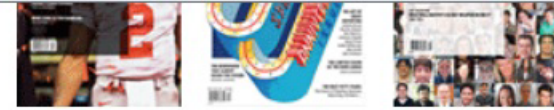


“If editors are looking there for talent,” Pareene explained in an email, “I think they’ll continue to read the site the same way I still do, which is by reading the posts and ignoring everything beneath them.” He does not think editors at more established outlets—say, Salon—will look negatively on Gawker writers’ interactions with commenters. “I don’t really think mixing it up in the comments reflect poorly on a writer unless their comments are themselves poor. It shouldn’t be much more damaging than engaging with people on Twitter.” Newell agreed, writing in an email, “I don’t see any new commenting scheme changing the fact that a staff writing job at Gawker is a great place to write whatever you want and have your byline noticed.”

Kinja could even help writers land jobs. If other news organizations adopt similar comment systems, Gawker writers’ experience with the platform will become a valuable resume booster. But will other outlets follow Gawker’s lead? Denton thinks they will, once Kinja ushers in a new style of “public journalism” that will be more trustworthy than the traditional kind where reporters interview sources in private and then write about it. In Denton’s vision, sources are interviewed in the comments of posts; while a journalist directs the interview, the public gets to grill the source right alongside the professional journalist. “It’s time for the leakers and the moles to bypass the traditional gatekeepers of information; and it’s time for them to be subject to challenge, not just by their pet reporter, but by readers,” Denton said.

As an example of Kinja’s potential benefits, Denton points to Judith Miller’s **credulous reporting on Ahmed Chalabi** in *The New York Times*. “One assumes Ahmed Chalabi’s account was subject to some test by Judith Miller of the *Times*, the chosen vehicle for his propaganda about Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction,” he wrote. “But not a sufficiently rigorous examination.” Had Chalabi been publicly interviewed by Miller and her readers in Kinja, Denton implied, maybe he would have been exposed



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propaganda about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction," he wrote. "But not a sufficiently rigorous examination." Had Chalabi been publicly interviewed by Miller and her readers in Kinja, Denton implied, maybe he would have been exposed.

Denton's dream is unlikely to become reality anytime soon. There's just no reason why sources, particularly sensitive and anonymous ones, would want to be interviewed in public. But it's still possible that other news organizations will want to adopt Kinja-like commenting systems. It's no secret that internet comment systems, particularly on mainstream news sites, are broken. Offensive and off-topic comments outnumber interesting comments so that the entire comment system is regarded as toxic and ignored by writers, which then leads to even more terrible comments from unregulated commenters. Sicha sums it up bluntly: "The comment space is treated like shit, so [commenters] act like shit." Even if it doesn't revolutionize journalism, Kinja could fix this problem, since it allows writers to control which comments are displayed. If Kinja does work, Gawker writers could find their commenter-engagement skills in high demand.

Clay Shirky, the NYU journalism professor and Future of News guru, thinks **other sites should follow Gawker** and try out new comment systems. "Gawker has demonstrated that it's possible to be a large, high-traffic site, and still do considerable experimentation with comments," he said. Could Kinja even come to the *Times* one day? Shirky demures. "My New Year's resolution for 2012," he explained, "is that when talking about the future of news, I won't discuss *The New York Times*." But, he added, "I think it will work for any place that has a lot of comments and a small group of users who control the comments," a description that encompasses plenty of news sites and blogs that might look to Gawker writers for help transitioning to a new comment system.

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If the rest of the Web follows Denton’s lead, then Kinja may simply be the next platform, like Wordpress or Twitter, that digital-age journalists need to learn. “These jobs we have as writers change, sometimes radically,” Sicha acknowledged. “Online-native outlets could just be the first to blur the line between writers and commenters.” Rather than herald the death of writers, the dawn of Kinja may just indicate that engaging with commenters will soon become a must-have skill.

This skill could help young reporters, insofar as it ensures they can get good jobs, but it won’t necessarily help them develop their reporting skills. Assuming that Denton’s “public journalism” doesn’t pan out and sources don’t line up in the comments to be grilled by Gawker reporters, it’s difficult to see how Kinja will make Gawker staffers into better journalists. Right now, young reporters often must write, blog, aggregate, and tweet, which leaves little time for actually reporting. Adding interaction with commenters to that list won’t help.



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