlights, or at least questions, the reference to journalists as holding a “privileged” status in the media. Carlson (2007:265) posits that journalistic authority becomes especially contested with the introduction of new media technologies and the evolution of old ones. According to Carlson (2007:266):

Media historians note tensions arising with the introduction among different media forms, and through the introduction of these, entrenched or accepted practices become scrutinised or contested.

One accepted practice is that the journalists and editors of newspapers have the last say over the content of the newspaper. According to Morozov (2005:12), the task of informing the public in a socially responsible manner involves a necessary gatekeeping or filtering function – one which traditionally is assigned to the sub-editors and editors of the newspaper. This method is challenged by the j-blog since the j-blogger, as well as the audience, decide which topics receive prominence through online discussion.

The accepted forms of traditional journalism are also contested through the use of audiences as a form of verification on j-blogs. Robinson (2006) asserted that with j-blogs audiences could play a decidedly important role in the creation of content and that the open-source journalism factor advocates looking to the audience as a means of verification of information on a j-blog. J-bloggers are enhancing the potential that new technologies hold by engaging the audience – the public – in the issues of the day. A j-blog in the mainstream media is different from an ordinary (personal) blog or conversation between members of the public. If the influence of the general public on content, delivery, form and results of media communication is enhanced by new technologies like j-blogs, then the mainstream media should react by establishing accommodative ethical guidelines for j-bloggers and continue to protect the general

public and maintain its “privileged status” as hosts of what Steyn (2007) terms “news in conversation”.

Belsey and Chadwick (1992:11) argue that the four press theories are the basis from which ethical codes of conduct are formed, and that one approach to finding a reasoned basis for a code of conduct would be to anchor the conduct in a virtuous character, one that for journalists would exhibit specific virtues, such as fairness and trustworthiness. However, one virtuous character for a code of conduct for j-bloggers may not be enough to fully describe the work of j-bloggers and still continue to protect the public because it would not necessarily contain specific guidelines for journalists to follow. Oosthuizen (2002) maintains that the normative theory of social responsibility resulted from a need to review policy formulation about the media’s position in libertarian dispensations. “Apart from freedom, social theory had to make provision for the obligations of the media,” states Oosthuizen, (2002:32). Siebert *et al.* (1963:86) note that the codes for the movie industry (1930), the radio industry (1937) and the television industry (1952) all differed from one another and that the requirements for the newspaper industry would therefore differ as well in so far as they need to ask: What does society require from its press?

Similarly then, one may ask: What does society require of its media with regard to new technologies like j-blogs? This study has already ascertained that the audience plays a more prominent role on the j-blog, for instance. The advent of new technologies signifies that media theories should try to accommodate or describe the role that these new technologies (for example, j-blogs) should play in mainstream media. Campbell, Gibson, Gunter and Touri (2007:12) attempt to describe the role of blogs in the mainstream media and conclude that j-blogs could act as originators, resuscitators or reframers of news.

J-blogs may play a role as originator of news where stories on j-blogs can “attract the interest of the mainstream media” (Campbell *et al.*, 2007:6). J-blogs may also act as resuscitators of news which according to Campbell *et al.* (2007:8) happens when the medium keeps a story alive more so than the mainstream media often producing the same outcome. Campbell *et al.* (2007:10) further argue that the “emerging predominance of

information in the form of commentary and analysis renders the blogosphere a platform where bloggers can reframe news, redistributing focal points for public attention”.

However, drawing from Carlson’s (2007:266) assertion that journalistic authority becomes contested with the introduction of the blogs as another form of media, the rising tension with the introduction of a new type of media could be explained with the intersection of the social responsibility and democratic-participant theories. It is argued by Nerone *et al.* (1995) that new media technologies would corrode the privileged status of journalists, while Carlson (2007:266) maintains that even with the rise of blogs, journalists have employed strategies of consolidation in an effort to protect their position against contestation from other parties seeking to increase their own authority. Yet, the increased participation and presence of the audience on j-blogs, the outlet to “privilege individual opinion” (Singer, 2006b:178) and the potential of the j-blog’s “mutualist impact on newspapers” (Campbell *et al.*, 2007:12) must be considered. Thus a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*, which operates mainly within the framework of the social responsibility theory, should accommodate more journalist and reader reciprocity, as well as interactivity – as proposed by the democratic-participant theory. Hence the j-bloggers code of conduct at *Die Burger* would cover tenets of both normative theories, which in turn, may be manifested in practical terms.

The current ethical code of *Die Burger* will be discussed to determine whether it aims to protect the public from harm and whether j-bloggers are able to work responsibly within the framework of the current code of conduct. It is helpful to draw a comparison between *Die Burger*’s code of conduct and a bloggers’ code of conduct (as formulated by Blood, 2003a; Dube 2004; Kuhn, 2005) as an approach toward answering the first research question in this study.

3.4 *Die Burger*’s Code of Conduct

In its preamble to a code of conduct *Die Burger* states that it wants to provide news truthfully, accurately, honestly and fairly and to publish comments that reflect fairness. The aim of accuracy is articulated in the code of conduct where journalists are asked to

test the accuracy of their work through, for example, the verification of sources and the attribution of all statements to a source. Journalists have to seek truth and report it as completely as possible. Under this principle, journalists must ask themselves whether they trust the facts, as well as the sources providing the facts in the articles they've written. According to *Die Burger's* Code of Conduct (2002):

If not, is there a way to tell the story more accurately and if you question the credibility of your sources, can you replace them in order to retain the factual credibility of the story?

The accuracy of reports is tied directly to the notion of responsibility toward the public. Retief (2001:49) maintains that inaccurate reporting could cause irreparable personal harm and prevents the public from making informed decisions. Siebert *et al.* (1963:101) explain that although freedom of expression is a moral right with an aspect of duty about it (according to the social responsibility theory) it is not sufficient to merely protect the right of the press to free expression; it also is imperative to protect the citizen's right to adequate information. In this regard, the right to adequate information constitutes a gathering of the relevant facts of a story, verifying these facts and placing them in a context that is understood as fair.

3.4.1 Accuracy, verification and anonymity

Die Burger's code of conduct expects its journalists to verify facts of a story with sources other than the main source of the story. Verification of facts is one way to ensure that the facts of a story are in fact true. For this reason, a journalist may have alternative people to draw on to confirm a statement made by one source.

In contrast the method of verification on a j-blog may differ with the use of open-source journalism, which is where the j-blogger links to other websites as a form of referencing and where the audience can contribute to the verification of information on a post. Robinson (2006:75) states that the *New York Times*, which posted its first blog during the

2004 presidential elections in the USA adapted to these changing of norms of the online medium. According to Robinson (2006:75):

This represents a significant departure; traditionally, newspapers have been loathe sending audiences off the news site into the dark unknown, unverifiable realm of the web but on the j-blog readers are key sources in the blog world and as a result audience agency is changing.

Jay Rosen (2004:1) maintains that in general readers know more than journalists do, but that journalists have to be open to it. According to Rosen (2004:2):

The audience always knew more, but [before the Internet] it didn't have a network for pulling its scattered self together.

Advocates for the use of open-source journalism (Morozov, 2005) maintain that the "open architecture" of the Internet and flexibility of online publishing is in conflict with established standards and practices executed by the traditional media. The use of the audience as a means of verification constitutes one such conflict. *Die Burger's* code of conduct advocates the verification of information through other sources. The code of conduct is comprehensive so as to enable journalists at the newspaper who are confronted with various topics on a daily basis, to report accurately.

The code of conduct for bloggers proposed by Blood (2003a) states that bloggers should note questionable and biased sources and references by way of links, if possible. Kuhn (2005:22) similarly maintains that journalists should cite and link to all sources online in his Code of Blogging Ethics. Dube (2004) posits that bloggers should identify and link to sources and make sure blog entries, quotations and headlines do not misrepresent facts in the post. According to Dube (2004), bloggers should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.

Though not as detailed as *Die Burger's* code of conduct, all the codes proposed for bloggers referred to in this study convey the fundamental importance of accuracy in

reporting through hyperlinking and reporting in context on a blog. The use of the audience as another form of accuracy and verification – as suggested by various theorists (for example, Robinson, 2006) is not discussed in *Die Burger*'s code of conduct signifying the fact that the newspaper's blogging section has not yet been taken into account in its code of conduct. Though Dube (2004) and Kuhn (2005) both highlight the need to link information and promote interactivity and dialogue with the public on blogs, these codes of conduct do not explicitly state the use of the audience as another form of verification. Morozov (2005:18) states that one sticky point in the debate concerning the implications of the online medium [referring specifically to blogs] for traditional journalistic practice is based on the assumption that the wider range of open journalism standards makes these standards somehow lower than the standards of traditional journalism. Morozov (2005:18) continues:

Not surprisingly efforts have been made by weblog authors to reconcile blogging practices with established journalistic principles (Blood, 2002; Cyberjournalist.net) because these principles are grounded in traditionalist notions of social journalistic responsibilities and serve as the basis for widely accepted professional codes of ethics.

Various ethical concepts and practices found in the codes of conduct of traditional media outlets have filtered through, but are stated more concisely into codes of conduct for bloggers. For example *Die Burger*'s code of conduct stipulates comprehensively its social responsibility toward its public by, for example, asking whether journalists have displayed the necessary amount of compassion for subjects who have been negatively affected by a story in the newspaper.

Correspondingly, Dube (2004) states that bloggers should treat sources and subjects as people, deserving of respect and show compassion for those who have been negatively affected by blog content. Where *Die Burger* places an emphasis on sourcing facts to achieve truth, the code of conduct proposed by Blood (2003a) states that bloggers “publish as fact that which they believe to be true and that if statements are speculation, [the blogger] should say so” (Blood, 2003a). Blood (2003a) further stipulates that

bloggers should “note questionable biased sources”. In comparison to *Die Burger*’s more comprehensive code of conduct, Blood’s proposal is more concise. Dube’s code of conduct for bloggers (2004) stipulates that bloggers “be honest and fair [...] this entails not plagiarising and linking to sources wherever possible” (Dube, 2004). Dube (2004) further cautions bloggers not to publish inaccurate information and like Blood (2003a) says that bloggers “should make it clear if something is in doubt” (Dube, 2004). Dube (2004) maintains that “only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into someone’s privacy,” thereby recognising the justification of the public interest as a means to obtain information that would not otherwise be possible.

Die Burger’s code of conduct further discusses the use of profane language or obscenities and asks its journalists to question the use of these. “The context within which this takes place, as well as publishing what is in the public’s interest” (*Die Burger*’s Code of Conduct, 2002) is mentioned as essential and used as controls to check the necessity thereof. In comparison, Kuhn (2005:22) asserts that bloggers should “be accountable for information posted on blogs”. Kuhn (2005), Blood (2003a) and Dube (2004) all offer proposals that, if adopted, are well-intentioned guidelines to facilitate responsibility toward the reading public.

Die Burger’s code of conduct stipulates guidelines for journalists using anonymous sources and asks: “Are you prepared to defend the use of anonymous sources in public?” (*Die Burger*’s Code of Conduct, 2002) According to Steyn (2007), readers commenting on issues anonymously on j-blogs should be treated with caution. The medium of blogging is one that lends itself to the idea of anonymity and in the case of j-blogging the seriousness of and context within which the exchange of comments take place should be considered. *Die Burger*’s verification system used as a control to verify comments posted, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4.2 Fairness and confidentiality

The concepts of fairness and objectivity are articulated in the findings of the Hutchins Commission as discussed in the theory of social responsibility (Siebert *et al.*, 1963).

Siebert *et al.* (1963:88) posit that the Hutchins Commission stated in its report that it is no longer enough to report the fact truthfully but that it was now necessary to report the truth about fact:

In adhering to objective reporting, the press has tried to present more than one side to a story; but in doing so, the suggestion is [...] the media have not supplied the perspective essential to a complete understanding of a given situation.

Die Burger's code of conduct asks its journalists to check the fairness of their articles by asking themselves whether the meaning of that which is being reported is changed by an under or overemphasis of the facts. Furthermore, journalists should consider whether they have done their best to get all sides of the story and if those affected by the story in a negative way have had the chance to respond. The findings of the Hutchins Commission emphasised that it is the function of the press to provide context to each story. In this regard *Die Burger's* code of conduct (2002) asks:

Have you ensured that your facts and quotations from people with whom you had interviews are placed in the proper context?

Robinson (2006:77) argues that blogging by its very nature tends to favour opinion and that journalists recognise that a new personal journalism seems to be popular. While *The New York Times' Company Policy on Ethics in Journalism* (2007) states that their j-bloggers should avoid taking stands on divisive public issues on their j-blogs, Steyn (2007) asserts that on *Die Burger's* j-blogs, it is not uncommon for a j-blogger to take a stance on a particular matter. "In fact, we encourage it," declares Steyn (2007).

In a proposal for a bloggers' code of conduct Dube (2004) asserts that j-bloggers be "honest and fair", while Kuhn (2005) suggests in a Code of Blogging Ethics that j-bloggers should be accountable for information posted on their blogs. None of the proposals for bloggers' ethical codes discussed above explicitly mention providing both sides of the story on a post. In comparison, *Die Burger's* code of conduct explicitly asks

that journalists be fair in their reportage. This signifies another tension between traditional journalistic values and the practices of the j-blogger. Steyn (2007) asserts that to some of the j-bloggers at *Die Burger*, writing on the j-blog is very similar to writing for a column in a newspaper – where opinions are allowed. According to Siebert *et al.* (1963:88) the Hutchins Commission stated that “the press should separate news from opinion”. Thus, as with the newspaper, a post on a j-blog at *Die Burger* should state when what is on the blog is an opinion. In this regard Dube (2004) states that bloggers should distinguish between advocacy, commentary and factual information on the blog. “Even advocacy writing and commentary should not misrepresent fact or context,” states Dube (2004).

Another form of displaying fairness on a j-blog is to provide the audience with enough additional information for them to make informed decisions. Singer (2006b:187) claims that j-bloggers can enhance their accountability and transparency by providing extensive hyperlinks to sources and related material. This will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Die Burger further stipulates that journalists have a responsibility toward their sources in terms of confidentiality. “Try to get the source to reveal his or her name in public and if this is not possible, try to get the information from another source who is willing to make his or her name public,” states *Die Burger’s* Code of Conduct (2002). Anonymous sources are not allowed to use *Die Burger* to promote their personal campaigns or to attack someone else: “If someone else is attacked, this person should be given the opportunity to respond” (*Die Burger’s* Code of Conduct, 2002). These guidelines emphasise the notion of fairness and are important in the context of social responsibility toward readers (see Chapter 4).

3.4.3 Act independently

Die Burger’s Code of Conduct requires its journalists to ask whether free gifts or trips bestowed on them by sources will affect their credibility. In order to act independently, the newspaper is clear about the acceptance of gifts and trips and insists that these should

be returned or paid for by the newspaper itself. *Die Burger's* Code of Conduct (2002) states:

Journalists should be cautious when regarding their affiliation with organisations, political or culturally and that this should not affect their credibility in their positions as journalists for *Die Burger*.

Involvement with any activity outside of the newspaper should be disclosed to the editors of the newspaper. The *New York Times* Ethical Policy (2007) stipulates that its j-bloggers should not allow their personal journals to interfere with their professional reporting and that the blogs of all staff must be independently produced. Blood (2003a) and Dube (2004) assert that bloggers should disclose any conflict of interest on their blogs. This is a good idea and would allow readers to decide whether what is posted may be potentially biased. J-bloggers working for *Die Burger* could disclose possible conflict of interest on the j-blog, though the current code of conduct already stipulates that situations of this nature should be reported to the editor.

3.4.4 Promote dialogue and correct errors

Siebert *et al.* (1963:89) posit that the Hutchins Commission found that the press should serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism". Establishing j-blogs at *Die Burger* is another platform where public discussion can take place. The goal of transparency is outlined in the code of conduct with the stipulation that news coverage should be thoroughly explained to readers to promote dialogue with the public about the journalists' behaviour. The code further stipulates that any errors should be willingly corrected as soon as possible in the publication. Similarly, many codes of conduct for bloggers highlight the promotion of interactivity on the blog and place a strong emphasis on the correction of errors. Dube (2004) stipulates that mistakes should be admitted and promptly corrected, while Blood (2003a) states any misinformation should be publicly corrected.

3.5 Critique of the professional journalism model

Thus far, this study has ascertained that *Die Burger's* Code of Conduct upholds professional journalistic standards to achieve responsible and balanced reporting. However, professional journalism has been criticised on various accounts. For example, Cunningham (2003:7) asserts that not only are news reporters expected to work within a newsframe, where formulas, such as the inverted pyramid are often applied; many theorists, including Cunningham, believe that it is not entirely possible to be objective. Tom Regan (2003:70) contends that journalists who present “fair and balanced” news are often disguising corporate and political agendas.

Barlow (2007:131) argues that political blogs, especially, have been a spontaneous response by the public to the failures of professional and commercial journalism to provide comprehensive news and analysis. This assertion is evident with events, such as Hurricane Bonnie, September 11, 2001, the 2004 presidential election and Hurricane Katrina in the USA, that all served as landmarks in the rise of blogs (Campbell *et al.*, 2007:3). Campbell *et al.* (2007:3) assert that the dramatic quality and unprecedented scale of the disaster (of Hurricane Bonnie) fueled public hunger for regular updates and the mainstream media struggled to cope. According to Lasica (2003a:77), viewers of mainstream journalism are drawn to blogs because no obvious gatekeeping exists that could keep bloggers from reporting their feelings on matters.

The role of gatekeeping in journalism has often been criticised. Fourie (2001:205) contends that the primary effect of gatekeeping – a journalistic method in which certain information passes through a series of checkpoints before finally being accepted as news material – changes the original message in some way. Fourie (2001:205) continues and maintains that gatekeeping may compromise the ethical concept of accuracy:

What readers read in a newspaper [...] is thus seldom an accurate reflection of reality.

This assertion is emphasised by Bowman and Willis (2003:7), who posit that the profession of journalism finds itself in a rare moment in history where for the first time, its hegemony as gatekeeper of the news is not only threatened by technology and its competitors, but potentially by the audience it serves through blogs.

Blogs may originally have been viewed as alternative to mainstream media but with professional journalists who now blog for mainstream news outlets, j-blogs may play an important role as originators, resuscitators and reframers of news in relation to the mainstream media as stated by Campbell *et al.* (2007:12). Thus following on this paper's discussion of the alternative interpretation of ethical concepts, such as accuracy, fairness and the use of anonymous sources on the j-blog, a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* should consider the potential that j-bloggers have for the newspaper by recognising these interpretations.

3.6 Summary

By comparing *Die Burger's* ethical code of conduct with some existing bloggers' codes of conduct, we can deduce that *Die Burger* offers clear and more defined practical guidelines for its mainstream journalists than do most codes of conduct for bloggers. This seems to aid the promotion of *Die Burger's* social responsibility toward readers and to motivate and direct journalists to conduct themselves ethically in the traditional medium. Interesting questions arise when comparing *Die Burger's* code of conduct to current codes of conduct for bloggers in that *Die Burger's* code of conduct seemingly covers most of the areas discussed in relation to codes for bloggers. This would call into question the need for a separate code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*. However, some issues may still arise pertaining to the changing relationship between j-bloggers and the audience, for example, the use of the audience as verification, as suggested by the open-source journalism function to which Robinson (2006:77) refers. In contrast to traditional journalism, the j-blog also offers the j-blogger the opportunity to link to various materials as a form of referencing. Another significant difference between traditional journalism and the j-blog is that the latter is confronted with the concept of

anonymity more so than in the mainstream and must therefore be especially careful when using anonymous sources (for example, readers with pseudonyms) on j-blogs.

In response to the first research question – Does the current ethical code at *Die Burger* cover the interests of the j-bloggers and the readers compared to codes of ethics for bloggers? – we can deduce that the current code of ethics at *Die Burger* does cover the interests of its readers in terms of the model of social responsibility in which it was developed. The code of conduct tries to ensure that readers are protected in each principle that is comprehensively outlined in the newspaper's code of conduct. In comparison to the current proposals for bloggers' codes of ethics, *Die Burger*'s code of conduct does, to a greater extent, equip j-bloggers to practise ethically in this medium as the code addresses several possible scenarios for journalists and clearly explains the newspaper's stance on these matters. *Die Burger*'s code of conduct is unambiguous in its principle of minimising harm, while the bloggers' codes of conduct put forward by Blood (2003a), Dube (2004) and Kuhn (2005) similarly recognise the protection of privacy of individuals and that bloggers accept responsibility for what they write.

Dube (2004) and Blood (2003a) suggest that j-bloggers should disclose possible conflict of interest (if any) on their j-blogs to allow members of the audience to decide for themselves whether the statements made on the j-blog are accurate. With regard to the concept of fairness, j-bloggers may want to offer opposing viewpoints in the form of links or comments. Dube (2004) suggests that bloggers accept responsibility for their writing or statements on the blog, which is also outlined as a principle of *Die Burger*'s code of ethics.

The notions of open-source journalism, through hyperlinking or readers' comments are not mentioned in *Die Burger*'s code of conduct. The extent to which online media is different from other traditional journalistic media, shows that one can expect it to be used differently as well, as Morozov (2005:21) contends:

It can be argued that trust in a profession depends on its ability to do what the members of the public expect it to do for them. The assumption that the

public expects online journalists to merely replicate and conform to the conventions of traditional journalism may have to be revisited.

Morozov's assertion indicates that the practices of the mainstream journalist on the j-blog cannot definitively be categorised along with those of the mainstream journalist who writes for a traditional newspaper. This suggests that practices which are specific to the work of the j-blogger, described by aspects of the theoretical democratic-participant model should be taken into account in a code of conduct for j-bloggers. In order to frame this discussion theoretically, the democratic-participant model of the media will be referred to (where relevant) in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 presents the findings of in-depth, unstructured interviews on the feasibility of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* with journalists, the editors, the ombudsman and j-bloggers of the newspaper.

Chapter 4

The feasibility of a Code of Conduct for J-bloggers at *Die Burger*

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 is a discussion of the results from unstructured in-depth interviews with a number of stakeholders at *Die Burger*, including print journalists, j-bloggers, the editor, the multimedia editor and the ombudsman of the newspaper. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the view of role players with regards to the feasibility of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*. Drawing from discussions about the interpretation of ethical concepts on j-blogs in Chapters 2 and 3, the in-depth interviews centred around the salient notions of accuracy, fairness and anonymity of sources in a proposed code of conduct for j-bloggers.

4.2 Research methodology

Du Plooy (1995:112) states that in-depth interviews can provide detailed background about the reasons why participants give specific answers. In-depth interviews also provide extensive data concerning participants' opinions, recollections, values, motivations and feelings. The in-depth interviews for this study were unstructured conversations with thirteen participants of whom the majority were j-bloggers. The main issue under discussion was the composition of the content for a possible code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*. Three print journalists were also interviewed in this study for their opinions regarding the practices associated with blogging. The editor, multimedia editor and the ombudsman of the newspaper were interviewed about the current code of conduct, as well as the greater role and contexts of the newspaper and j-blogs in society. The feasibility of a code of conduct for j-bloggers was discussed with participants of the study.

In Chapter 3 it was established that *Die Burger's* code of conduct specifically aims to protect its reading public from harm but that some ethical concepts in the code of conduct may be considered differently for j-blogs. Chapter 2 established that *Die Burger's* code of

conduct operates mainly within the normative framework of social responsibility. However, the introduction of j-blogs and the specific practice thereof in the mainstream media resulted in the observation that the theory of social responsibility intersects in some respects with a democratic-participant theory of the media. Theoretically both these theories will thus be considered when discussing a code of conduct for j-bloggers.

The concepts of accuracy, fairness and the use of anonymous sources distilled from previous chapters in this study were discussed with the participants to gain some insight into their opinions of writing on the j-blog at *Die Burger*, as well as ethical considerations in this medium.

4.3 J-blogs at *Die Burger*

The in-depth interviews commenced with a general discussion about what the function of the j-blog at *Die Burger* should be and how j-bloggers view their role in this medium. According to the multimedia editor of *Die Burger*, De Waal Steyn (2007), j-bloggers at *Die Burger* are institutionalised bloggers who work within a structured media environment where a code of conduct applies. Steyn (2007) asserts:

This blogger is different from the social blogger who delivers social comment outside the ambit of mainstream journalism because he or she has journalistic responsibilities toward the public.

Steyn (2007) further argues that j-bloggers should be critical of what they write on the blogs and that the onus to be responsible toward the public is on the j-blogger. Henry Jeffreys (2007), editor of *Die Burger*, posits that a j-blogger should maintain responsibility on the j-blog at all times, especially because in comparison to the role of the mainstream journalist who works for the newspaper, the j-blogger is a “one-man show”. One other responsibility that j-bloggers have is to be engaged with the readers of the j-blog as much as possible. The sense of immediacy of the j-blog was picked up in the interviews with j-bloggers. Le Roux Schoeman (2007), a j-blogger who writes about a

variety of topics at *Die Burger*, asserted there is pressure on the j-blogger to engage with readers almost immediately after a post has been published.

One print journalist who often writes about religion, Johannes de Villiers, revealed that he thinks j-bloggers should be “mediators in a conversation with the audience” (2007). De Villiers, a former j-blogger, maintains that a j-blogger’s role in the mainstream media should function as an “agent in conversation rather than to preach to the audience” (2007). According to De Villiers (2007) the j-blogger is one who initiates the conversation with the audience but is not one who gives the final judgement over the truth. One way of achieving this is to allow the audience to debate among themselves, he says.

However, Altus Momberg (2007), a j-blogger and sports writer at *Die Burger*, says he tries not to engage in a debate with the audience about his post. Momberg’s statement is illustrative of Boczkowski’s (2002:277) assertion that journalists in general are not keen to interact with their audience. However, a minority of j-bloggers at *Die Burger* said that they did not like to engage with audiences.

Some participants asserted that a j-blog is a space for the individual journalist to assert his or her opinion on a matter – much like the opinion columns in the newspaper – with the only difference being that the audience can engage with the subject matter online and therefore much faster than in the newspaper. However, Steyn (2007) maintains that the j-blog is shorter and carries more punch than a newspaper column with, for example, rich content like hyperlinks, thus making the approach to reading content on a j-blog quite different to reading a newspaper article.

In the interviews it was generally stated that the function of a j-blogger is to continue to be a responsible journalist who engages in a conversation with the audience as much as possible. According to Willem Jordaan (2007), a political j-blogger at *Die Burger*, the current code of conduct at *Die Burger* lends a form of professional status to the j-blogs but separate guidelines for j-bloggers could be useful to ease the tension between blogging and mainstream journalism by accommodating the interpretations of ethical

concepts on j-blogs. George Claassen (2007), *Die Burger's* ombudsman, asserts that the current code of conduct of *Die Burger* suffices for j-blogs in terms of censoring harmful content. This is important from a mainstream perspective. Claassen's view is particularly important for the discussion of the composition of a code of conduct for j-bloggers as he is also the author of the current code of conduct for the mainstream newspaper.

The following section of this chapter reports on discussions about *Die Burger's* current code of conduct, highlighting the concept of open-source journalism as a means to be more accurate, posting opposing opinions or links to opposing material as a means of fairness and the use of anonymous commentators as a source on a j-blog. At the end of this chapter, I aim to determine what the feasibility of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* is.

4.3.1 Open-source journalism in *Die Burger's* code of conduct for j-bloggers

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, open-source journalism functions in two ways on a blog. Firstly, when making use of open-source journalism, a j-blogger may use comments from the audience as another means to verify information posted on the blog (if applicable); and secondly, the post could link to other material online to verify the facts of what had been written. The concept of open-source journalism was explained to the participants in this study.

Four participants did not entirely agree with the concept of open-source journalism as a means to ensure accuracy on a blog. Schoeman (2007) posits that comments on a j-blog cannot be entirely regulated because the democracy of the blogging platform allows everyone, regardless of their designation or expertise or lack thereof in any field, to comment on the blog. According to Schoeman (2007) the use of audience as a means of verification on the j-blog is not entirely reliable. Schoeman suggested that j-bloggers should invite comments at all times as this heightens the spontaneity of the conversation but that using comments as a means of fact checking would not work as a guideline for j-bloggers. Momberg (2007) asserted that a j-blog exists solely as a tool for journalists to convey their opinion. He concurs with Schoeman (2007) about the democracy of the j-

blog adding that the audience's credibility cannot be entirely trusted. Momberg asserts that in general comments from readers cannot necessarily be trusted as a means of verification. Lamprecht (2007), a print journalist about a variety of topics, asserts that the j-blogger, like the mainstream journalist, should avoid inaccuracies on the j-blog entirely which would leave no room for the audience to correct him or her. According to Lamprecht (2007):

The basis of what you're saying on the j-blog should be the truth and furthermore, an opinion on a j-blog cannot be verified.

Claassen (2007) asserts that the audience already contributes to the accuracy of the articles in the newspaper and agrees with Lamprecht (2007). The j-blogger should ask whether he is factually accurate before publishing the post on a blog says Claassen, (2007).

While the participants agreed that the basis of a j-blog post should be truthful and that if it is not, the j-blogger should say so, some agreed that using the audience as another means of verifying facts could work as a guideline for j-bloggers. However, if the comments of readers were to be used as a guideline for bloggers, it was necessary to establish some boundaries. Eunice Visagie (2007), a j-blogger, who writes about sport and fitness maintained that it is important for the j-blogger not to get carried away with what the reader is saying. J-bloggers must remember that they have the responsibility to make sure everything is accurate on the j-blog (Visagie, 2007). Jeanne Hugo (2007) and Stephen Nell (2007), both j-bloggers who write movie reviews and sport stories, Steyn (2007) and Rolls (2007), a print journalist who writes on a variety of topics, all agree that the audience's comments could be useful but that the j-blogger needs to be especially careful when using these in a follow-up post. They argue that j-bloggers must make sure that the j-blog is not being abused by readers and that the comments from members of the audience are valid. Rolls (2007) maintains that the j-blogger should verify comments from the audience if it is going to be used in a follow-up post.

According to De Villiers (2007) we should always question the myth that the print media is necessarily more trustworthy than blogs because the opposite of this can also be true. “Mistakes in the factual columns of newspapers – which may constitute only a small portion of mistakes in the newspaper – is evidence of this,” said De Villiers (2007). De Villiers (2007) maintains that j-blogs have an advantage in this respect since mistakes are quickly picked up and corrected on this platform. De Villiers (2007) continues:

However, we should not see j-blogs in the same way as we view the static model of the print media because a blog is not a once-off record to be used as a reference to certain events, instead it is a conversation that aims, through other comments, to get to the truth.

Gerrit Brand (2007), a j-blogger who writes for the arts section, concurs with De Villiers, saying that truth is mainly achieved through a conversation with the audience on the j-blog and that dialogue further promotes the accuracy of statements, thereby making comments from the audience useful. Several other participants, such as Nell, Hugo, Visagie and Rolls agreed that feedback from the audience may be useful on a j-blog. Drawing from this, it may be argued that using the audience as a means of accuracy could constitute a guideline for a code of conduct, but that ultimately the j-blogger has the responsibility to verify statements made by the audience on the j-blog.

The other element of open-source journalism that the open architecture of the Internet allows, is the employment of hyperlinks to other sources as a means of providing the audience with more or other reading material about the topic. Schoeman (2007) asserts that using links on a j-blog makes a difference in establishing credibility among audiences. Jeffreys (2007) notes that a j-blogger who writes factual information on the j-blog has the same responsibilities as the mainstream journalist in referring to sources and is therefore encouraged to link to online sources as a form of reference. Importantly, all the participants found linking to other sources on the j-blog valuable but commented that these sources had to be trustworthy. In this regard, Steyn (2007) asserts that it is important for the j-blogger to make sure the linked sources are credible in journalistic

terms. This would include using links to other news sources or widely acknowledged websites.

This section of the chapter highlights how some tenets of the democratic-participant theory of the media may be relevant in the description of some of the practices of j-bloggers at *Die Burger*. The concept of open-source journalism places an increased emphasis on the participation of the audience on j-blogs. The open-source journalism model describes how j-bloggers may use comments from the audience in follow-up posts or where applicable, as a means of verification. Open-source journalism also suggests that j-bloggers may link to other sources online. These practices, particularly the inclusion of comments from the audiences on the j-blog, are indicative of the argument made by McQuail (1983:97) that the central point of the democratic-participant theory lies with the needs and interests of the receiver. Some participants in the study, for example, Schoeman (2007) and Momberg (2007), expressed concerns about the democracy of j-blogs which, according to them, means the audience's comments are not completely reliable as a means of verification. This concern may stem from the idea that traditionally, comments made by readers are edited and verified before they are published in the newspaper. Comments on j-blogs do not go through the same process. In this regard, Momberg (2007) asserted that not all comments made by readers may be used in follow-up posts or as a means of verification because one cannot always trust them.

Many of the other participants agreed that open-source journalism on j-blogs may be useful. They asserted, however, that when using comments for follow-up posts, the j-blogger be responsible and verify such comments first. Some participants, for example, . Claassen (2007) and Lamprecht (2007), stated that with regard to accuracy, j-bloggers should not post inaccuracies on j-blogs in the first place. These comments are indicative of the role that the social responsibility theory plays at *Die Burger*. Singer (2006a:5) argues that some conflicting approaches to the notion of social responsibility – for example reconciling the ideas of freedom of the press and responsibility – have left journalists seeking ways to resolve this apparent conflict. Singer (2006a:5) continues:

One approach has been to emphasise the ethical decision to use freedom in responsible ways [...] and another approach has been to qualify the notion of freedom as independence from political or social faction rather than from a commitment to the public at large.

Singer (2006a:6) asserts that journalists as an occupational group have turned toward professional norms to help resolve the conflict between freedom and responsibility. Thus, although j-bloggers could use open-source journalism as a means of improving accuracy on j-blogs, which is a significant move away from the traditional idea of accuracy in professional journalism, they also have the responsibility to continue to be accurate and responsible in this regard. Responsibility would, as argued by the participants, include verifying comments from the audience if they were to be used in a follow-up post.

4.3.2 Fairness on j-blogs

As discussed in Chapter 3, *Die Burger's* code of conduct stipulates that journalists should be fair in their reporting by offering a fair and balanced account of the day's events. This includes offering counter-perspectives and allowing both sides of a story to reflect in a news article. In terms of j-blogging, this study has already indicated that opposing views of statements made on a j-blog post could easily be offered, either through comments from the audience (if applicable) or by linking to sources which may offer another perspective on the same topic.

From the interviews it was determined that some participants in this study had not previously considered offering an opposing view in an attempt to be fair on the j-blog. One shared reason for this was the idea that the j-blog constituted what Singer (2006b:178) termed as "privileging individual opinion". For example, Brand (2007), Steyn (2007), Momberg (2007) and Lamprecht (2007) maintained that the purpose of the j-blog is to take a stance on a matter and to present an opinion and that it should be encouraged in this medium. Brand (2007) who writes and blogs for *Die Burger's* art and entertainment section, maintains:

The field of journalism I work in almost wholly constitutes offering a subjective opinion on a matter, so realistically I don't write much else other than my opinion.

However, while many of the j-bloggers confirmed that the j-blog offers them the opportunity to air their views on a matter, it was found that the suggestion of offering opposing views or using the opposing comments from readers in order to be fair could be employed in a code of conduct for j-bloggers. Some of the reasons included:

- It could strengthen the j-blogger's argument if an opposing argument is voluntarily offered (Nell, 2007).
- It would challenge people to think more critically about a subject if other arguments were used; offering counterpoints is a clever way to blog (Hugo, 2007).
- J-bloggers have a responsibility toward their readers to be critical of their opinions; to milk a subject for all it is worth (Rolls, 2007).
- It will heighten the credibility of the blog (Visagie, 2007).

Other participants felt that the medium of the j-blog itself constitutes fairness by means of the dialogue between the j-blogger and the audience. Claassen (2007), for example, notes that it is not necessary for the j-blogger to offer an opposing view (voluntarily) because fairness already plays a role when the reader makes a comment on the blog. Brand (2007) concurs that an opposing view is not necessary but adds that the truth of a matter is always established through dialogue and that he welcomes comments from readers. De Villiers (2007) also posits that the j-blogger should use reader comments to be fair. Rolls (2007), Visagie (2007), Hugo (2007), Jordaan (2007) and Steyn (2007) maintain that reader comments may be useful, but that these comments should be thoroughly examined and should not contain defamatory or harmful content before it is used in a follow-up post.

Both Claassen (2007) and Schoeman (2007) note that the speed with which communication between a j-blogger and the audience takes place – as opposed to communication between readers of the newspaper and the journalists – already has the

merit of fairness because opposing views may be seen at a faster rate than with the newspaper in the form of comments from readers.

The majority of the participants agreed, in varying degrees, that j-bloggers have the responsibility to be fair on j-blogs. Some participants stated that offering opposing views through links and voluntarily using reader comments in follow-up posts could be useful as guidelines for j-bloggers at *Die Burger*, while others think that the existence of reader comments alone already constituted fairness. Jordaan (2007), Visagie (2007), Steyn (2007) and Lamprecht (2007) note that these suggestions may be useful to serve as guidelines in addition to *Die Burger*'s current code of conduct. However, it was argued that comments may be used voluntarily. One reason for the latter comments may be the "grey area that opinionated j-bloggers present" to which Jeffreys (2007) refers.

Chapter 3 showed how, in terms of the social responsibility theory, the mainstream media should separate comments and opinions from fact in a newspaper. Jeffreys (2007) and Schoeman (2007) both recommend that j-bloggers at *Die Burger* need to separate posts about fact from posts containing their opinion. According to Jeffreys (2007):

J-bloggers at *Die Burger* need to state on the j-blog whether they are writing factually or presenting an opinion.

This comment is useful with regard to the recommendation that j-bloggers should be fair in their posts. Although some participants felt that it was not necessary to establish a modicum of fairness on the j-blogs, separating facts from opinion on the j-blogs could lead to those j-bloggers who post facts executing some of the abovementioned recommendations to be fair.

However, this suggestion is confounded by the claim that j-bloggers often mix facts with their opinion. Nell (2007) says that he often writes his opinions on factual information on his blog. Steyn (2007) notes that it is acceptable for j-bloggers to state their opinion about facts. The abovementioned stipulation that j-bloggers make a distinction between fact and opinion may thus be useful only as a recommendation in a code of conduct for j-bloggers.

Furthermore, it may be deduced from the interviews that j-bloggers could try to be fair on their blogs either by considering contrasting views from readers as follow-up posts or by linking to conflicting opinions on other websites. The use of the comments should be considered carefully and examined for harmful content before being used in a follow-up post while hyperlinks should refer to credible online sources.

The suggestion that offering an opposing opinion on j-blogs either through the use of a reader's comment or by linking to an online source with an opposing opinion illustrates the complexity of the intersection of the social responsibility and the democratic-participant theories. The democratic-participant theory emphasises that the nature of communication between the communicator and the recipient should be horizontal. Where the democratic-participant theory emphasises interactivity – which in this study invariably includes readers' comments and linking to other sources – the social responsibility theory, like some other theories of the press presumes a linearity in the process of communication that relies on a fixed idea of authorship, text and audience (Cover, 2004:174).

The Hutchins Commission of the 1940s found that the media have not supplied the perspective essential to a complete understanding of a given situation (Siebert *et al.*, 1963:88). The suggestion is that journalists should ensure that facts and quotations are placed in the proper context. I argue that on the j-blog, providing an opinion and linking to other opinions or using an opposing opinion from a reader can also constitute providing perspective to a story. Some participants have argued that voluntarily providing a counter opinion to what is written on a j-blog may even strengthen the argument of the original post.

The social responsibility theory stipulates that the press should separate fact from opinion. However, from the arguments presented by study participants, separating facts from opinion on j-blogs may serve only as a recommendation for j-bloggers in a code of conduct. One must take into account that the extent to which j-bloggers may or may not adhere to this recommendation is compounded by the suggestion that j-bloggers often write their opinion based on facts. Although this is not too different from opinion

columns in the newspaper, one must also bear in mind that unlike the newspaper, j-blogs do not consist of various sections which provide the reader with clear distinctions between news and opinion.

4.3.3 The use of anonymous sources

Robinson (2006) suggests that j-bloggers aid in audience agency by sometimes using comments from readers as sources on a j-blog for writing follow-up posts. Comments from anonymous readers could therefore constitute a source as it is understood in the traditional sense at *Die Burger*. It has also been established in the previous section of this chapter, that j-bloggers can use comments from readers in follow-up posts in order to further discuss a topic. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, *Die Burger*'s current code of conduct because anonymous sources are only to be used in exceptional circumstances.

Therefore *Die Burger*'s verification system was discussed with the editor of the multimedia editor, De Waal Steyn. According to Steyn (2007), all commentators have to make use of a verification process before their comments may be seen online:

This involves registering the Internet Protocol (IP) address of the computer by way of identifying hidden letters and numbers as a security measure which allows us to track the location of the computer that the individual commentator uses.

According to Steyn (2007), the verification system for *Die Burger*'s blogs is a measure to protect the newspaper. Steyn (2007) does encourage the use of anonymous sources however, and asserts that readers may have valid points:

The culture of anonymous sources is inherently part of the blogging culture which originated from anonymity in online chat rooms.

Lamprecht (2007) agrees that the anonymity of comments is an accepted part of blogging culture, and Schoeman (2007) asserts that the anonymity of comments heightens the

spontaneity of the interaction between the j-blogger and the reader. Claassen (2007), Momberg (2007) and De Villiers (2007) assert that the anonymity of commentators highlights the potential problems of slander, defamation and harmful content which may arise on the j-blog. However, De Villiers (2007) notes:

Even if people do register their IP addresses before they post a comment, this registration does not hold much value. Despite this, we should, as is the case with the newspaper's letters page, remember our readers are not sheep and they can distinguish between sources who post anonymously and comments from people who post under their real name.

De Villiers (2007) further argues that readers will be able to make this distinction based on the authority attached to a source. Similarly, Nell (2007) also argues this point adding that he often senses that people who comment on his blog anonymously know more about a subject than they are letting on and that the use of anonymous sources cannot be ignored on the blog. Nell (2007) further argues:

Even so, we as j-bloggers should be especially careful not to allow or use slanderous or offensive comments on our blogs.

Brand (2007), Jordaan (2007), Hugo (2007), Rolls (2007) Visagie (2007), De Villiers (2007), Schoeman (2007) and Lamprecht (2007) agree that anonymous comments may be used on j-blogs, but that j-bloggers have to be especially sensitive when using these in follow-up posts. In the interviews, the following general comments were made with regard to the use of anonymous comments on blogs:

- J-bloggers should not allow the anonymity of sources to get in the way of a potential story. One's readership can provide a great number of leads (Rolls, 2007).
- As a j-blogger, you must recognise that you take the lead in what is said on your blog and must therefore be careful not to cause any harm by the use of anonymous sources (Visagie, 2007).

- Even though *Die Burger*'s webmaster may play a role in detecting undesirable comments, the j-blogger should never allow slanderous comments to cause harm to readers (Nell, 2007).
- The j-blogger should play an arbiter role on the j-blog and get to know the trustworthy and regular commentators who may be used in follow-ups. Slanderous comments have to be censored (De Villiers, 2007).
- When using anonymous comments as sources, each matter should be judged by its merits (Lamprecht, 2007 and Brand, 2007).
- J-bloggers should be especially careful not to promote harmful content, which includes profanity (Hugo, 2007).
- J-bloggers should be especially careful when dealing with anonymous comments online (Jeffreys, 2007).

Brand (2007) contends that when using comments from anonymous sources, the j-blogger should at least state that what is being said may be speculation, or follow up the claims made in a post before it is used in a follow-up post. Drawing from the comments made about anonymous sources on the j-blog, it can be assumed that while the participants in this study are not opposed to the use such sources on j-blogs, they placed a significant emphasis on the responsibility of the j-blogger to be cautious with the use of these.

The most salient aspect that came up in the interviews regarding anonymous sources was the potential for slander or the publication of harmful content. *Die Burger*'s verification process allows comments from users who register with the website. However, it was felt that j-bloggers should judge the comments from anonymous sources on their merits and on the weight of the contribution made to j-blog discussions. Participants expressed a need for j-bloggers to base their posts on the truth and foremostly to find credible sources – as is stipulated in the current code of conduct – before considering anonymous comments as a source. The potential of leads for stories in anonymous comments was highlighted and signifies that such comments may have a role to play in this context.

In this section of Chapter 4 the contributions of the audience to discussion on j-blogs, as well as the potential that anonymous comments may have as “originators of news” (Campbell *et al.*, 2007) is evidence of the principles of interactivity and involvement proposed by the democratic-participant theory. The participants emphasised that the responsibility of the j-blogger is to minimise harm by ensuring that defamatory or slanderous anonymous comments are not published. Also facts posted by an anonymous source must be verified if they are to be used in a follow-up post. Credible sources must be found before considering the use of anonymous comments. These proposals highlight the idea from the social responsibility theory that the media should accept certain responsibilities toward society. Hence, both theories are illustrated in the discussion about anonymous sources on the j-blog.

4.3.4 The feasibility and proposed content for a j-bloggers’ code of conduct at *Die Burger*

Ethical concepts in *Die Burger*’s code of conduct, with an emphasis on practical guidelines for j-bloggers were discussed in interviews with participants in this study in order to establish the feasibility of a j-bloggers’ code of conduct at *Die Burger*.

Participants argued that j-bloggers have the responsibility to be accurate in their posting of factual information on j-blogs. Open-source journalism, where the audience may contribute or correct the post of a j-blogger in the form of a comment, can according to participants be used but they argue that j-bloggers must still verify the statements made in the comment before using it in a following-up post. They also argued that j-bloggers should not allow themselves to be misled by the readers of a j-blog or allow a j-blog to be abused by readers. These could take place in the form of readers using the blog as a platform to advance their own causes, for example. Furthermore, participants argued that j-bloggers should promote dialogue with their readers because discussions with varying perspectives on a topic would further promote accuracy. Also j-bloggers should, where appropriate, link to other sources online. In journalistic terms, the participants agreed that the credibility of sources is important.

The consensus was that j-bloggers should be allowed to state their opinion on a matter, but with the recommendation that, where appropriate, factual posts should be distinguished from posts that purely constitute the j-blogger's opinion. J-bloggers agreed that dialogue with readers should be promoted as this will highlight various opinions on the j-blog. The interviews also illustrated the opinion that j-bloggers should be responsible toward readers and should not allow or use slanderous, defamatory or harmful comments in their posts. They argued that j-bloggers should try to be fair on their blogs by offering contrasting views from other sources and/or readers' comments and that sources used should be credible.

It was also stated in the interviews that the nature of a j-blog allows the anonymous posting of comments. Although *Die Burger* verifies and tracks the origin of comments, participants in the study proposed that j-bloggers themselves should take the responsibility to verify the comments made by anonymous readers if they were to be used as a follow-up post. Some participants in this study recognised the potential that anonymous sources may have in providing leads to stories, however they noted that all statements should then first be verified. Where appropriate, j-bloggers should state if an anonymous comment is considered to be speculation. Most importantly, comments that are slanderous, defamatory or amount to hate speech should not be allowed and must be deleted, the participants argue.

Steyn (2007) states that *Die Burger* should lead the way to establish a broad code of conduct for j-bloggers at mainstream organisations. "Such a code of conduct would reflect where the j-bloggers responsibilities begin and end," says Steyn (2007). In this code of conduct the concept of anonymity and the verification of comments from readers, especially, should be discussed (Steyn, 2007).

4.4 Summary

Chapter 4 reported on and discussed unstructured in-depth interviews with j-bloggers, print journalists, as well as the multimedia editor, editor and ombudsman of *Die Burger*. Drawing from the findings in the interviews and in order to approach an answer to research question two – what is the feasibility of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* – it may be concluded that a separate code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* is feasible. However, it would seem that, in many respects, a code of conduct for j-bloggers will overlap with the current code of conduct at the newspaper. For example, the current code of conduct already addresses the issue of conflicts of interest, as discussed in Chapter 3. Thus a separate code could be drawn up for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* but is not necessary. The current code of conduct should rather be improved with a number of additions aimed at j-bloggers.

The suggestion that the practices of j-bloggers must also be considered in a code of conduct at *Die Burger* therefore reflects the intersection of the social responsibility and democratic-participant theories of the media and the extent to which the constantly modifying digital world has made inroads into codes of conduct which govern traditional media like *Die Burger*.

The following chapter constitutes a proposal for additions aimed at j-bloggers which should be included into the current code of conduct for *Die Burger*.

Chapter 5

Summary and conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines a proposal for the contents of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* and therewith concludes the study.

5.2 Proposal for a J-bloggers' Code of Conduct at *Die Burger*

From the discussion with participants in this study, it may be argued that j-bloggers at *Die Burger* would benefit from a code of conduct which addresses that specific practice. However, such a code of conduct would not render the current one for mainstream journalists obsolete for j-bloggers. The code of conduct for j-bloggers would serve a supplementary role in practical terms and could be included in *Die Burger*'s current code. In answer to research question three which asked what a j-bloggers' code of conduct at *Die Burger* would look like, a summary of Chapters 3 and 4 presents a feasible proposal.

5.2.1 Accuracy on j-blogs

- Where applicable, posts on j-blogs must be based on facts. J-bloggers must be able to show that they have used trustworthy sources and that facts have been verified by more than one source. J-bloggers should ensure that all facts and quotations are attributed to credible sources.
- Before posting a comment, j-bloggers should ask themselves if the post reflects the truth as they know it and whether the context of what is said by sources or the j-blogger in posts is reflected accurately.
- When expressing an opinion or the opinions of others on the j-blog it is recommended that j-bloggers indicate when a post contains the opinion of the j-blogger or the opinions of others.
- While members of the audience (readers) provide a wealth of information through their comments on a j-blog post, j-bloggers must ensure that comments are accurate.

- Using the audience as a means of verification on a j-blog may be helpful, but j-bloggers should note that assertions or corrections from the audience (readers) must be verified before from an audience comment is used in a follow-up post.
- J-bloggers have the responsibility to correct inaccurate information as soon as possible and give reasonable prominence to corrections of errors in the original post.
- J-bloggers should not allow their j-blog to be abused by any reader through comments or in any other way.
- J-bloggers should, as much as possible, try to link to other relevant and credible online sources as a means of verification or for the provision of more information.

5.2.2 Fairness on j-blogs

- J-bloggers may express opinions on j-blogs but it is recommended that, where applicable, posts containing only facts should be distinguished from posts that contain an opinion.
- Comments from readers on the j-blog may not be defamatory or slanderous and such comments must be removed immediately.
- J-bloggers should be vigilant of conflict of interest in readers' comments. They must ensure that readers are not using the j-blog as a means to advance their own agenda.
- J-bloggers should try to be fair on their j-blogs by offering contrasting views on a matter from other sources or from online sources and/or reader comments.
- When using other online sources, j-bloggers should link to credible and/or widely acknowledged online sources.

5.2.3 Anonymity of sources on j-blogs

- The nature of the j-blog allows for the posting of anonymous comments. J-bloggers may pick up leads for a story from an anonymous comment. However, this comment should be thoroughly verified before any follow-up posts about it are published.
- Allowing an anonymous comment in a post, and where appropriate, the j-blogger should state that the comment is anonymous and may therefore be speculation.

5.3 Conclusion

By establishing j-blogs *Die Burger* has raised a number of questions regarding the ethical conduct of journalists in this medium. The examination of the feasibility of a code of conduct for j-bloggers at *Die Burger* in this study has highlighted how mainstream ethical norms may be reconsidered when faced by the challenges presented by new media technologies, such as j-blogs. As a manifestation of *Die Burger*'s self-regulating practices, the newspaper enforces an ethical code of conduct which proposes to offer guidelines for journalists. *Die Burger*'s code of conduct includes the notions of accuracy, fairness and the use of anonymous sources, which this study isolated as salient factors in its comparison of ethical codes in both the mainstream media and in the blogosphere. Yet as the world of journalism evolves, with the introduction of new media platforms and technologies, some scholars have argued that journalists would need to develop more sophisticated ethical decision-making skills.

For media practitioners, academics and journalists alike, the proliferation of blogs has raised interesting questions about the role of ethical codes in the current media environment. The discussion in this study suggests that there are some ethical issues that could be interpreted differently in the j-blogging medium at *Die Burger*. These specific issues centre around accuracy, the use of anonymous sources and fairness.

This study found that while mainstream ethical codes in general are comprehensive to ensure responsibility and protection toward readers, bloggers' codes are more concise and need only stipulate a few general guidelines for bloggers to work from. It was found that increased interactivity with audiences online have aided the assertion that j-blogging is an audience-centred medium. The notion of open-source journalism, as suggested by Rosen (2004:1), where the j-blogger may use readers' comments in a follow-up post and link to other online sources as a form of verification, was found to be another way of ensuring accuracy on the j-blog. The open architecture of the Internet (Morozov, 2005) may further promote the notion of fairness through the publication of readers' comments which offer an opposing view to an argument on the j-blog or hyperlinking to other online sources. Furthermore, this study has argued that readers' comments may be

anonymous or posted under a pseudonym – as an accepted part of the online culture (Steyn, 2007). These anonymous comments may be used as leads to news stories or to follow up stories if the facts in the comment are thoroughly verified by j-bloggers.

J-bloggers at *Die Burger* are working according to the newspaper's code of conduct which was drawn up for and is applicable to its mainstream journalists, photographers and graphic artists. This study has examined *Die Burger*'s current code of conduct within the normative framework of social responsibility to determine whether it covers the interests of both the readers and the j-bloggers at the newspaper. The current code of conduct offers clear stipulations and guides responsibility toward the public. However, it was found that the incorporation of particular ethical notions into a code of conduct may assist j-bloggers to employ the medium to its full potential by engaging with audiences and other online material while working according to an ethical code of conduct.

In this study, the composition of a j-bloggers' code of conduct was discussed with print journalists, j-bloggers, the multimedia editor, the ombudsman and the editor of *Die Burger*. The unstructured in-depth interviews were used to determine the feasibility of a j-bloggers' code of conduct by speaking to j-bloggers who are affected by, and have to make decisions according to a code of conduct as several other stakeholders at *Die Burger*. The interviews confirmed the main findings from the literature review that a j-bloggers' code of conduct at *Die Burger* was feasible, but that it would not render the current code of conduct at *Die Burger* obsolete. Instead, the j-bloggers' code of conduct would more specifically address the practices of the j-bloggers and could be used in addition to the current code of conduct.

Having considered the normative ethical framework of social responsibility within which *Die Burger* operates, it was found that some of the principles of the democratic-participant theory are relevant in this study because in practical terms, the work of j-bloggers address some of the specific principles proposed in this theory. McQuail (1983:96) maintained that some of the tenets in the democratic-participant theory are already to be found in other theories of the press. This assertion is confirmed by Fourie (2001:272) who writes that social responsibility theory suggests that the media should

provide the public with a forum for different viewpoints, as well as represent all social groups and reflect the diversity of society. Similarly, the democratic-participant theory has to do with the right of the audience to answer back and the right to use the means of communication for interaction (McQuail, 1983:97). Blevins (1999:2) lends credence to the claim that the democratic-participant theory reflects some of the principles from social responsibility theory as he argues that the democratic-participant theory echoed the 1947 Hutchins Commission's concern that the media alienated citizens from democratic processes. The findings in the reports of the Hutchins Commission are noted by Siebert *et al.* (1963) to be the source of the social responsibility theory.

The social responsibility theory emphasises the reconciliation of freedom and responsibility through the development of public institutions that are independent from government and the continuing development of professionalism (Fourie, 2001:272). However, McQuail (1983:97) points out that the social responsibility theory is inadequate because of its complicity in the bureaucratic state and in the self-serving of media organisations and professions. Although social responsibility claims to accept responsibilities toward society, McQuail (1983:97) argues that self-regulation by the press has not prevented the growth of media institutions which dominate from the power centres of society and fail in their task of meeting the needs that arise from the daily experience of citizens. "Hence, the needs of the recipient constitute the central point of the democratic-participant theory," states McQuail (1983:97).

This study has placed the role of ethics in two journalistic contexts – mainstream media and blogging – and found that however divergent the two mediums supposedly are in practical terms, it can operate symbiotically and that both mediums may continue to offer responsible journalism to the reading public, through codes of conduct that address each specific practice.

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Etiese Kode en Riglyne vir Verslaggewers, Fotografe en Grafiese Kunstenaars van Die Burger

Die Burger se **waardes** waarbinne sy etiese kode geld, is die volgende:

Die Burger is verbind om nuus waarheidsgetrou, akkuraat, eerlik en regverdig te rapporteer, en om kommentaar te publiseer wat regverdigheid weerspieël en nastreef volgens die hoogste standaarde in joernalistiek soos uiteengesit in die perskode wat hieronder volg.

Die Burger is onafhanklik van die owerheid op alle vlakke, of enige druk- en/of belangegroep.

Die Burger moedig rasseharmonie aan en streef daarna om die welsyn en vooruitgang van alle sektore van die bevolking te bevorder deur sy verslaggewing.

Die Burger tree op in die openbare belang as voorstander van vryheid van spraak.

Die Burger is verbind tot die bevordering van Afrikaans onder alle sprekers, ongeag ras en etniese groepering.

Die Burger steun 'n sakeomgewing waarin 'n onafhanklike mediabedryf kan meeding en floreer.

Die volgende vier beginsels geld as basiese riglyne in die daaglikse optrede van joernaliste, fotografe en grafiese kunstenaars van *Die Burger*:

1. Soek die waarheid en doen so volledig as moontlik daaroor verslag

1.1 Akkuraatheid - toets die noukeurigheid van inligting deur dit aan die volgende vrae te onderwerp:

- Het jy 'n hoë mate van vertroue in die feite van jou berig/artikel en die bronne wat dit verskaf het? Indien nie, kan jy jou storie op 'n meer akkurate manier vertel? As jy enige twyfel het oor jou bronne, kan jy hulle uitskakel en vervang ten einde 'n groter mate van feitelike getrouheid te bewerkstellig?
- Het jy alle feite aan 'n bron gekoppel of gedokumenteer?
- Het jy die hoofteite gekontroleer en geverifieer, verkieslik by ander bronne as jou hoofbron(ne)?
- Kan jy die korrek gespelde naam en korrekte telefoonnommer van elke bron aan jou redakteur verskaf?
- Het jy volle vertroue dat al die feitelike verklarings in jou storie die waarheid reflekteer?
- Is jy bereid om in die openbaar jou kontroliering van feite en ander verifiëringsmetodes om jou storie se akkuraatheid te verseker te verdedig?
- Is die aanhalings in jou storie regverdig en in konteks aangebied?
- Haal jy anonieme bronne aan? Hoekom maak jy van sodanige bronne gebruik? Is jy bereid om in die openbaar die gebruik van daardie bronne te verdedig?
- Gebruik jy enige materiaal, dokumente of foto's wat deur anonieme bronne verskaf is? Hoekom? Hoeveel vertroue het jy in die egtheid van die materiaal? Is jy bereid om in die openbaar die gebruik van daardie bronne te verdedig?
- Het jy enige persone, rasse, kulture, nasies of segmente van die samelewing - beskryf deur stereotipiese byvoeglike naamwoorde te gebruik? Is sodanige beskrywings akkuraat en betekenisvol in die konteks waarin dit aangebied is?
- Het jy potensieel aanstootlike taal of foto's in jou storie gebruik? Is dit noodsaaklik dat jy dit moet gebruik? Sal die storie minder akkuraat wees as daardie woord(e) of foto nie gebruik word nie?
- Reflekteer jou opskrifte, prikkelaars en plakkaat die feite en konteks van die storie waarna dit verwys?

- Die volgende riglyne geld vir die gebruik van **vloekwoorde, woorde wat godsdienstelike woorde kan affronteer of ander moontlike obscene woorde** wat miskien kan aanstoot gee: Die beleid oor profaniteit en die gebruik van godsdienstige name wat moontlik aan spesifieke godsdienste aanstoot kan gee, het as vertrekpunt dat *Die Burger* by so 'n wye leserskorps as moontlik moet probeer aanklank vind. Al het die aanvaarbaarheidsvlak van sekere woorde vanweë 'n meer toegeeflike benadering by die publiek die afgelope aantal jare verander en meer toeskietlik geraak, moet ons die gebruik van dié soort woorde versigtig dophou en beperk tot die volgende uitsonderlike omstandighede:
 1. Elke geval moet beoordeel en getoets word aan die kernvraag: Word 'n belangrike joernalistieke doel bereik deur die gebruik van die vloekwoord of obscene taalgebruik? Hoe sterker die taalgebruik, hoe belangriker en ernstiger moet die doel van ons gebruik daarmee wees. Is dit byvoorbeeld in die openbare belang dat ons die wese van wat gesê is, moet weergee? Die konteks waarin die woorde gebruik word, moet deeglik in ag geneem word. Hier speel faktore soos openbare belang en die plek waarin die woorde in die koerant gebruik word 'n rol.
 2. Indien daar twyfel bestaan of die woord gebruik moet word, moet 'n hoofredaksielid of lynhoof, maar verkieslik die redakteur, se raad gevra word.
 3. Die gebruik van twyfelagtige woorde word uitsluitlik beperk tot aangehaalde materiaal. *Die Burger* se eie verslaggewers mag net in hoogs uitsonderlike omstandighede dié soort woorde in berigte/artikels gebruik en ook nie sonder toestemming van 'n hoofredaksielid of lynhoof, maar verkieslik die redakteur, nie.
 4. 'n Algemene reël is dat indien 'n persoon in die nuus 'n profaniteit kwytraak wanneer niemand teenwoordig is behalwe 'n enkele of meer as een verslaggewer nie, *Die Burger* dit nie sal gebruik nie. Wanneer daar egter meer mense en ander lede van die publiek teenwoordig is, en die betrokke persoon bekend is, raak die aanhaling van die woord(e) meer aanvaarbaar.
 5. Soms is taalgebruik nie profaan, obseen of godsdienstig aanstootlik nie, maar kan dit steeds aanstoot gee op grond van smaak. Die relevansie van die nuus moet dan as kriterium geld en behoort verslaggewers toegelaat te word om in die lig van nuusrelevansie oor sake soos die menslike anatomie, seks- en uitskeidingsfunksies te skryf. Smaak kan nie gereguleer word nie, maar verslaggewers en redakteurs moet in ag neem dat *Die Burger* hom posisioneer as 'n gesaghebbende koerant van openbare rekord waarin nuuswaardes ook deeglik in ag geneem moet word. Die ondeurdagte gebruik van profaniteit kan afbreuk doen aan dié posisionering.
 6. Versagtende vorme van profane woorde en frases kan gebruik word, indien enige twyfel bestaan. Dit beteken nie dat alternatiewe woorde gebruik word nie, maar eerder 'n beletselteken. Wanneer besluit word om taal uit 'n aanhaling te sny, word so 'n beletsel- of weglatingsteken gebruik, bv. k—k , s—t en f—n onderskeidelik vir kak, stront en fokken. Ons gebruik dus net die eerste letter van die woord, gevolg deur die em-teken, en daarna die laaste letter. Asteriske mag nie gebruik word om weggelate letters aan te toon nie.

7. Die gebruik van dié soort woorde binne konteks word toegelaat in langer, ernstiger artikels of rubrieke wat normaalweg op die kunsblad, hoofartikelblad en forumblad verskyn. Weer eens moet egter in ag geneem word of die gebruik van die woorde 'n belangrike joernalistieke doel dien en of daardie doel sou skade ly indien die woorde gewysig, met ems geredigeer, of bloot weggelaat word.
8. Dogmatiese weglating van profaniteite moet vermy word en besluite hieroor moet voortdurend geneem word in die lig van die spieël van die werklikheid wat *Die Burger* elke dag aan sy lesers probeer voorhou.

1.2 Plagiaat: Moet nooit plagiaat pleeg nie. Volgens die *Ensiklopedie van die Wêreld* (deel 8, Stellenbosch: C.F. Albertyn Edms. Bpk, 1976: 253) is plagiaat die “nabootsing of oorneem van geskrewe of ander skeppinge van 'n ander, met die doel om dit vir eie skepping te laat deurgaan; in beperkte sin die skending van outeursreg.” Die *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980: 1596) beskryf plagiaat as “the taking and using as one’s own of the thoughts, writings, or inventions of another.” W. Pauk. 1984. *How to study in college* (3de uitgawe). Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 354, beskryf plagiaat soos volg:

Plagiarism is stealing other people’s words and ideas and making them appear to be your own without giving credit. If you paraphrase something from already published material and do not give the reference, you’re guilty of plagiarism even though you have no intention of stealing! Simply rearranging sentences or rephrasing a little without crediting is still plagiarism.

Die pleeg van plagiaat word in 'n baie ernstige lig in die joernalistiek beskou. Joernaliste wat plagiaat pleeg, sal dissiplinêr aangekla word en kan ontslaan word. Indien jy onseker is oor wat plagiaat is, kyk gerus na die volgende webwerwe waar die verskillende vorme van plagiaat uiteengesit word, of gesels met *Die Burger* se ombudsman vóór jy 'n berig of artikel aanbied vir publikasie:

- i. www.plagiarism.org
- ii. www.turnitin.org

Normaalweg bestaan 5 vlakke van plagiaat, soos geïdentifiseer deur verskillende professionele instellings soos byvoorbeeld die Amerikaanse Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (www.ieee.org):

Vlak 1: Ongekrediteerde (onerkende) verbatim kopiëring van 'n volledige artikel.

Vlak 2: Ongekrediteerde (onerkende) verbatim kopiëring van 'n groot deel (tot soveel as helfte) van 'n artikel.

Vlak 3: Ongekrediteerde (onerkende) verbatim kopiëring van individuele elemente soos sinne, paragrawe, en illustrasies.

Vlak 4: Ongekrediteerde (onerkende) onaanvaarbare parafrasering van bladsye of paragrawe (deur 'n paar woorde of frases te verander of om die oorspronklike sinsvolgorde te verander).

Vlak 5: Deur erkenning te gee aan verbatim gekopieerde dele van 'n artikel sonder om duidelik aan te toon wie wat geskryf het.

Toets jouself altyd aan die volgende vrae:

- Het jy deurlopend in jou berig/artikel behoorlike erkenning gegee aan enige materiaal wat nie jou eie is nie? Onthou: om bloot 'n bronnelys te vermeld aan die einde van 'n berig/artikel, sonder om die relevante dele waaruit jy jou inligting verkry het behoorlik deurlopend in die teks aan te dui, is nie voldoende nie. Dit kom steeds neer op plagiaat.
- Werk jy van jou aantekeninge/notas, of deur uit jou kop te memoriseer? Indien laasgenoemde, is jy seker jy gebruik nie iemand anders se frases of sinne uit jou geheue nie?
- Sal redelike mense die verskil agterkom tussen jou skryfwerk en ander s'n?
- Is jy goed genoeg ingelig oor jou onderwerp om potensiële probleme met jou werk te kan raaksien?
- Het jy ander aangemoedig om jou werk te lees om te sien of dit enige herinneringe loslaat wat plagiaat mag aandui?

1.3 Misleiding in 'n poging om die waarheid vas te stel: Kriteria vir regverdiging van die gebruik van 'n leuen en misleiding moet aan elkeen van die volgende vereistes voldoen:

- Wanneer die inligting waarna jy soek van groot belang is. Dit moet van uiters belangrike openbare belang wees, soos om byvoorbeeld inligting openbaar te maak wat 'n groot mislukking van stelselinstorting rapporteer; of wat diepgaande skade of leed aan individue voorkom.
- Wanneer alle ander alternatiewe om dieselfde inligting te bekom misluk het.
- Wanneer die betrokke joernaliste en fotografe bereid is om volledig en openlik die aard van die misleiding openbaar te maak, asook die redes daarvoor aan die belanghebbendes en die publiek.
- Wanneer die individuele betrokke verslaggewers en fotografe en *Die Burger* uitnemendheid beoefen deur uitmuntende vaardighede sowel as deur die toesegging van die verlangde tyd en geld, om die storie volledig na te volg.
- Wanneer die skade wat voorkom word deur die inligting openbaar te maak deur middel van misleiding swaarder weeg as enige skade wat veroorsaak word deur die daad van misleiding.
- Wanneer die betrokke verslaggewers en fotografe 'n betekenisvolle, medewerkende en doelgerigte besluitnemingsproses in werking gestel het waarin die volgende gewoone is:
 - ❖ Die gevolge (lang- en korttermyn) van die misleiding op hulle wat mislei word;

- ❖ Die impak op joernalistieke geloofwaardigheid;
 - ❖ Die motiverings vir die joernaliste en fotografe se optrede;
 - ❖ Die misleidende daad in verhouding met *Die Burger* se redaksionele missie;
 - ❖ Die regsimplikasies van die misleiding; en
 - ❖ Die konsekwensie van die verslaggewers en fotografe se beredenering en optrede.
- Dit is van die allergrootste belang dat enige selfondersoek en bevraagtekening van moontlike misleiding geskied voor van misleidende metodes van verslaggewing gebruik gemaak word en nie eers daarna nie.

1.4 Stereotipering: Die mens se ingeboude geneigdheid om ander te kategoriseer lei tot stereotipering op grond van geslag, ras, etniese verband, godsdiens, land van oorsprong, woongebied, seksuele voorkeur, fisiese en geestelike gestremdheid, al dan nie, politieke sienings, en ander vorme. Dié stereotipes versterk dikwels verkeerde persepsies teenoor enkelinge of groepe. Sonder om op artistieke vryheid inbreuk te maak, moet stereotipering sover as moontlik vermy word. Wat op die spel is, is die strukture, die waardes en die praktyke wat bepaal hoe nuus geselekteer word. Gevalle van moontlike stereotipering in nuusverslaggewing behoort in die redaksie omvattend bespreek te word tussen verteenwoordigende groepe uit verskillende rasse-, geslags- en ouderdomsgroepe. Verslaggewers en fotografe van *Die Burger* streef daarna om die volgende riglyne ten opsigte van stereotipering na te kom:

1.4.1 Ras: Die gebruik van kwetsende woorde om mense rasgewys te stereotipeer moet ten alle koste vermy word. Redakteurs en afdelingshoofde moet bedag wees op rassestereotipering en dit nie in kopie toelaat nie. Die Burger is 'n koerant met 'n diverse lesersgroep en dié lesersprofiel moet te alle tye by die skryf van berigte en die keuring van kopie, ook deur bydraers en rubriekskrywers van buite, in gedagte gehou word. Rassisme sal nie in redaksionele kopie, promosiemateriaal en advertensies in Die Burger toegelaat word nie. Die ras van 'n persoon mag nie in berigte genoem word nie, tensy:

- die persoon se ras relevant is om byvoorbeeld 'n verdagte te kan identifiseer omdat dit in openbare belang is.
- mense wat om kommentaar genader is of wat by die nuusgebeure betrokke was as deelnemende partye, getuies of slagoffers, die ras van iemand noem ten einde 'n nuusgebeurtenis te beskryf.

- die ras in 'n hof genoem word en dit relevant is vir die saak wat verhoor word.
- **Uitsonderings:** daar is uitsonderings in die gebruik van woorde wat op rassebasis moontlik kwetsend kan wees. Elke woord moet binne konteks beoordeel word. Normaalweg sal die woorde “hotnot”, “kaffer” en soortgelyke kwetsende woorde nie in teks, opskrifte en byskrifte gebruik word nie. Daar is egter sekere woorde wat, weens die feit dat sekere groepe hulself so beskryf, wel gebruik mag word. By sekere Khoisan-groepe bestaan die gebruik om van hulself as “Boesmans” te praat. Hier moet omsigtig te werk gegaan word omdat Boesman wel deur sekere groepe as kwetsend beskou kan word, maar dit wel aanvaarbaar is binne sekere historiese verbande en by sekere San-groepe, soos byvoorbeeld die San van die Botswana-Kalahari wat in 'n hofgeding met die Botswana-regering en die myngroep Anglo-American hulself in hofstukke beskryf as “Bushmen”. Hulle het ook in plakkaat in betogings voor die myngroep se gebou in 2004 in Londen hulself as “Bushmen” beskryf.

1.4.2 Geslag: Vermoed stereotipering oor geslag en hanteer dit met omsigtigheid. Die volgende riglyne moet in ag geneem word wanneer gender ter sprake kom:

- Verhoog vroue se sigbaarheid in die nuus – nie alleen deur meer stories oor vroue (presteerders, sport, ens) te plaas nie, maar ook deur vroulike kundiges as bronne te gebruik; soek doelbewus vroue se perspektiewe.
- Navorsing toon slegs 10 % van nuusstories het vroue as sentrale fokus. Vra jouself af wat die fokus van die storie is en of dit pleks van uit 'n manlike perspektief vir mans, nie “geslagloos” kan wees om vroue ook in te sluit nie.
- Vroulike joernaliste toon 'n geneigdheid om meer vroue as bronne te gebruik. Alle joernaliste behoort uit hul pad te gaan om meer vroue as bronne te gebruik. Terselfdertyd moet joernaliste ook vroue aanmoedig om hul verhale te vertel – en dat hul stories ook waarde het.
- Streef daarna om per storie gelyke verteenwoordiging te kry van mans en vroue in gesagsposisies wat as bronne kan dien.
- Maak seker jy het balans in jou storie – veral as dit 'n kwessie is wat vroue raak. Byvoorbeeld in die geval van verkragting, vra jouself of die bronne gebalanseerd en verteenwoordigend is.
- Herken en verwerp degraderende kulturele gebruike wat vroue se stemme uit die media hou, of wat karikature van vroue maak, of stereotipes perpetueer.
- Kopie en foto's moet die onvanpaste gebruik of uitbuiting van vroulike seksualiteit vermoed. Waar seksualiteit ter sprake is, moet dit met respek en sensitiwiteit vir almal gebruik word, sowel die onderwerp as die leser.
- Die aanvaarde praktyk om vroue volgens voorkoms, huwelikstatus en ouderdom te definieer, is diskriminerend – indien dit nie nodig is vir die berig nie, vermoed.
- As onderwerpe in foto's: vroue is verhoudingsgewys oorverteenwoordig in foto's. Die afleiding is dat vroue op foto's is vir dekoratiewe doeleindes. Vra jouself af hoekom dit nodig is dat 'n vrou op die foto moet wees, en of dit nie ook 'n man kan wees nie.
- Moenie vroue as slagoffers uitbeeld nie. Die tipiese foto van die vrou huilend wanneer informele huisvesting afgebrand het, is 'n voorbeeld. Dit perpetueer

die stereotipe dat vroue nie in beheer is nie, maar slagoffers van omstandighede. Gebruik ook mans vir sulke foto's en vir aanhalings.

- As 'n opvoedkundige rol, publiseer voorvalle van teistering, hoe dit hanteer word, en die gevolge.
- Verskaf 'n kontaklys (ook in die vorm van 'n aanlyn-databasis) van vroulike kundiges en organisasies op alle gebiede wat voortdurend aangepas en uitgebrei kan word aan alle joernaliste wat as bronne gebruik kan word.

1.4.3 Seksuele voorkeur: die gebruik van kwetsende woorde om mense se seksuele voorkeure te beskryf moet vermy word. Vermy aanduidings van mense se seksuele voorkeur in byvoorbeeld opskrifte tensy dit absoluut funksioneel is.

1.4.4 Diversiteit: stereotipering kan vermy word deur diversiteit in verslaggewing in ag te neem en te bevorder. Die volgende riglyne geld:

- Nuusberigte, grafika en foto's moet met sensitiwiteit, akkuraatheid en regverdigheid aangebied word teenoor alle betrokke partye.
- Neem die moontlike gevolge van jou berig/artikel/foto/grafika in ag. Wie sal benadeel en wie bevoordeel word.
- Maak gebruik van 'n diversiteit van bronne. Die gebruik van een minderheidspersoon kan neerkom op oëverblindery.
- Moenie dat vooropgestelde idees jou pogings om diversiteit in te sluit beperk nie.
- Wees buigsaam oor die moontlikheid dat die fokus van jou berig/grafika/foto mag verander as ander bronne ingesluit word.
- Ontwikkel 'n betekenisvolle lys van minderheidsbronne wat perspektief en kundigheid in die daaglikse nuusverslaggewing kan teweegbring.
- Bring tyd deur in minderheidsomgewings.
- Vermy dat plekname kodewoorde word met betrekking tot misdaad en ander negatiewe nuus.

1.4.5 Gestremdheid: wees versigtig in die beskrywing/omskrywing van mense met gestremdhede. Die gebruik van beskrywings soos dat iemand "mal" is of "geestesversteurd" is onaanvaarbaar. Geestesgestremd is 'n beter beskrywing.

2. Beperk skade tot die minimum

2.1 Regverdigheid: Toets die regverdigheid van jou verslaggewing deur dit aan die volgende vrae te onderwerp:

- Word die betekenis van dit waaroor jy verslag doen verdraai deur oor- of onderbeklemtoning van feite?
- Word feite en aanhalings van mense met wie onderhoude gevoer is behoorlik in konteks geplaas?
- Hou die berig/artikel se lengte en prominensie in die koerant verband met die belangrikheid daarvan, en is dit met waardigheid en professionaliteit aangebied?

- Word die opskrifte en prikkelaars geregverdig deur die inhoud van die berig/artikel?
- Het jy jou uiterste bes gedoen om alle kante van verhaal te vertel, of, netso problematies, het jy twee kunsmatiggedrewe kante van die saak weergegee? Het jy dus die audi alteram partem-reël nagekom deur die ander kant van die saak ook te stel?
- Het jy met deernis verslag gedoen oor 'n saak? Toon jou berig/artikel mededoë vir diegene wat negatief daardeur geraak word? Beoefen jy spesiale sensitiwiteit teenoor kinders waaroor jy verslag doen of onervare bronne of onderwerpe?
- Is alle betrokkenes, veral diegene wat moontlik deur jou verslaggewing geraak is of skade berokken kan word, die geleentheid gebied om te reageer? As hulle nie bereik kan word nie of geen kommentaar het nie, het jy die redes daarvoor verduidelik?
- Het jy familieledede van 'n beskuldigde/veroordeelde in 'n misdaad onnodiglik betrek by jou storie deur byvoorbeeld te verwys na die familieverbintenis van 'n bekende familielid (kleinkind, pa, broer, dogter, ma, ens.) met die beskuldigde/veroordeelde? Is dit werklik nodig om die naam van die bekende familielid te koppel aan dié van die beskuldigde/veroordeelde? Die toets sou wees: Het die bekende familielid enigiets met die onderhawige saak waarby die beskuldigde/veroordeelde betrek is, te doen en plaas die naam van sy/haar naam in die berig enige perspektief op die feite van die hofsaak/aanklagte, of kan die storie op sy eie staan sonder om die bekende familielid te betrek?
- As bronne nie behoorlik geïdentifiseer is nie, is daar 'n grondige rede daarvoor?
- As substantiewe foute of distorsies in jou koerant verskyn, plaas jy vrywilliglik, spoedig en met vergelykbare prominensie as die onakkurate berig/artikel 'n regstelling en verskoning?
- Moedig jy 'n oop dialoog met jou lesers aan? Voel andere, binne sowel as buite die redaksie, dat die berig/artikel regverdig is teenoor die betrokkenes?
- Is jy sensitief wanneer jy foto's of onderhoude aanvra van diegene wat deur tragedie of hartseer geraak word?
- Is jy volledig bewus daarvan dat die insameling van nuus en verslaggewing ongemak en skade kan aanrig en dat die inligtingsfunksie nie 'n paspoort tot arrogansie behoort te wees nie?

2.2 Privaatheid – Artikel 14 van die Suid-Afrikaanse Grondwet waarborg die reg van privaatheid. Die privaatheid van individue kan op die volgende wyse geskend word:

2.2.1 Indringing: Die doelbewuste indringing van 'n persoon se privaatheid deur

- Private eiendom te betree sonder die eienaar se toestemming, selfs al sê die polisie dit is in orde.
- Die gebruik van telefontelense om private oomblikke van mense af te neem.
- Die onregmatige gebruik van bandopnames, kameras, meeluisterapparaat of ander tegniese hulpmiddels om inligting te bekom. 'n Algemene reël om regmatigheid/onregmatigheid te toets by die gebruik van bogenoemde

apparatuur, is dat as daar prima facie-bewyse bestaan dat iemand se optrede krimineel is, dat daar geen ander uitweg is om die inligting te bekom nie, en dat genoemde persoon herhaaldelik sonder grondige redes geweier het om daardie inligting te verskaf, dan kan 'n opname gemaak word sonder om die persoon mee te deel.

- Die afneem van iemand in 'n hospitaal sonder die toestemming van die pasiënt of familie.

2.2.2 Publisiteit aan private feite: Die publikasie van inligting wat waar is oor die privaatlewe van 'n persoon, wat terselfdertyd hoogs aanstootlik is vir 'n redelike persoon en ook nie in openbare belang nie, verteenwoordig indringing op die persoon se privaatheid. Dit word gewoonlik gemeet deur te bepaal hoe die inligting verkry is, en deur die nuuswaardigheid daarvan te beoordeel. Private feite oor 'n persoon se ekonomiese status, gesondheid, of seksuele aktiwiteite kan privaatheidskending wees. Die feit dat 'n persoon MIV/vigs onder lede het, mag nie genoem word sonder die persoon se toestemming nie. Die uitsondering hier is dat die name van openbare persoonlikhede wat aan vigs sterf, wel genoem mag word solank dit in openbare belang is. Groot omsigtigheid moet egter hiermee geneem word alvorens tot so 'n besluit oorgegaan word. Verslaggewers moet ten alle koste die stigmatisering van MIV/vigs-lyers deur hul beriggewing vermy. Wees ook uiters versigtig in die rapportering van sogenaamde “kure” of teenmiddels vir MIV/vigs. Aansprake van genesing van vigs deur enige persoon kan in hierdie stadium nie gemaak word nie en verslaggewers moet bedag daarop wees om relevante wetenskaplikes se mening altyd in sodanige gevalle te toets. Die foto's van vigslyers (of vigswesies) mag ook nie sonder hul toestemming gepubliseer word nie. In die geval van vigswesies moet die voogde se toestemming verkry word.

2.2.3 Vals lig of beklemtoning: Dit geskied wanneer inligting gepubliseer word wat die verkeerde openbare beeld of indruk van 'n persoon weergee.

2.2.4 Wederregtelike toe-eiening: Dit behels die gebruik van persone se naam, foto of ander afbeelding sonder hul toestemming, gewoonlik om geldelike gewin.

Toets die wyse waarop jy inbreuk maak op die privaatheid van mense waaroor jy verslag doen aan die volgende kriteria:

- Hoe belangrik is die inligting wat ek in die hande probeer kry?
- Het die publiek 'n reg en behoefte om te weet, of wil hulle maar net weet?
- Watter graad van beskerming is die individue wat betrokke is by die storie op geregtig?
- Hoeveel skade kan hulle moontlik ly?
- Wat kan jy doen om die skade tot die minimum te beperk?
- Hoe sal jy voel as jy aan dieselfde mate van noukeurige ondersoek (skrutinerings) onderwerp word?
- Kan jy duidelik en ten volle jou denkwyses en besluit om iemand se privaatheid binne te dring, aan die betrokke(n) én die publiek verduidelik?

2.3 Hantering van bronne: *Die Burger* se verslaggewers is verplig om bronne van vertroulike inligting te beskerm en mag dit nie aan enigiemand buiten die redakteur of dié se verteenwoordiger bekend maak nie.

2.3.1 Voorwaardes by die gebruik van anonieme bronne:

- Die storie moet oorweldigend belangrik wees en in die openbare belang.
- Indien die storie nie op enige ander wyse verkry kan word nie.
- Indien die betroubaarheid van die bron bo verdenking is.

2.3.2 Hoe om anonieme bronne te gebruik: hou die volgende in gedagte voordat jy anonieme bronne gebruik:

- Wees baie duidelik oor *Die Burger* se standpunt oor die gebruik van anonieme bronne. 'n Belofte dat 'n bron se anonimiteit beskerm sal word, kan nie gemaak word sonder toestemming van die redakteur, of iemand anders in 'n uitvoerende posisie soos die nuusredakteur nie. As beloftes van anonimiteit gemaak word sonder hul toestemming, en jy beland in die hof, kan jy nie verwag dat jou redakteurs jou sal ondersteun nie.
- Probeer (weer) om jou bron te oorreed om sy/haar naam openbaar te maak. Soms is anonimiteit onnodig.
- As die bron nie wil toegee nie, probeer om die inligting van 'n ander bron te verkry. Dit is altyd beter om 'n bron te identifiseer as om 'n storie rondom anonieme bewerings saam te stel.
- Probeer om 'n belofte te maak op voorwaarde dat as die saak na die hof toe moet gaan, dit nie meer geld nie. 'n Voorwaardelike onderneming van anonimiteit kan vooraf gereël word met die bron.
- As jy anonimiteit sonder enige voorwaardes belowe, moet jy dit nakom, al beteken dit dat jy tronk toe moet gaan as gevolg daarvan. Soms is 'n bron nie gelukkig met 'n voorwaardelike onderneming nie. Dan is jou integriteit as joernalis op die spel. As jy eers jou anonimiteit belowe het, is daar geen uitweg nie. As jy dink daar is, behoort jy nie 'n joernalis te wees nie.
- Moenie dat 'n anonieme bron *Die Burger* gebruik om 'n veldtog te voer of 'n aanval te loods op iemand anders nie. Dit geld ook briëfskrywers wat persoonlike aanvalle loods op ander onder 'n skuilnaam. As 'n bron iemand anders aanval en bereid is om sy/haar naam bekend te maak, behoort die persoon of instelling wat aangeval word die geleentheid te kry om te reageer. Maar as die bron anoniem is, word die persoon wat aangeval word benadeel. Moenie jou bron daardie onregverdige voordeel gee nie.
- Maak dit duidelik aan die publiek hoekom jy 'n anonieme bron gebruik.
- In politieke verslaggewing moet die politieke affiliasie van die anonieme bron genoem word. Weer eens, moenie anonieme politieke bronne gebruik om ander aan te val nie.
- Openbaar die naam van jou anonieme bron aan jou redakteur indien hy/sy daarop aandrings. Dit is goeie beleid om 'n bron te laat begryp dat jou redakteur mag aandrings om te weet wie die bron is.
- As jy uitvind dat jou bron 'n leuen vertel het, deel dit mee aan die publiek. Alle beloftes van anonimiteit is van nul en gener waarde as jy in enige stadium

agterkom dat jou bron gelieg het. publiseer sy/haar naam en vertel die publiek hy/sy het 'n leuen vertel.

- Moenie enige rekords hou van vertroulike bronne nie. Dit sal verhoed dat die polisie moontlik daarop kan beslag lê. *Die Burger* se verslaggewers is nie verlengstukke van die polisie, veiligheidsmagte of enige ander instelling nie.
- Moet nooit met iemand gesels oor anonieme bronne of enige vertroulike inligting oor hulle met iemand anders behalwe jou redakteur of onmiddellike lynhoof deel nie. Dit sal jou en jou bronne beskerm. Dit geld ook jou familie en vriende. Moenie hulle daardeur in gevaar stel nie.

2.3.3 Algemene riglyne met betrekking tot bronne:

- Maak dit baie duidelik wanneer jou gesprek op of van die rekord af is. Beide die verslaggewer en die bron moet duidelik begryp wat die status van die gesprek is. As dit nie duidelik is aan albei partye nie, kan allerhande probleme opduik. Vermy dié soort situasie ten alle koste.
- Moet nooit “ja” sê vir 'n gesprek van die rekord af nadat die gesprek reeds plaasgevind het nie. Te dikwels openbaar 'n bron belangrike inligting, net om later koue voete te kry. Dis jou bron se probleem, nie joune nie. Probeer egter regverdig wees omdat jy later weer van die bron sal wil gebruik maak.
- Moet nooit enige gesprek op band opneem sonder die bron se wete nie. 'n Bandopname is noodsaaklik vir akkurate berigging en dus 'n noodsaaklike hulpmiddel vir enige verslaggewer. Maar die etiese en korrekte stap is om jou bron in kennis te stel dat jy 'n gesprek gaan opneem. Dit sal die bron versigtiger maak wat ook voordele inhou.
- Moet nooit bronne misbruik of deur hulle misbruik word nie. Moenie woorde plaas in die mond van 'n bron nie, maar moet nooit 'n bron toelaat om voor te skryf wat jy moet skryf nie.
- Moenie toegee aan bronne se druk om jou storie goed te keur nie. Dit is egter gesonde praktyk wat jou beskerm deur bronne toe te laat om aanhalings te sien/hoor wat hulle woorde bevat om te verseker dat iemand korrek aangehaal is. Moenie dat 'n bron egter die wyse waarop jy die storie aanbied, beïnvloed nie.
- Identifiseer jousef as 'n verslaggewer van *Die Burger* so vroeg as moontlik in die gesprek. Moenie die bron mislei nie.
- Probeer om alle inligting te verifieer. Dit verminder die kans dat jy mislei word. Die algemene reël is om nie te publiseer tensy jy die inligting uit 'n ander bron kan verifieer nie.
- Dis baie belangrik dat 'n storie nie net gebou word om 'n enkele anonieme bron nie. Probeer altyd 'n anonieme bron se weergawe van 'n storie bevestig kry by ten minste een ander bron. Enkelbronjoernalistiek skep wantroue en hou gevare in vir die koerant en verslaggewer.

3. Tree onafhanklik op

Verslaggewers en fotografe van *Die Burger* behoort vry van verpligting teenoor enige belange- en drukgroep en politieke party te wees buiten die publiek se reg om te weet.

3.1 Interne gewetenstoets: Twee nuttige “interne toetse van jou gewete” kan deurgaans deur joernaliste en fotografe gebruik word, indien onsekerheid bestaan:

- Kan jy in alle eerlikheid sê dat die betrokke guns of aanbod - of dit ’n dosie sjokolade, ’n sigaar, ’n week in Mauritius, of ’n besoek aan die Franse wynlande op uitnodiging van die Franse wynmakersgilde, of aan die Australiese boendoe op uitnodiging van die land se grootste lugredery – nie jou onpartydigheid sal beïnvloed nie? Sal jou lesers seker wees van jou geloofwaardigheid, selfs al het jy geen twyfel daaroor nie?

3.2 Belangebotsings: Vermy botsende belange van die volgende aard:

3 Geskenke: Alle geskenke wat aan verslaggewers/fotografe/grafiese kunstenaars in die uitvoering van hul pligte gegee word, moet aan die redakteur of ’n ander hoofredaksielid as lynhoof verklaar word. Ons aanvaar nie geskenke van enige aard nie, behalwe in gevalle waarin die materiaal verskaf word met die oog op joernalistieke beoordeling en ontleding (byvoorbeeld ’n boek vir resensiedoeleindes; ’n bottel wyn kan dus duidelik aanvaarbaar wees mits daarvoor verslag gedoen word, ’n kis wyn beslis nie). Die beste uitweg is om enige geskenk wat ’n potensiële nuusbron aan ’n redaksielid stuur, dadelik en beleef terug te stuur. Dit is ook altyd beter om *Die Burger* te laat betaal vir ’n ete. Geen gratis ete bestaan nie.

3.2.2 Reise: Alle uitnodigings aan redaksieledes om reise op koste van enige organisasie of persoon mee te maak, moet aan die redakteur gerig of verklaar word wat oor die meriete van die uitnodiging sal besluit. **Geen uitnodiging mag aanvaar word sonder die redakteur se toestemming nie.**

3.2.3 Buitewerk (“moonlighting”): Goedkeuring moet verkry word vir enige buitewerk wat joernaliste en fotografe verrig wat nie verband hou met hul werk vir *Die Burger* nie. Die koerant het prioriteit op jou dienste bokant die vryskutwerk. Sien ook punt 3.2.9 in hierdie verband.

3.2.4 Affiliasie met organisasies: Die probleme wat kan opduik wanneer verslaggewers en fotografe hul affilieer met organisasies – hetsy polities, taalkultureel, of ander – en drukgroepe kan hul geloofwaardigheid en onafhanklikheid onder verdenking bring. Om by organisasies geaffilieer te wees, kan, aan die ander kant, die geleentheid bied om mense te ontmoet, kontakte uit te brei en moontlike nuusbronne te identifiseer. Die goue middeweg is dat die soort organisasie met omsigtigheid gekies moet word: ’n brug-, skaak- of sportklub bied veel minder van ’n probleem as ’n politieke organisasie of aktivistiese drukgroep wat nuuswaardig is. Redaksieledes moet sensitief wees en nie toelaat dat enige situasie hul professionaliteit aantast nie. Onpartydigheid is die wagwoord en om dit te bewerkstellig, is afstanddoening van affiliasie by drukgroepe wat die koerant in die verleentheid kan stel, die enigste uitweg. Lidmaatskap van professionele verenigings is nie hierby ingesluit nie.

- 3.2.5 Vriende en familie:** Vermoë situasies waarin die vinger van nepotisme na jou as redaksielid gewys kan word. Artikels of ander bydraes wat deur familieledes geskryf word, mag nie deur die betrokke redaksielid aangevra en gekeur word nie, maar deur die redakteur of sy/haar aangewese lynhoof.
- 3.2.6 Betaling vir inligting:** Geen betaling vir artikels (Engels: feature articles) mag aan persone gemaak word wat by misdade of ander wangedrag betrokke is nie, of aan veroordeeldes of hul medepligtiges, insluitend familie, vriende, bure en kollegas nie, behalwe waar die betrokke materiaal in die openbare belang gepubliseer behoort te word en betaling nodig is om dit te laat gebeur. Tjekboekjoernalistiek moet ten alle koste vermy word. Dit sluit nie die betaling in van foto's nie wat van vryskutfotografe verkry word wat nuuswaardige foto's aanbied.
- 3.2.7 Promosies:** Redaksieledes moet versigtig wees om nie by verbruikersaangeleenthede betrokke te raak wat hul verbintenis met en siening van enige produk of diens kan beïnvloed nie. Dit sluit optrede in in advertensies, produkbevordering, die vervaardiging en verskyning in korporatiewe video's en openbare skakelwerk. Om by promosie-aktiwiteite van produkte en dienste buiten dié van jou maatskappy betrokke te raak doen skade aan verslaggewers en fotografe se onpartydigheid en neutraliteit.
- 3.2.8 Liefdadigheidswerk:** Betrokkenheid hierby is normaalweg aanvaarbaar behalwe as 'n liefdadigheidsorganisasie omstrede begin raak wat *Die Burger* se verslaggewing daarvoor kan beïnvloed.
- 3.2.9 Verslaggewing vir ander publikasies:** Dit is aanvaarbaar om artikels te skryf, foto's te neem of grafika te ontwerp vir ander publikasies binne die Media24-groep. Daar moet egter eers toestemming van jou redakteur verkry word voordat jy vir 'n ander publikasie mag skryf, grafika ontwerp of foto's neem of aanbied. Die beginsel is dat jy in die eerste plek in die aanbieding van dié soort werk *Die Burger* eerste geleentheid moet bied om dit te gebruik. Eers as die redakteur toestemming daartoe verleen het, mag jy dit vir ander publikasies, ook dié in die Media24-groep, aanbied. Toestemming moet ook gevra word indien werk vir 'n publikasie buite die groep aangebied word wat gewoonlik nie toegestaan word nie.
- 3.2.10 Betrokkenheid by berigte/artikels waarby jy as nuusonderwerp betrek word:** Een van die belangrikste onafhanklikheidsreëls van die joernalistiek is dat verslaggewers dit ten alle koste moet vermy om oor hulself te skryf. Daar is uitsonderings, soos byvoorbeeld wanneer die verslaggewer die onderwerp word van 'n nuusgebeurtenis ('n motorkaping byvoorbeeld) omdat dit die nuus toelig en konteks gee. Die reël wat egter deurentyd in gedagte gehou moet word, is dat verslaggewers rapporteerders is van nuusgebeure, nie die onderwerp daarvan nie. Wanneer 'n verslaggewer byvoorbeeld 'n boek geskryf het of 'n CD gemaak het wat kommersieel bemark word, mag hy/sy nie self daarvoor skryf in *Die Burger* in wat gesien kan word as selfpromosie vir die produk nie. Dit is verkieslik dat iemand onafhanklik van die verslaggewer so 'n artikel skryf, maar wat altyd in aanmerking geneem moet word, is dat die produk liefds deur middel van normale advertensiepraktyke in *Die Burger* geadverteer moet word. Verslaggewers moet selfpromosie dus ten alle koste vermy.
- 3.2.11 Onvermydelike belangebotsings:** Enige botsings van dié aard moet onmiddellik aan die redakteur verklaar word.

4. Aanvaar aanspreeklikheid

Joernaliste en fotografe van *Die Burger* aanvaar aanspreeklikheid teenoor hul lesers en mekaar. *Die Burger* is 'n voorstander van die volgende etiese beginsels oor verantwoordelike joernalistiek:

- Om nuusdekking behoorlik te verduidelik aan lesers en dialoog aan te moedig met die publiek oor joernalistieke gedrag en optrede.
- Om die publiek uit te nooi om griewe, klagtes en besware teen *Die Burger* te lug, hetsy by die koerant se redakteur of interne ombudspersoon, of by die Suid-Afrikaanse Pers-ombudsman.
- Om foute wat in die berigging en fotojoernalistiek in *Die Burger* voorkom, te erken en dit dadelik reg te stel.
- Om onetiese praktyke van verslaggewers, fotografe en die nuusmedia bloot te lê en daaroor te rapporteer, sou dit voorkom, en om 'n benadering en persepsies ten alle koste te vermy waarvolgens beoefenaars van die beroep mekaar beskerm.
- Om dieselfde hoë standaard te handhaaf wat vereis word van mense, instansies en organisasies buite die joernalistieke beroep.

Saamgestel en opgedateer deur George Claassen, Desember 2002 – Mei 2007

Bronne:

1. Gedragskode van die Suid-Afrikaanse Persombudsman.
2. Gedragskode van die Amerikaanse Society of Professional Journalists.
2. Jay Black *et al*: *Doing Ethics in Journalism – A Handbook With Case Studies*, The Poynter Institute for Media Studies, St. Petersburg, 1999.
3. Johan Retief: *Media Ethics – An Introduction to Responsible Journalism*, Oxford University Press, 2002.
4. Global media Monitoring Project (GMMP)
5. International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF)
6. African Women's Media Centre (AWMC)
7. Media Awareness Network
8. Prof. Lizette Rabe, Departement Joernalistiek, Universiteit van Stellenbosch

Etiese Kode vir *Die Burger* se Fotoredaksie

Die Burger se fotoredaksie het ewe hoë agting vir die waardes en standaarde van fotojoernalistiek as vir dié van die publiek wat daardeur gedien word, en ons fotojoernaliste verbind hulle tot hierdie etiese kode:

1. As fotojoernaliste aanvaar ons die verantwoordelikheid om die samelewing te dokumenteer en 'n visuele rekord van geskiedkundige gebeure uit te bou. Vanweë die aard van hierdie diens aan die gemeenskap, wil ons onafhanklik bly van oormatige persoonlike oorwegings en geldsugtigheid.

2. Eerlikheid, akkuraatheid en onafhanklikheid is ons grondbeginsels. In ons fotodekking streef ons dus na 'n korrekte, eerlike en objektiewe weergawe van die situasie.
3. As joernaliste is geloofwaardigheid ons belangrikste bate. Omdat ons aanvaar dat ons integriteit aangetas word deur manipulasie, is ons gekant teen enige vorm daarvan, insluitende:
 - a. digitale manipulasie in sover dit die boodskap en / of betekenis van 'n foto verander.
 - b. die uitoefening van ons invloed op die natuurlike verloop van gebeure.
 - c. die bevordering van stereotipes met inbegrip van ras, geslag en geloofsoortuigings.
4. Ons respekteer die universele reg op privaatheid van 'n individu, en handhaaf openbare belang as riglyn.
5. Slagoffers van trauma sal ten alle tye met sensitiwiteit en deernis benader word. Leed en lyding moet geminimaliseer word.

Saamgestel en aangepas deur Johann van Tonder, Fotoredakteur : Die Burger, Augustus 2002 – Mei 2007