The *Guardian* Reportage of the UK MP Expenses Scandal: a Case Study of Computational Journalism

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Abstract

The *Guardian* reportage of the United Kingdom Member of Parliament (MP) expenses scandal of 2009 used crowdsourcing and computational journalism techniques. Computational journalism can be broadly defined as the application of computer science techniques to the activities of journalism. Its foundation lies in computer assisted reporting techniques and its importance is increasing due to the:

a) increasing availability of large scale government datasets for scrutiny;
b) declining cost, increasing power and ease of use of data mining and filtering software; and Web 2.0; and
c) (c) explosion of online public engagement and opinion.

This paper provides a case study of the Guardian MP expenses scandal reportage and reveals some key challenges and opportunities for digital journalism. It finds journalists may increasingly take an active role in understanding, interpreting, verifying and reporting clues or conclusions that arise from the interrogations of datasets (computational journalism). Secondly a distinction should be made between information reportage and computational journalism in the digital realm, just as a distinction might be made between citizen reporting and citizen journalism. Thirdly, an opportunity exists for online news providers to take a 'curatorial' role, selecting and making easily available the best data sources for readers to use (information reportage). These activities have always been fundamental to journalism, however the way in which they are undertaken may change.

Findings from this paper may suggest opportunities and challenges for the implementation of computational journalism techniques in practice by digital Australian media providers, and further areas of research.