

AOL-HuffPost Merger Raises Questions about Unpaid Labor

By MIP

3 minutes

The recent merger of AOL and the Huffington Post focused public attention on the important role unpaid contributors play in the success of many Internet businesses. Although the Huffington Post is staffed in part by paid editors and curators, much of the content is generated by unpaid, individual bloggers, many of whom are prolific and popular with readers. At the time of the merger, some critics wondered whether a portion of the \$315 million in proceeds should be shared with HuffPo bloggers. And among the bloggers themselves, heated discussions ensued about compensation and conditions of labor. The Media Industries Project (MIP) of the Carsey-Wolf Center at UC Santa Barbara analyzed more than five hundred press reports and blog postings about the merger, and surveyed a select sample of HuffPo's most frequent bloggers.

This study provides the first systematic exploration of HuffPo bloggers' opinions about this merger and the value of their contributions to online journalism. Responses from the survey provide crucial insights regarding the current status and future

prospects of creative workers in the online world.

MIP's major findings include:

- Ninety-six percent of those surveyed believe that their postings are equal to or more valuable than contributions made by paid editors and curators at HuffPo.
- Sixty-nine percent believe bloggers should share in the \$315 million payday.
- A majority (54%) say HuffPo should develop a flat-rate payment schedule for contributors (based on words per post, for example).
- Most respondents (54%) say HuffPo bloggers should press their case through some form of concerted action, such as online organizing or unionization.
- Despite mixed feelings about the merger, the majority (92%) of our sample indicates it will continue writing for HuffPo after the merger.
- Almost half (46%) of our respondents say they will contribute because they benefit from the exposure their work receives at HuffPo, which in turn generates ancillary opportunities, such as book sales or consulting jobs.

Download a copy of the executive summary, the full report, or the press release below. Also available is a supplementary report exploring the differences in the way major media and the blogosphere reported the controversy the merger.