

The impact of changing media technology on the practice of journalism.

by

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The works presented here constitute an examination of the impact of new media technologies (focusing on social media) on the practice of journalism, with an emphasis on integrating empirical and sociological research. The use of a combination of content analysis, interviews and personal reflections and columns by journalists, case studies and observations, serves to verify and triangulate the evidence. The use of a comprehensive model to examine and analyse media products is a substantial contribution to the field of journalism studies. Previous studies that focused on new media technologies tended to either simply describe these technologies and their potential for change, or to analyse them purely in relationship to older technologies and processes, reducing both forms of practice to a tautological definition: each is that which the other is not. Taking a clear snapshot of the current landscape, and examining it without reference to specific technologies or past practices, the model allows for clear examination of relationships and practices, without being limited by the previous analyses.

A number of key themes emerge from research: the tension between the potential of new technologies to expand and improve journalistic practice and output is countered by the fear that the technology will render journalists and their practices redundant. The impact of economic forces is also apparent in the research. The economic structures that underpin journalism were undergoing substantial changes as new media was introduced, and have undergone additional changes as a result of the social and usage changes that technology has wrought. Technology cannot be abstracted from society and economics, and this interrelationship is apparent in the development of the model of the new media ecology which we developed.

The work expands on ideas of the first wave of sociological research into the practice of journalism, taking the methods and ideas and applying them to current environments. The iterative development of a model for the new media environments, and its application to empirical and observed research is a key contribution to the field.

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The works presented here constitute an examination of the impact of new media technologies (focusing on social media) on the practice of journalism, with an emphasis on integrating empirical and sociological research. The works examine practices from the beginning of the 21st Century to the present, tracking the evolution of online to social and mobile journalism and their impact on the still-existing traditional forms of journalistic process and output.

1. Introduction and context

Technology has always played a role in journalism. The process of observing the world around us and explaining it to others is not necessarily technological, but journalism as a professional and industrial practice is inherently driven by technological innovations (Briggs, 2001). Journalism studies as a field has a complex and varied history, and brings together approaches from literary studies, linguistics, sociology, philosophy and economics. Whether one considers journalism studies a branch of sociology, or of cultural studies, or something else depends largely on the approaches one uses and the focus of questions one has. My approach is broadly sociological within the framework of the Frankfurt school, whose work I was initially schooled in. There is no space here for a comprehensive analysis of the field, but the key ideas and influences evident in my work are discussed, in order to locate the work within its specific corner of the contextual field.

The industrial age, which brought with it comprehensive changes in society and production also created modern journalism. The daily newspaper, with news from across the world, produced centrally and distributed physically was an industrial invention and has not changed in physical presence in the last 150 years (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2001). The changes that technology has wrought are more apparent in the production and distribution of

the news: although the newspaper itself is recognisable, the newsroom and the presses would be far less so. The journalist of a century ago would battle to orient himself in a modern newsroom – with its computers, digital archives and networked access, its multi-platform production environment and, increasingly, its remarkable lack of visible staff (Sylvie, 2002; Tidd et al., 2001; Zelizer, 2009).

The study of journalism has kept pace with these changes, inasmuch as the output of industrial journalism has changed. However, the academy has to an extent tended to privilege the study of the meaning and impact of journalism on society over the study of the practice itself (McQuail, 2010; Sterling, 2009). Engineers and entrepreneurs may have been occupied by the question of how to make the presses faster, how to make more money from advertising and subscriptions, how to send images and text over long distances and how to increase the reach and quality of broadcast news; the academy that examined the news media has, however, tended to retain something of a focus on the end product. This reflects the development of the field from literary and sociological studies to the specific study of the news media itself.

From the nineteenth century, fear of the dangers of popular culture (in the form of sensationalist news reports and “penny dreadfuls”) presented to the wellbeing of the working classes, from Matthew Arnold’s dismissal of journalism as being “feather-brained” and “not literature” (1887, p. 639), to the importance of the press in educating and uplifting the public, the focus of criticism and comment was on the content presented and its impact on society (Palmegiano, 2012). As the twentieth century progressed, the field of media studies progressed with it, incorporating ideas and approaches from the wider philosophical endeavour of the academy. Since the media (along with literature and the arts) is a reflection of its society, so the analysis and investigation of the media is likewise a reflection of the concerns of a society.

The Frankfurt school's initial focus on the roles the media play in maintaining society's status quo, and the Marxist approach which informed the school, remain a key influence within journalism and media studies. With the move of key figures of the Frankfurt School to New York in the middle of the twentieth century and the rise of sociology as a subject, the focus (at least in North America) began to shift slightly and newsrooms and their practices began to be of interest, especially in as much as newsroom practices determined content. David Manning White's 1950 study of the motivations and reasons behind one news editor's selection of news led to wider discussion of gatekeeping, and of the ways in which news is constructed by the people and technologies of the industry (Shoemaker, 1996; White, 1950). From this, discussions on the role of the industrialised processes of news and, by inference, of the technology of news began to arise, but technology as a specific driver of news constraints was not explicitly examined. The focus instead was on "news work", and what studies there were focused a sociological eye on the newsroom and its inhabitants.

a. The development of new media technologies

New technologies arise through an incremental evolution of ideas and research, informed directly and indirectly by social and economic forces at play within the wider context (Neuman, 2010). Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, new technologies made the gathering and dissemination of news faster, more complex and cheaper. The list of such technologies that subtly transformed news production is long: better quality international phone calls made it possible to record audio through the telephone; lighter batteries and cassette tapes made journalists more mobile for longer; video cameras speeded up television coverage; outside broadcast rigs brought us the now-ubiquitous "live crossing"; fax machines and early computers changed printing and compositing; computer networks changed the wire services; satellites allowed the transmission of live video feeds from around the world; teletext created a new form of text-based news on television screens;

home satellite receivers created twenty-four hour news channels, mobile telephones brought reporters into constant contact with sources and editors; computer network services like Compuserve provided news on home computers, desktop publishing transformed journalists into designers and made whole categories of staff redundant, and so on. Each of these changes was incremental, altering slightly the routine or output of the news industry, and no one change can be viewed as “the thing that changed journalism”. While the academy acknowledged these changes in their teaching of journalism practice, they were less explicitly acknowledged in the research. Technological change was in some ways so inherent to the industry that it was unremarked upon for much of their history.

New media technologies, specifically the Internet, mobile technologies and social media have arguably had more of an impact on the work of journalists than any other technological invention, and certainly one that is more rapid. In the course of a decade (from 1996 to 2006), aspects of the practice and consumption of journalism was rendered almost unrecognisable both to the public and the journalists themselves. Although these changes were still incremental, they were faster than many others and they did include an entirely new medium (the Internet) which then evolved to include all aspects of the previous media (text, still images, audio and video), as well as new aspects such as customisation and interactivity. This new technology also changed the nature of consumption from time and location-specific to “any time” and “any place”, while introducing massive competition for consumers’ attention by providing a hitherto unprecedented range of entertainment and information, all within one context. All of these things had an impact on the consumption and economy of the news media, but not (initially at least) on the production of it.

b. Research responses to new media technologies

Academic research into the impact of the technological changes has tended to focus either on the nature of consumption and interaction (and not limited to news media), or on the

“technology of the possible” - discussions of what changes these technologies might bring, rather than what they demonstrably have. John Pavlik was one of the early pioneers of this research, and his work was typically optimistic, hailing the ease with which journalists would now be able to work (Pavlik, 2001, 1999), and others that followed after him tended to be similarly either descriptive or predictive rather than analytical. Coupled with this is a large body of work published in the professional and trade journals of the media industry, which discuss specific examples of new technologies, and how they are (or might be) being used, but frequently without the rigour of applied research (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2006).

What these initial studies lacked was the in-depth data collection and critical analysis of what, if anything, was actually happening in newsrooms. In the 1960s and 1970s, the relatively new field of sociology had turned its attention to the practice of journalism and analysed in fine detail as to what journalists were doing all day, how the news was selected, constructed and presented (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). These studies were pivotal in the development of journalism theory as a field, but the approach was, by the time I started my masters' research (on print news organisations' approach in creating online sites) in 2000, considered old-fashioned and overly formalist (at least by the largely critical-theory informed academy at which I was doing my research). Although the conclusions reached by this research remained relevant and were widely taught and cited, it was not considered necessary to revisit the process, to repeat the studies and to analyse what, if anything, had changed. Some studies began to appear in the early 2000s, most notably Williams and Delli Carpini's (2004, 2000) studies of the coverage of the Monica Lewinsky scandal which focused on the use of the Drudge Report as a trusted source.

It was this gap that I perceived in the field that I chose to focus on: the specific question of how, exactly, new technologies were being used in newsrooms and how this impacted on the

news media as an institution. The research presented in this submission covers a range of issues and incorporates a range of methods, but the focus and intent of the research returns again and again to the nature of the impact of technological change on the practice of journalism, and to the extent to which journalism adapts to and resists both technological innovation and structural change. Although the works are presented chronologically, a number of key themes are present throughout the works, and the discussion below focuses on these. The three themes are concentric, each theme takes an aspect of the prior, and narrows the focus down.

2. Technological determinism and taxonomical concerns

A key concern for researchers in many fields is to identify and label that which they are examining. The naming of things is a fundamental philosophical endeavour (Sapir and Mandelbaum, 1985, pp. 3–6; Whorf and Carroll, 2007, pp. 246–8). Until the end of the twentieth century, this was largely unproblematic for the fields of journalism and media studies. News organisations were identified by either their final output (newspapers, magazines) or their primary means of distribution (radio, television). Finer details of format (tabloid, broadsheet), chronology (daily, weekly, monthly), economic role (state-owned, public, commercial) and political leanings (right-wing, left-wing) were added as necessary. Specific pieces of content could be further categorised and examined according to accepted rules of format, voice and structure that applies to that medium. Analysis of media outputs worked within these accepted norms of reference and production, with little concern for the potential disruption to these norms (Briggs, 2001; Harcup, 2009; McQuail, 2010; Sterling, 2009).

The invention of new technologies seldom caused a problem for this taxonomical framework. Prior to the Internet, new forms of news distribution that were adopted (radio, newsreels, television and teletext) remained self-contained so, although new terminologies were needed to classify and reference these new technological forms, these new terms

remained themselves discrete entities with little need to adjust or adapt terminology as used for the older forms. Forms of journalism (text, still pictures, moving pictures, audio) were uniquely attached to forms of distribution (newspapers and magazines, television, radio), which allowed for simplicity (and conflation) of reference terms. The Internet was initially just another new form of news, referenced simply as online news. However, unlike with previous new developments which had engendered new (industrialised) organisations and entities to produce them, news on the Internet was either a new division within an old news organisation, or created and distributed by people not associated with any news organisation (who may or may not have considered themselves journalists) (Briggs, 2001; Sterling, 2009).

This created confusion within both the industry and the academy. If a newspaper organisation runs a news website, is that website still part of the “press”? Is video posted online inherently “broadcast journalism” because of the essentialism of the video format, or is the distribution mechanism more important than the format of the content when determining “what” it is? If the journalist who posted it works for a newspaper, does that make it not television journalism? If the person who posted the video is not employed (or trained) as a journalist then is that journalism? These issues are not simply ones of taxonomy and classification – the impact of the medium on journalism is a fundamental unit of enquiry within journalism studies, and the need to identify the common and unique aspects of a text is essential to understanding the frame into which an analysis enquires. If “the medium is the message”, as McLuhan (1964) claimed, then how are we to understand the message if we are no longer sure what the medium is?

Throughout the corpus of research presented here, I have tackled the question of classification and definition in new technological forms of journalism. The focus was not on the industrialised frame which had been used to determine news and its impacts but on the

nature of the content itself, whether there was an essentialist aspect to new media technologies which would allow researchers to classify, and from there develop a framework for analysis of these new forms of journalism. In the absence of medium-specific identifiers, I focused on inherent aspects of the text and on the intent of the producers.

In the initial stages of my research I applied this frame to blogs and citizen journalism, attempting to establish, beyond the purely technological, the nature of these “new” forms of reporting and social engagement. *In Blogging: a new medium or a new form of an old one* (Knight, 2005, pp. 40–41 in this document), a set of criteria by which to distinguish blogging from more traditional forms of journalism was proposed. These criteria hinged on the issues of personal voice, the production process and the financial and economic context. This paper, which was developed as a discussion paper for the Creative Commons conference in Johannesburg in 2005, examines the format and voice of blogs and contrasts this with the format and voice of traditional, or formal, journalism with the goal of examining the ways in which the two approaches converged and differed. This resulted in two (not exactly orthogonal) axes along which content could be arranged: the personal/professional axis, and the raw/cooked axis.

The personal/professional axis identifies the range of voices within content: from the highly personal voice of early bloggers such as Dooce, to the mix of personal and political in writers such as Atrios (Daily Kos) to the full range of journalistic voices from columnists to the highly depersonalised voices of the BBC and “newspapers of record”. This axis also coincides with that much beleaguered and argued-about aspect of journalism: objectivity (Allan, 2010; Rosen, 1993). Whether or not objectivity could, or should, exist within reportage, blogging’s lack of objectivity was fundamental to dismissal of it as a serious contender for space in the public sphere.

The raw/cooked axis ties in to the nature of production. Blogging tended at the time to be an individual or small team activity, and content was created by one person from idea to publication. News organisations stood in contrast to that, with large teams of editors, reporters, writers, sub-editors and the like, all working on the content as on a factory floor. This links in to the previous axis in that the regimented production process of industrialised news is clearly linked to “objectivity” and the erasure of the personal voice in favour of the “house style” of the newspaper or broadcast house. At the time of this paper, many news organisations were still working within the traditional daily news cycle of deadlines, and holding web content back in favour of the broadcast or print run. Because of this, the raw/cooked axis also identifies immediacy as a key aspect of blogging, and links it to the informality of the voice.

The third axis – free/expensive – dealt with the commercial underpinnings of both forms, and the fact that blogging was at the time still largely viewed as an amateur activity. This is expanded further in later research with a focus on the intent of the producer, and not on the commercial transactions that underpin its distribution (I am not an economist and although commerce is at the heart of society, I am not equipped to analyse it or its impact).

In a later analysis, written after the development of social media, the rise of citizen journalism and the almost total dissolution of the single-medium news organisation into the multiple media news ecology, this model was explicated in the paper *Beyond Technological Determinism* (Knight and Cook, 2011, pp. 65-69 in this document), jointly authored with Clare Cook (whose expertise is in branding and financial models for new media technologies).

This paper is a structured attempt at developing a model for the forms of kinds of journalism - based on axes of voice (format and presentation of news content, as well as the nature of

the relationship between the organisation and its audience) and intent (commercial, industrialised news as opposed to the dissemination of news content as secondary to other goals, such as social or political change). These axes formed a two-dimensional matrix, on which news organisations could be mapped and the relationships between them established. A second, micro, model was developed for the ways in which individual journalists worked within this new media context, working with depth and breadth in sourcing at one end, and niche and mass audiences at the other. In this paper, we worked jointly to develop the overall models but I wrote up the discussion and analysis of the macro model and Clare Cook developed and analysed the micro model.

This model is informed by the axes proposed in the initial paper mentioned, the relationship between personal and professional, and between formally and informally constructed work. The additional focus on audience and reach was Clare Cook's contribution to the ideas, since her focus is on the financial and consumer models of new journalism, whereas mine is on the practices.

This paper was a cohesive attempt to map the landscape of new and social media. Fundamental to it was a rejection of the technology of distribution as the determining factor in creating a taxonomy of news organisations. This paper is fairly esoteric, but formed the basis of the book *Social Media for Journalists: Principles and Practice*¹ (Knight and Cook, 2013, pp. 120 -264 in this document), which then expands on this model in order to develop a comprehensive guide to the ways in which news was now being produced and disseminated in this new environment.

¹ The title of the book was the source of considerable argument between Sage and ourselves. Clare and I initially titled it *News in the New Media Ecology*, but Sage felt that this was too obscure and insisted on the title it currently has, to link it in with Tony Harcup's work *Journalism: Principles and Practice*. New Media Ecology is a phrase that is used throughout the book, and one which we feel better describes the range and scope of the work.

The paper used the phrase “technological determinism” to reference the essentialism of technology that had marked understandings of the news media prior to the development of the Internet and its wholesale impact on the news industry. Technological determinism is more widely understood as a framework in which technological development is viewed as a force upon society which engenders specific responses, and not a product of society itself, subject to the same pressures and forces (Grint and Woolgar, 1997). This idea of technological determinism is congruent with our use of the term within the paper, but not analogous. The apparent invisibility of technology to the development of news formats, its acceptance as an unquestioned part of the landscape by journalism studies and the way in which it was unquestioningly accepted as indivisible from the news itself was the heart of the argument we were making. By identifying the technological determinism in the field, and highlighting both the impact of that technology and the variable nature of its relationship to the medium, we intended to extract the content and its formats from the technology itself.

The book is a mixture of textbook and theory, and contains fourteen chapters. Clare and I co-wrote the introductory and final chapters (and they are an expansion of the ideas presented in the *Beyond Technological Determinism* paper). Broadly speaking, we divided the work up so that Clare wrote the "Practices" sections - chapters which provide guidance and skills training - and I wrote the "Principles" sections - chapters which provide the theoretical and social context in which these practices occur. The chapters I wrote are: Data Journalism and Crowdsourcing, Citizen Journalism and the Public Sphere, Collaborative Journalism and User-generated content, Ethics and the Code of Conduct, Truth and Verification and Journalism and the Law. These chapters provide an overview of the broader issues in new forms of journalism, and tensions around the origins of content, the lines of fair use and reuse, personal engagement with audiences and the changing goals of news organisations. Each of these chapters consist of a theoretical analysis, based on the literature

and examples and on case studies which delineate the issues and conclusions of the subject at hand. These case studies are based on interviews and analysis of primary content.

Although the book is the largest work in the material I am presenting it is, in effect, an expansion of the ideas presenting in the previous papers. *Beyond Technological Determinism* was the theoretical construction of a model (which had developed directly from the conclusions reached in the prior four papers and book chapter), with no application of that model beyond a "proof of concept" test of the precepts. The book is an expansion of that model into a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the field of journalism at that time, and the case studies and structure of the book expand on and clarify the ideas presented in the initial paper. The conclusion presented at the end of the book remains in line with that of the initial paper, but there are subtle changes as we adapted the model from a theoretical to an applied one.

The book is unapologetically a textbook, intended both to illuminate an idea and to render it relevant and applicable to practice. Throughout my research, I have worked to illuminate the links and gaps between academic research, journalistic practice and journalists' own discourse about their practice. These spaces and connections are the heart of my ideas, and the contribution I have made to scholarship. As a teacher of journalism, I am aware that any practice that cannot be explained cannot be taught, and any theoretical model that does not truly illuminate the subject will be rapidly cast aside in discussion from invested students. Taking the model proposed in *Beyond Technological Determinism* and subjecting it to case studies and to the development of teaching materials was the test of its value and applicability to the practice of journalism.

The model forms the frame of the book, and aspects of it are illuminated and highlighted in the case studies and original research within the book. Because the models proposed in the

book are complicated ones which seek to link different aspects of modern journalistic practice to each other, and to changes in the environment, no one research study would suffice to justify the assertions made. Each chapter and assertion of the components of the model are illuminated through a combination of literature, primary social research and case studies. These link together to provide the justification for the model and, in philosophical terms, to prove it.

The impact of citizen and amateur journalism and newsgathering on industrialised and formalised news production processes is discussed in chapters six and seven. A substantial part of chapter six delineates and examines the various forms of “citizen journalism”, from formal news organisations’ created “citizen journalism” ventures designed to harvest story ideas and content from the public, to hyperlocal journalism, to public and activist journalism (pp. 102-107, pp. 166-167 in this document). This is an expansion of the ideas presented in the chapter *Blogging and Citizen Journalism* (2008), working again with ideas about intent, voice and production used to establish the boundaries of the various forms.

The case study for chapter six raises a separate issue in citizen journalism (pp.107-109, pp. 167-168 in this document). This is an examination of the impact of “netizens” (Chinese citizens commenting and interacting on the Internet) on the reportage of a specific disaster story. The conclusion of this case study (based partially on primary research gathered by an MA student of mine, Chen Dan Qi), highlighted the significance of Chinese state control of the media in how the public use the social networks, and the nature of that state response to the network. Although this may appear to be contrary to my previous research which showed how journalists used social networks to find information (or didn’t), the significance of the conclusion that even within a state-controlled media, the agenda is being affected by online comment, cannot be denied. Even if the response to that affect takes the form of increased

controls on internet access and commentary, it is undeniable that the formal media is aware of and responding to amateur content.

The final chapter of the book revisits the issue of technological determinism and argues that a new measure of journalism and journalistic practice is needed. This measure is based not on the industrial or technological basis of distribution (the press, both as physical entity and conceptual descriptor is increasingly meaningless) but on the nature of engagement with the environment, the voice with which one engages and the effect of that engagement. The idea that journalism is not located solely within an institution which defines itself as such, but is based on the practice itself, is a radical one and one which opens up the practice to a far greater examination of its nature than previous definitions allowed. This also reflects the fact that the news environment has become increasingly open, allowing for multiple sources of information to compete in a [relatively] open playing field. The inclusion of organisations like Wikileaks, or alternative and radical organisations which also provide news and information is important: the argument is made that because people use these organisations as a source of information about the world around them, they are in, de facto, news organisations, regardless of whether they consider themselves as such, or whether the more entrenched elements of the news industry do.

[The model we propose] is not intended as a definitive map of the landscape and all the players within it; rather, it is constructed as a challenge to existing models of the news media environment, and old ways of thinking about the news that make it difficult for researchers and theorists to grapple with the specific issues that this radically changed landscape has created. (Knight and Cook, 2013, p. 229, p. 234 in this document)

However, the various outlets competing for attention differ so widely that the simple mechanism of defining news organisations by their distribution technology (radio, television, newspapers and magazine) and by their relationship to the state (commercial, public and state-owned) is no longer meaningful. A range of measures is proposed: intent,

which measures the nature of the organisation and whether news distribution is its sole purpose; voice, which examines the use of professional, so-called objective, journalism (and calls back to Jay Rosen's seminal essay: *Beyond Objectivity* (1993)) or the more immediate, personal, voice of blogs and activists; engagement, which is a combination of reach (audience size) and the nature of the interaction with the audience (the feedback loop and the extent to which audience members are encouraged to participate in, and contribute to, the content provided). Various news organisations were mapped on to this matrix for explanatory purposes. The point was not to identify and map each organisation, but to demonstrate the axes with known examples. This is the new News Ecology which we proposed and, to follow that theme through, this is an attempt at a taxonomy of that ecosystem.

The use of a comprehensive model to examine and analyse media products is a substantial contribution to the field of journalism studies. Previous studies that focused on new media technologies tended to either simply describe these technologies and their potential for change (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Bull, 2010; Gillmor, 2006; Hall, 2001) or to analyse them purely in relationship to older technologies and processes, reducing both forms of practice to a tautological definition: each is that which the other is not. Taking a clear snapshot of the current landscape, and examining it without reference to specific technologies or past practices, the model allows for clear examination of relationships and practices without being limited by the previous analyses.

3. Professional responses to technological developments

Within the broader frame of technological and taxonomical definitions is the actual response by the news media (and journalists in specific) to the impact of specific technologies. This is examined within the context both of what is expressed by journalists in the press about the impact of technologies, and in what is actually used by journalists. One study focused on

“citizen journalism” and its use by a mainstream news organisation. Twitter was the focus of three of the studies presented here, two content analyses of its use as a source in journalistic content, one coupled with interviews, and one observational study of the process of news production. The final study in this stream explored the practice of data journalism in UK newspapers. These studies were largely quantitative and examined the actual usage of these new technologies by news organisations, but they also illuminate something of discourse surrounding these new technologies.

In the book chapter *Blogging and Citizen Journalism* (Knight, 2010), I expand on the ideas of subjective and objective voices in amateur and professional media respectively, which had been the focus of the earlier paper on blogging (Knight, 2005, pp. 38–41 in this document). This chapter was written and researched in 2007/8, although not published until two years later, and is a development of ideas I first raised within the 2005 paper. The key difference here is the way in which the industrialised news industry had begun to co-opt and absorb some of the main approaches of blogging and citizen journalism. From the opposing positions as exemplified by the axes of the first paper, this chapter looks at the merging of the two forms, primarily through a case study analysis of Reporter.co.za – a citizen journalism project wholly funded and managed by a commercial news organisation, Johnnic (now Avusa) press. (Knight, 2010, pp. 45–47 (pp.59-61 in this document))

The two papers on blogging delineate the characteristics of the newly developing forms of journalism, in order to further quantify and analyse their spread through the more traditional media. The case study of Reporter.co.za which constitutes the bulk of the book chapter is used to examine the co-opting of the voice of amateur journalism into mainstream practice. This issue, of the ways in which technology made it possible non-industrialised news organisations to pose a threat to the more traditional ways of doing things is one that has occupied considerable space in the public discourse around the challenges of new media.

Two key works exemplify that threat: the American Press Institute's *We Media* report (Bowman and Willis, 2003) and Dan Gillmor's *We the Media* (2006). Both of these works pose the argument that technology has democratised the means of production and distribution, widening access for the general public. The idea that traditional news media (traditional more in terms of the institution than in format by this point) would be drowned out by citizen journalism was, in retrospect, naive. The overall gist of the argument was that the public would report on events for themselves, using technology to speak directly to each other, removing the news industry as middleman. The focus was on the technology that made this possible (websites, fora, blogs, and later Twitter and Facebook), rather than on the other aspects of production infrastructure which made news media possible: money, time, and access to news sources. This technological determinism (speaking of the news media as merely an offshoot of their technological means of distribution – the press, the website, the radio station) is something that is discussed again in the paper *Beyond Technological Determinism* (2011, pp. 65-69 in this document) and the book *Social Media for Journalists: Principles and Practices* (2013, pp. 2-3, pp. 128-129 in this document).

These two initial works draw on the discourse around the nature of journalism in which academics, journalists and new media innovators were engaging. Rather than the somewhat pedantic separation of academics and journalists as shown in the research produced by White, Tuchman and other sociologists of journalism practice in the sixties and seventies (exemplified by the observation method used in much of this work), the broadening of the academy and the widening of interest in their own practices in the light of technology on the part of journalists resulted in research and discourse produced by journalists writing about their own work. This style of work and the discourses raised by it remain a focus of the research.

a. Social media and response by traditional news outlets.

By the time the chapter *Blogging and Citizen Journalism* appeared, blogging was very much on the way out in terms of public discourse and awareness, displaced by Facebook, Twitter, and the various technologies dubbed “social media”. Although blogs still exist, and blogging remains an important form of amateur online content production (and self-expression), the rapid rise of social media predicated a change in focus of the research. The Iranian election of 2009, coming just two years after the launch of Twitter, and four years after that of Facebook, proved a watershed for the social networks. As the younger generation of networked Iranians (some commentators would have said Tehranis) rebelled against the state-controlled media and took to social media to express support for their candidate, the world’s media became focused on the ways in which this network was supplementing and supplanting the traditional news networks. My research was not focused on the use of the networks by the Iranian public (not being able to read Farsi made this impossible), but in the ways in which the western media were using these networks as a source of news.

This study, *Journalism as usual: The use of social media as a newsgathering tool in the coverage of the Iranian elections in 2009* (2012) examines two aspects of the coverage: the actual use of social media as a source of news, and the discussion of the same usage within the news itself. This was one of the first studies to attempt to quantify the use of social media as a news source. Previous work had either looked at limited case studies or extreme examples, or was presented as guidance as to how a journalist might use the network as a source. The study found that actual use of social media as a source was limited. Statements by the opposition parties that appeared on social media (having been banned by the state media) were quoted, but little else, that could be determined. Comment on the use of social media as a source outweighed the actual usage, and the study illuminated a considerable

weight of concern about the impact of such material on the traditional practices of journalism.

This study was a content and discourse analysis of the published material in the newspapers, and the methodology left some questions unanswered: specifically the non-disclosed use of social media (practices differ across newspapers as to whether the medium of communication is mentioned in the text), and the use of social media in planning stories and finding contacts, prior to the actual sourcing of quotes.

b. Public discourse on the impact of social media

By this point, the journalistic discourse around the use of social media and other technologies by journalists had become visible across the public sphere, and the starting point for this piece of research was the question of whether news organisations were, in fact, using social media as often as the commentary would imply they were. The commentary was considerably more concerned with the potential impact of the use of social media (especially unverified social media), than the news copy indicated social media sources were being used. However, despite style and ethical guidelines, the channel of access to a source was not consistently identified by journalists, which raised the possibility that social media were being used far more extensively by journalists than was evident in the published work. This possibility was addressed in the next two studies in this sequence.

One major aspect which was identified in this study was the issue of verification. Concern was raised repeatedly in the public discourse around journalism as to whether information and media material sourced from social networks could be trusted, and the risk of news organisations being fooled by pranksters or political operative was highlighted (Knight, 2012). This concern was not unfounded: many news organisations had published images of the 2004 Tsunami which had turned out to be false, as had images of the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, but the concern appeared to be disproportionate

to the risk, and expressed in some ways as more of an existential fear of the role of the journalist than of real concern of misleading the public. This concern for verification, as expressed by a number of journalists whose work is examined in the paper (Berman, 2009; Fisk, 2009; Jardine, 2009; Sullivan, 2009; Tait and Weaver, 2009) can be linked to the ideals of objectivity and the idea of the journalist as arbiter of truth which underlies much of the ideology of industrialised news production in the twentieth century, and informs much of the discourse around the use of social media and new technologies by journalists.

c. Social media as news source

This study focused on sourcing as a key practice in journalism that might have been expected to change as a result of new technologies. Sourcing is also identified in the literature as being linked to agenda setting and the representation of the full range of ideas within a news organisation (Davis, 2009; Sigal, 1973). This is, in turn, linked to the idea that social media and new media would make the media more accountable and more representative, something that advocates of new media technologies touted as a benefit (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2006).

In January 2011, Tunisia erupted in a popular uprising, and the world's media flocked to the country. As with the Iranian election eighteen months earlier, this uprising was hailed as a "social media revolution" and attention immediately focused on the role played by Twitter and Facebook in events. The paper (originally commissioned as a book chapter for a book which was never published, is now available as a working paper), *The revolution will be Facebooked, broadcast and published* (2013, pp.105-119 in this document) investigated what, if anything, had changed in the use of social media as a source in journalism since the events in Iran. For this study, I supplemented the content analysis (expanding on the instrument used in the Iran study) with semi-structured interviews with key reporters, which

addressed the question of how social media was used in planning and finding stories, as well as in coverage itself.

In the interim between the Iranian elections in 2009 and the outbreak of violent protest in Tunisia in 2011, Egypt had erupted in what came to be known as the Arab Spring. The protests and ensuing disruption in the country had caught the international news media somewhat by surprise, and the widespread use of social media and blogs by young Egyptians proved a testing ground for the use of social media as a news source. Andy Carvin, then a digital community manager at National Public Radio in Washington DC, had extensive social media contacts in Egypt, having trained young Egyptian journalists and entrepreneurs in the use of the Internet some years previously. His Twitter account rapidly became the clearing house for information about events in Cairo and, specifically, Tahrir Square, the centre of protest. Carvin himself spoke often about the difficulty of being in that position, of the challenges of verification, and of the fact that he himself was not a journalist, and made no claims to be one (Carvin, 2012, 2011; Katz, 2011; Kiss, 2011). The Arab Spring brought social media into the forefront of public consciousness around journalism, and tensions around the roles of journalists and sources and around verification and control of the channels of communication were highlighted again.

In the Tunisia study, as with the Iranian election, social media was not extensively used as a reporting tool, although journalists did use it as a means to discover the location of events and protests. This is more a function of the journalists responding to the nature of the event (in that the protests were being organised and planned through social media) than taking the initiative to use a new tool in new ways. This study expanded on the work in the Iran study, and draws a more comprehensive picture of the ways in which journalists are using social media as a newsgathering tool. Language was identified as another issue affecting the use of social media by journalists – only those journalists who spoke Arabic (or had access to

assistants who did) were able to access social media material easily (Knight, 2013 pp. 100-101 in this document).

Throughout these studies, the focus was on journalists working for mainstream newspapers in traditional capacities. The final print output was the object of study, the use of social media as a news dissemination mechanism was not examined. This was a deliberate choice to focus on how journalists use technology, and how it alters news gathering practices. The print edition of the newspaper was chosen as that tends to be the most traditional and constructed element of the news output produced by modern news outlets, so would tend to only identify changes in routines and processes that had been thoroughly embedded, as it were, in practices. The choice to focus on foreign stories was co-incidental – these were the events which occurred at the time and raised interesting issues in the discourse. The focus on the Middle East, particularly, swayed the analysis, since the region is traditionally covered by the most experienced and respected (and oldest) foreign correspondents in any news organisation. This did result in a high level of contrast between the stated concerns on the prevalence of the use of social media and the actual use by journalists within that news organisation who were focusing on that story.

d. Social media in the newsroom: source and commentary

The third study in the series, *The origin of stories: how journalists find and create news in an age of social media, competition and churnalism* (2011 pp70-90 in this document), takes that methodological process further while retaining the same essential question, and is based on participant observation in a national newspaper and a parallel analysis of the content produced. This both obviates the narrow focus imposed by focusing only on foreign correspondents in a specific context, and looks to marry production processes with the final product, and track the overall impact throughout the cycle.

The use of social media in newsgathering was almost entirely absent; although journalists were all avid users of social media, it was largely used to examine the impact of outputs or to see what the competition was doing. Specific stories within the corpus of content did quote social media, but they were set up specifically to do that: the modern digital vox pop. One story, the reported attempted bombing of a bank in Watford, should have lent itself to extensive social media usage (every commenter and adviser to journalists on the use of social media would have leapt on that as the epitome of a story that could be covered from Twitter), but it was not even suggested in conference, and the final reporting was based entirely on wire and second-hand reports. This piece of research is a key development of ideas, and stands with the previous two papers as the culmination of the question of how journalists use social media as a newsgathering tool. Without this study, the previous two are open to criticism that their specific focus limits the impact of their conclusions; this one addresses the gaps in those two and returns the same conclusion, that social media is not extensively used as a newsgathering tool, and that institutional and public relations channels remain the dominant source of news within the news industry. (2011, pp. 83-84 in this document)

These studies have focused on news sourcing practices, on how journalists find and create news (rather than distribute and sell it). The importance of sourcing practices to the nature of the news that is created and disseminated has long been recognised and studied; from the early stages of the Frankfurt School's analysis of how power is created and perpetuated, the idea that the nature of the sources quoted sets the agenda of the story has long been accepted (Gans, 1979; McCombs, 2005, 2004). Sigal's (1973) study of sourcing practices remains key to this question, and this approach is used within the research, finding that the practices of journalists have not been substantially changed by new technologies.

This is the key finding of this phase of the research, that the optimism with which new media technology was hailed in the early stages (Bardoel and Deuze, 2001; Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2010, 2006; Pavlik, 1999; Platon and Deuze, 2003) has been misguided, and that most commercial, industrialised journalism has not fundamentally altered its relationships to power within society. The three studies, taken together, show journalistic practice adapting slowly and erratically to the changes that social media brought. Where change happened, it was in response to changes so fundamental on the ground that journalists had no choice but to respond. When the Iranian opposition took to social media to spread its message the journalists followed, but only once it was impossible to gain access to the same information by any other means. Journalists used Facebook to find out where the protests would be happening in Tunis because that was the only place that information could be found. Any information that could be obtained through more traditional means (press conferences, interviews with bystanders, insider contacts) was done so. In the third study, when the journalists were based within their own newsrooms with access to telephones, websites, and press releases, social media was relegated to a source of celebrity quotes and tracking the retweets of the newspapers' own material; it was not looked upon as a source.

Data journalism is not a new concept, but as with many other forms of journalism, new technologies and methods have lowered the barriers to entry for many journalists.

Subsequently, in the last seven years or so, it has become increasingly visible in journalistic practice. Although data journalism (or strictly speaking, simplified and cheaper data analysis tools and readily accessible data) does not present the same challenges social media does for journalism, it raises similar issues for the researcher. The zeal with which news commentators often greet new technological forms is apparent in the discourse, the discussions of "is this really journalism" are visible, and the adaptation and absorption into the normalised practice of journalism appears to be under way.

Data journalism is discussed in chapter four of *Social Media for Journalists*. In the chapter, case studies are presented that illustrate how data journalism was being used in newsrooms. In 2014 I began to explore data journalism as a specific form of journalism, and published *Data Journalism in the UK: a preliminary analysis of form and content* (Knight, 2015, pp.265 - 284 in this document). This is an examination of “data journalism” in UK newspapers, with the intent of examining how it is used, whether it is a substantially new form of journalism, and the overall impact of the supposedly new practice on journalism as a whole. Its intent is similar to the work that preceded it, which looked at the use of social media in traditional news organisations, and it falls within the broad body of work which examines the impact of new technologies on news content and practices. As with the papers on the use of social media, the conclusions were mixed; overall, there is the appearance of data journalism with fairly extensive use of graphs, charts and other visualisations, but data as a source of news is not evident.

The study examines and highlights some of the claims made by data journalism evangelists against the reality. The aim is not to demolish the claims of data journalism, but to examine its level of penetration into (mainstream news) media practice. To that end, the findings do not show overwhelming evidence of comprehensive use of data journalism by national UK titles. (2015, p. 69, p. 281 in this document)

This paper, then, revisits the same territory that I have examined throughout: the impact of new technologies on journalism and the extent to which news organisations’ outward support for those technologies is mirrored by actual usage. This is then reflected in tensions around the construction of information, the control of the channel and the nature of professionalism that run throughout my work. Concerns around the reliability of sources, the function of the journalistic process in the creation of the “news product” and the skills and actions that make one a journalist, are threaded throughout the work I have presented.

The paper does depict news organisations being less ambivalent about a new technology than previous work did. This might represent a genuine change in thinking, but I suspect that further research will show that the eagerness with which news organisations appear to embrace data journalism has more to do with the fact that it is complex and difficult, and requires specialised expertise to use. In *News Culture*, Stuart Allan discussed the ways in which expertise in shorthand became the barrier to entry for journalists, and the mark of ‘professionalism’ which distinguished them from their amateur competition (Allan, 2004, p. 20) I suspect that data journalism has similar appeal for newsrooms.

4. Ambivalence and excitement

The final focus of the work presented is on the ambivalence with which new technologies were approached by journalists and newsrooms. Journalists are almost by definition people who are excited by the appeal of something new and different but, as a profession, journalism is under threat and journalists are concerned by the impact of new technologies on their livelihoods. This is examined through discourse analysis of columns and opinion pieces reflecting on the changing nature of journalism as a benchmark against which to measure those changes through content analysis appears in *Blogging and Citizen Journalism* (2010), *Journalism as Usual* (2012), *The revolution will be Facebooked, Broadcast and Published* (2013, pp. 105-119 in this document) and in *Data Journalism in the UK* (2015, pp. 265 - 284 in this document). This method is supplemented by interviews and case studies in *The revolution will be Facebooked, Broadcast and Published* and in the book *Social Media for Journalists* (Knight and Cook, 2013, pp. 120-284 in this document). The use of comment and opinion by working journalists represents something of a change in the literature, which traditionally either relied on direct interviews and observation, or focused only on the content, not considering the intent. This material sits between the formalised academy-based research into news practices and the informal assumptions about what

journalists do, how they do it, and why. By including the journalists' own voices in the analysis, the tension the profession is under as a result of technological change becomes evident and can then itself be analysed.

Throughout the work one can see journalists torn between the excitement of new content and new forms becoming available to them and fear for their own professional survival. In *Journalism as Usual* (2012), that tension is most evident in the fear that is expressed of social media "getting it wrong", and in the commentary around the video of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan:

Jardine's article in *The Telegraph* was critical of the footage, discussing both the possibility that it was faked and her opinion that the footage was unethical by western journalistic standards, that it 'violated one of our last taboos: that the moment of death is private and should be witnessed only by those who care for that person.' (2012, p. 69, p. 99 in this document)

Jardine's opposition to the idea of the footage, to its being on YouTube at all and that it was not being correctly presented and viewed, is typical of many journalists whose ideas are reflected in the work. In *The Revolution will be Facebooked, Broadcast and Published* Isabelle Mandraud of *Le Monde* expressed similar reservations:

She used the contacts in the military, government and political parties that she had built up in years of covering the region, and did not use social media at all. In fact, she describes it as dangerous' for journalists, citing the familiar concerns about reliability and verisimilitude. (Mandraud, in Knight, 2013, p. 4, p. 109 in this document)

These tensions around the use of user-generated content coalesced into concerns about veracity and reliability, and in *Social Media for Journalists* the extensive discussion of the verification methods used by large news organisations is evidence of that (Knight and Cook, 2013, pp. 150-153, pp. 211-214 in this document).

The tension that industrialised news organisations are under is borne out by the rapidly changing landscape in which they operate. In *Beyond Technological Determinism* (Knight and Cook, 2011, pp. 65-69 in this document) and throughout *Social Media for Journalists*, this is evident. These works move the scale outwards and examine the wider ecosystem in which news organisations work. From this perspective, one can see that the fear and tension around new forms of media is not necessarily created from a genuine fear of getting things wrong (after all, newspapers and TV channels have been getting things wrong since well before the World Wide Web, as several examples in chapter nine of *Social Media for Journalists* show), but from a more amorphous fear of the loss of space and voice. When the larger picture is viewed, it is clear that news organisations face unprecedented competition from non-traditional outlets, and the reaction has been an inevitable combination of contempt for these new forms (as seen in the discussions of social media as a news source above) and co-optation of them. This adoption and adaptation of new forms of journalism as a survival tactic is raised in *Blogging and Citizen Journalism's* discussion of Avusa's Reporter.co.za project:

The site was explicitly created to develop a news source for the commercial entities of Avusa. Although the site paid for stories, the fee was minimal, and in the case of a major story, the tip was certainly worth it for Avusa, who maintained ownership of all content published on the site. Stories submitted to the site were edited by a team of professional journalists, employed by Avusa, and content was controlled in this way, and journalists were given advice and guidance by the team. (Knight, 2010, p. 44)

In *Social Media for Journalists*, the use of user-generated content has become standard practice for large news organisations, and the structures and processes around this had begun to be codified and formalised. However, the tension remains and the subtext is that formalised, constructed news produced by 'professional' journalists is still the ideal form of the content.

Robert Mackay of the New York Times agrees that live blogs are not a substitute for a finished news product: 'You are more or less providing readers with raw material rather than telling them a story. You also tend to get swept up in the rush of events, and don't have nearly as much time as you'd like to think about what's happening and make connections, or write any sort of news analysis.' (Mackay, quoted in (Wells, 2011)).

Live blogging can bring out the best in the new forms of journalism, transparency, immediacy and interaction, but are not the only form of news available, and are not a direct substitute for the traditional summative, authoritative, structured news report. They are also not suited to all stories, and careful consideration needs to be given to the question of whether a specific incident or event is worth the effort of creating and running a live blog, and whether there is sufficient audience or content to make it worthwhile (Anderson, cited in (Wells, 2011)). (Knight and Cook, 2013, p123, p. 187 in this document).

Within the book, these tensions are further illuminated and discussed. Chapter seven deals with the use of user-generated content (whether solicited, as in the case of crowdsourcing, or not) by news organisations. This chapter argues that the use of public-created images and video footage by journalists is not new, but the availability of such material has increased radically with the ubiquitousness of cameras and the ease of communication with news outlets. With the increased prevalence of such footage, a number of routines and structures around their use have been established, but the chapter argues that such processes are still in line with traditional news practices – the verification of sources has always been an issue for responsible journalists (pp. 112-113, 118-120; pp. 174-175, 180-182 in this document).

For professional journalists, the main concerns raised by user-generated content are verification and analysis. In the second part of chapter seven, and in the case study appended to it, these issues are linked to tensions around the role of professional journalism, and the nature of control of the news channel. In the Iranian election paper (2012, pp.90-104 in this document), I argued that the extent to which news organisations addressed and discussed the possibility of social media as a news source was more a reflection of their fears of being

upstaged than a response to a genuinely changing practice. In 2011, as the book was being written, this had changed, and news organisations had developed guidelines and protocols for using this content (also discussed in chapter nine), but the tension remains – that the role of the journalist is under threat from amateurs whose contributions must be corralled, tagged and controlled.

The case study for this chapter looks at the use of Ushahidi (a crowdsourcing content platform developed for use in disasters) by the public broadcaster in Australia. This is an example of a disaster circumstance where the journalistic goals of a news organisation are somewhat subsumed by their public obligation to provide raw information. The use of their technological and verification skills to provide not a narrative nor an analysis, but simple facts, sourced from the public and channelled through the organisation, is an interesting development in the nature of journalism and networked information. It is, however, a very specific circumstance and the interviews conducted made clear that the journalists did not view this as part of their normal role, reiterating the tensions such forms of content and information raised (pp. 124 -125, pp. 188-189 in this document).

a. Verification, ethics and the laws of ownership

One of the tensions illuminated by social and new media developments is that of ownership of content. The traditional models of copyright and ownership of content are based on particular technologies, and the financial relationship between journalists and publisher was a simple one based on this relationship. As new and social media expanded to allow more voices and sources, the boundaries of ownership blurred and the ethics of usage, credit and questions of veracity were exposed. These issues are further clouded by their [perceived] impact on the professionalism and financial basis of traditional journalism. This is apparent in both *Journalism as Usual* and *The Revolution will be Facebooked*, but not extensively discussed. Within industrialised journalism, the journalist exchanges exclusive content for

financial gain, which content the publisher sells on to its readership. The exclusivity and originality of the content created is fundamental to its value as a commodity. This is all brought into question by the rise of social media, and these tensions are discussed in three chapters of the book.

Chapter nine deals with verification of user-generated and crowd-sourced material. Much of the chapter is in the form of advice (the “practice” side of the book) but it contains case study discussions of a number of cases of news organisations being hoaxed or mistaken by fake content, and the ways in which these hoaxes have contributed to the development of formal, codified, verification practices. The main case study (pp.156-157, pp. 217-218 in this document) examines the response of news organisations to a suspected hoax. Social media and user-generated content raises significant issues of verification for journalists – what used to simply be instinct and a “hunch” as to the reliability of a source now needs to be formally codified and implemented. The chapter discusses the mechanisms and procedures now in place to verify social media sourced material at a variety of news organisations, and contributes an understanding of this process to the overall picture of how the practice of journalism has changed.

Chapters eight and ten deal with ethics and the law respectively. Chapter eight is an extended discussion of journalistic ethics in the online environment and draws extensively on case studies and examples from the industry. The nature of the social networks and their impact on the traditional boundaries governing ethics is examined and the impact of rulings by the (now defunct) PCC is considered. The case study in this chapter hinges directly on the issue of “public interest”, and reiterates the point that the ethical judgements journalists make are not substantially different in the new networked environment (pp.143 -144, pp. 204-205 in this document).

Chapter ten is focused on legal issues, including copyright and legal protection of sources. The law governing the practice of journalism remains focused on the issue who can claim to be a journalist and, by extension, the legal protection that status confers. This section of the chapter is, then, inevitably an analysis of the tensions around the definition of a journalist, and the various legal rulings which have attempted to make sense of that definition. The impossibility of defining a journalist in traditional ways (works for a registered news organisation, for example) again highlights the tensions around the role and practices that have arisen as a result of new media technologies. In a number of rulings it is the practice itself that has been used to determine the status of the “journalist”, and it can be seen that this represents a transition from the status of journalist being conferred by the industrialised organisation (the press, as personified entity) to one in which it is reflexively generated by the practice itself.

5. Methodological approaches

Throughout the work presented here, I have used a variety of methodological approaches. As new technologies evolved, were adopted and became evident in the news output, the specific nature of my enquiry adapted to accommodate the specific nature of the area under scrutiny. The approach is broadly sociological and qualitative, combining content analysis with textual analysis, supplemented with observations, case studies and interviews. The use of different methods to examine the same question is particularly evident in the series of three papers examining the use of social media as a source. The initial study was purely based on content analysis of published texts, the findings of which informed the second study and the interviews conducted. The final study incorporated interviews, observations and content analysis. This iterative process of examining a practice repeatedly, incorporating differing approaches, gives a particularly robust framework from which an overall conclusion can be drawn.

6. Conclusion

There can be no simple conclusion here. The work I am engaged in is ongoing and developing, and the push-pull relationship between the draw of new technologies and the fear of the loss of traditional forms (and the security they offer) is not going to dissipate. The last work in the corpus, *Data Journalism in the UK* presents a picture of the news media being slightly less ambivalent about a new technology than previous research does (although, it would appear, no more able to use it effectively). The impact of technology on journalistic practice is not simple – it is a process of adaptation, backlash, co-optation and evolution, and one which will always need further study. My work, however, is a substantial contribution the ideas which inform that research and an expansion on work which preceded it in that it does uncritically accept the technology with which journalists work, but opens it up to examination and analysis.

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Note: Although I am submitting this PhD under my legal name, Margaret Anne Knight, personally and professionally, I am known as Megan Knight, and the works presented are all published under this name.

The works are presented in chronological order, and their original page numbering is preserved. The additional page numbering is that of this submitted document, and it is that which is referenced in the table of contents at the beginning of this volume.

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Blogging: a new medium, or a new form of an old one?

This is not intended as a an academic paper, but as the starting point for a discussion on the role of blogs and bloggers in the contemporary media environment.

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Basic terms of reference:

Blogging

The word blog is an abbreviation of the word weblog, a term coined to refer to a site which is a log of other websites visited by the weblogger, and commented on in the weblog. While the term has been shortened, its meaning has expanded. A blog is a website which provides short commentary on various topics, including other websites, news of the day, the personal life of the blogger, or pretty much anything else on can imagine. Weblogs are usually the work of one person, although there are communal weblogs that are very successful, and the site that claims to be the first weblog, boingboing.net is run by four people.

Blogs have expanded to include the previous forms of the online journal, and personal home page that were popular five years ago. Technically, the term can be loosely applied, and often is, but it is generally assumed that a blog is hosted using one of the many blogging software systems that are available, and which impose basic structural and format conventions on the user. The basic format of the weblog is a series of posts consisting of text, and possibly hyperlinks, which are delineated by time and date, and usually listed in reverse chronological order, with the most recent post at the top. Some weblogs allow pictures to be included as well, but most blogging software limits the amount of formatting and fancy layout that the writer can impose. The words, therefore are given priority on a weblog: it is primarily a textual, and hypertextual, form. (There are now blogs which focus primarily on images and photographs, several run by professional photographers, or people with cellphone cameras, in which the images are given pride of place. Likewise, podcasting, and audioblogging is increasing rapidly, providing content in audio form for users. Although these forms owe a lot to blogging, they are different in many ways, and I have found it necessary to limit my terms of reference to the text-based blog.)

Most blogging software also creates a text feed that can be read by a standardised piece of software called an aggregator. The most common format of this is Real Simple Syndication, or RSS, which allows a user to collect the latest posts from a list of blogs and view the content aggregated into a single window. The need for RSS compliance among bloggers further increases the emphasis that blogs place on text, rather than layout or design.

Below each post space is given for readers to comment, and for others to respond. This discussion allows for a far greater sense of community than is possible on a conventional website (but less than on a discussion forum or bulletin board), and the back and forth conversation is often more detailed and longer than the initial post.

Another common feature of the blog is the “blogroll” the term used for the writer’s list of recommended sites and other blogs which runs down one side of the page. Since blogging is an activity that works mostly by word of mouth, being mentioned in a popular blogger’s list can rapidly increase the audience for a site. The blogroll phenomenon also creates a sense of community around blogs, since people tend to list each other reciprocally and comment on each other’s sites and posts in their own blogs.

Journalism.

Journalism is the practice of producing stories about events in the world for other people to consume (read, watch, listen). Journalism is often a commercial enterprise, the newspaper, tv show or radio programme are produced for profit, either to be sold directly to the audience, or to sell advertising (selling the audience to the advertiser, rather than the newspaper to the audience). In modern society, journalism is mostly produced by professionals, people who are explicitly trained in the telling of news stories, and who are paid to do so.

Journalism tends also to follow standardised format, a story in a newspaper has a headline, a byline, and the main text, which itself will follow certain structural and stylistic conventions. Newspapers also follow a format, broken explicitly into sections on local, national and international news, sport, entertainment, opinion and lifestyle. The clear delineation of topics, and the very clear line that is drawn between opinion and “fact” are important hallmarks of the profession of journalism.

Modern journalism as a profession and practice is only just over a hundred years old. Newspapers have their roots in the pamphlets produced during the eighteenth century on topics of interest at the time. These pamphlets were the work of anyone who felt a desire to express something, and who could afford the cost of printing. Essentially, anyone with an opinion and a bit of money could produce a pamphlet and have his voice heard.

As newspapers began to print more regularly, to take contributions from more people and to distribute more widely, the idea of the professional journalist began to emerge. With the arrival of advertising (along with the rise of the middle classes), newspapers began to become a business. As the telegraph and the train increased both the sources of stories that could be told, and the distribution of the newspaper, they began to be big, and expensive businesses. The more expensive and commercialised the newspaper industry became, the more journalists began to think of themselves as professionals, and the standardised forms of news began to arise, along with the professional ideals of “objectivity” and balance.

Journalism, for the terms of this discussion, therefore refers to the products of professional, formalised news organisations, produced by professional journalists.

Key differences between Weblogging and news

The personal, the political, and the professional

Mainstream news content relies heavily on the idea of objectivity and balance in reporting. Opinion is rare, and when it is given, it is clearly delineated as such, on the editorial pages of the newspaper. Most news reporting is constructed as to give the impression that it is reporting the truth of the events, without the feelings or opinions of the journalists intervening. The ideal of the professional journalist is the ideal of the disinterested observer, reporting only things as they happen, without “fear or favour”. This ideal is old-fashioned, and it is easy to show that contemporary news coverage does not adhere to it (if in fact, it ever did), but the ideological stance of “objectivity” is still one that carries substantial weight in society today. We may be aware that the news is biased, but we still expect journalists to present the image of the disinterested observer when reporting.

Blogging is fundamentally personal, it is, at heart, about reporting one’s own experiences and interpretations of them. Opinion is freely given, and often intermingled with reporting and commentary. In form and style, many blogs read like a letter, or a brief note to a friend, and they often intermingle the personal with political quite freely. The phenomenon of Friday Catblogging, started (as far as I can tell), by blogger Atrios, who, on Fridays drops the heavy political commentary that is his staple, and posts updates on the activities of his cats, is an excellent example of the ways in which the personal and political get blended.

Bloggers argue that since news coverage is so biased and based on opinion, they provide an essential counterpoint to mainstream news coverage. Critics reply that since bloggers seldom make any clear delineation between verified (or verifiable) fact, opinion and speculation, readers find it hard to tell what is actually going on. Many bloggers have very strong and clear political stances, and their commentary is very much on the side of those opinions.

The raw and the cooked

Modern news content is heavily processed. The text in a newspaper article is edited at least twice before it is printed, video and audio footage is edited to make narrative sense, photographs are cropped, and even sometimes airbrushed and digitally altered. It takes many people, and hours of work, to create the artifact that is a news story.

Blogging, by contrast, is immediate, and rapid. The writer may go back to check their spelling or wording, they may even rewrite extensively, depending on the nature of the person writing, but blogging is not edited in any sense of the word. There is no team who processes the text, and it is delivered to the audience “immediately” as it were. Advocates of blogging argue that this makes their content fresher, more real, and less altered than mainstream news. Detractors say that the process of editing is essential to ensure that the news is fairly presented, and free of errors.

Blogging, as yet, does not operate under the constraints of balance and truth that commercial and mainstream news does. The fact-checking that goes along with the editing, the verification of sources, and the concerns about libel and defamation that operate in commercial news production are all absent in blogging. Although it is only a matter of time before a blogger is sued for libel, so far bloggers operate in a fairly free-for-all environment which allows a lot of leeway in what is said, and very few consequences.

By contrast, news organisations are constantly aware of the need to fact-check and to verify, for fear of legal repercussions. The recent high-profile cases such as the Jayson Blair and the David Kelly notwithstanding, there is still immense pressure on journalists to verify everything, and stories often get killed out of fear of ramifications, or failure to meet the onerous requirements of fact-checking which big media companies now have. The Monica Lewinsky story is an excellent example of an issue which many mainstream news organisations knew about, but were afraid to report on until the story had been broken by the Drudge Report online (although not a blog, technically, sites like the Drudge Report and Smoking Gun have much in common with blogging).

The free and the expensive

Blogging is currently almost entirely an amateur activity. Blogs are free to visit, and not heavily reliant on advertising. Very few bloggers get paid to write, and only a small few collect the revenues from ads on their sites (most advertising on blogs is a trade-off in exchange for free hosting, and completely out of the control of the individual blogger). About the only way to make a living out of blogging is to get hired by a mainstream news organisation as a columnist or commentator, such as Ana Marie Cox (at which point it could be argued that one is no longer a blogger), or to publish a book, such as Salaam Pax did. Other bloggers, like Glenn Reynolds, and Mark Deuze, are academics who blog as part of their research and writing (although not for the always-needed publication credits).

Most mainstream news, is by contrast, extremely big business. In most countries, the costs of starting a newspaper or radio station are prohibitively high. Even creating an online news site, which is nominally less expensive in terms of capital investment and licensing, is costly, and it is unsurprising that there are very few independent (ie, not the online presence of a news organisation whose primary operation is in the print or broadcast world) news sites left. The costs of gathering and processing information remain as high for online news operators as for other media, even though the physical production costs are fewer.

It is not just the physical production costs which are a concern. News organisations which rely on advertising revenue are finding themselves under pressure to alter their reporting in order to favour particular economic and financial interests. Specific advertisers putting pressure on journalists to alter specific stories, is still rare, but large commercial news organisations have a tendency to slant coverage in subtle ways to support the same ideological stances as the corporate owners and advertising clients do. Coverage of anti-globalisation, or pro-union issues have been affected by this subtle hegemonic control of coverage of issues.

The problem, of course, with an amateur medium is that of long term viability. People need to make a living, and blogging, especially serious news-based or political blogging is time-consuming. Right now, there are a large number of bloggers, but the question of finances still hovers. Experiments by former mainstream news people such as Dan Gillmor and Arianna Huffington are worth watching, especially in terms of their long-term survival.

Public journalism, alternative media and the rest

If bloggers are responding to what is perceived as mainstream media's bias, and many bloggers identify themselves as such, then they are not the only people doing that. In my view, blogging is simply an extension of the older traditions of alternative and underground newspapers, the zines of the eighties and nineties, the Samizdat movement of the Soviet era, and countless other exercises in which people outside the mainstream created their own news and media.

Advocates of these media would argue (as do many bloggers) that all of this is just continuing the tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century pamphleteers who started the whole news media and journalism phenomena. Contemporary bloggers do have a lot in common with people like Thomas Payne and Jonathan Swift, in that they are giving their opinions on political and social issues in a public forum, and not for profit.

In recent years, media commentators like Jay Rosen and Dan Gillmor have called for the creation of "citizen" or "public" journalism. This is also a backlash against what is seen as the increasing commercial bias of mainstream media, the scandals around plagiarism and dishonesty among journalists and the increasing lack of trust of the media seen in contemporary (American) society. Public journalism is journalism produced by the public, on stories which the public deems important.

Central to the idea of public journalism is the idea of feedback, of the journalists remaining in constant communication with their audience, and in fact, of the journalists being part of the community they serve. This feedback is something that has only vestigial remnants left in mainstream media, in the carefully cordoned-off letters to the editor section. Even on the web, with no space or technological limits communication between journalists and readers is limited. With blogs, though, cross-communication and feedback are fundamental to the nature of the medium.

This idea of community conversation is new to the news industry, and although many of the ideals of public journalism owe their origins to the days of pamphleteers and libels, this is one aspect of the idea which is only really possible with new technology.

Conclusion

Blogging, then, is not an entirely new phenomenon, but one that is part of a tradition of online journals and fora, of alternative and underground news, of community and pirate radio stations. It is happening along with greater movements towards community media in the developing world, and with greater and greater mistrust of global commercial and government media worldwide.

Blogging, at its worst is a solipsistic navel-gazing activity. The web is unfortunately, full of people obsessed with the tedious minutiae of their daily lives (wonderfully spoofed in the "Dullest blog in the world" - <http://www.wibsite.com/wiblog/dull/>). At its best, though, blogging can be an exciting new gateway into ideas and thoughts, and a viable alternative to mainstream media. Taken in conjunction with alternative media and citizen journalism, this format could prove to be a whole new medium on its own, the one that online news turned out not to be.

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Blogging and citizen journalism

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This chapter presents and discussed some of the trends and issues arising with regards to the relatively new areas of blogging and citizen journalism, especially in South Africa. This is of necessity an overview, but the issues surrounding audience engagement and participation are particularly considered, especially as they relate to the role of journalism in development. The paper attempts to draw parallels between the history of activist and community media and the newer areas of citizen journalism and blogging, especially in the light of increasing commercialisation and corporatisation of the news media in Africa. The author examines the changing roles of journalism and journalists in the light of newer technologies and other developments, and the ongoing tension that arises around the questions of what journalism is, and who it is for.

Keywords: citizen journalism, alternative media, blogging, South Africa

Introduction

This chapter will attempt to present and discuss some of the trends and issues arising with regards to the relatively new areas of blogging and citizen journalism. The point of this chapter is not to provide a list of sites or organisations which work within these relatively new media: given the nature of books, and the nature of the Internet, it is most likely that all of those sites would have closed, changed or in some way by the time the book is published. Instead, I am attempting to give some idea of the debates and arguments which underlie these new developments, and to point to directions and issues which I think will be the most fruitful areas of investigation into the future.

There is a tendency to assume that any new technological development is somehow so specific, so earth-shattering, that it can only be discussed in and of itself, outside of its context. There is also a tendency to assume that these technologies are so revolutionary that the changes they bring will become permanent parts of the landscape. In the fifteen years I have been working with new media technologies, I have seen countless numbers of these unique and life-changing technologies come and go: what remains constant are the questions journalists and

media researchers have been asking for more than a hundred years. What are we doing here? Are we doing it the best way we can? Is what we are doing a good thing for the communities in which we live?

I have tried therefore, in this chapter to limit the discussion of specific technological developments, and to focus the discussion on the issues of the impact of these technological developments, and the ways in which they are changing (or not changing) the fundamental practice of journalism.

It is often said that South Africans have a cultural inferior complex, and habitually take their cue from developments in the UK, and increasingly from the USA. But it is equally true that the concerns of South Africans mirror those in the wider world, because the world is smaller than we think, and we have more in common than we suppose. With a population ten times larger than that of South Africa, and much greater financial and cultural resources, the UK (and, by extension, the US) is the mother lode of the media and how it is changing, and South Africans and the country's media organisations will look north, and adapt their behaviour accordingly. This is not to say that South Africa is merely imitating the first world (although to even a less than casual observer it is clear that a substantial amount of imitation is occurring), but that the whole world is following the lead of the USA and the UK.

However, I have tried to show specific South African examples, where they exist, and to show how South Africa differs from the first world, and how this difference might be accounted for in the media practices of the country.

What is citizen journalism?

Citizen journalism is a highly-contested term, and since its coining sometime in the early part of the twenty-first century it has come to mean many things to many people. In its initial meaning, that espoused by Dan Gillmor and the writers of the We Media Manifesto, citizen journalism refers to:

The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires. (Bowman and Willis, 2003)

This definition sets up a deliberate contrast with professional journalism, whose practitioners are not seen to be ‘citizens’, but in some way separate from full membership in civic society (we shall return to this point later) . It also explicitly requires that citizen journalists be fully involved in the whole news production cycle, not just in one aspect of it.

In the sections below, some of the key thinkers or texts behind the idea of citizen journalism are discussed, along with examples of a few projects in order to give some examples of the range of concepts included under the umbrella of the term. This is not in any way intended to give an exhaustive overview of opinions on or approaches to the practice of citizen journalism, but as indicators of the variety of possible approaches.

Jay Rosen – Beyond Objectivity

One of the first mentions of a new kind of journalism was made by Jay Rosen in his 1993 essay in Nieman Reports, *Beyond Objectivity*. In that essay, Rosen argued for a return to the more engaged, and activist journalism of the past, and that ‘objectivity’, as an ideal, was not creating the kind of journalism that the public seemed to want.

That is, they have to get the public on their side, and objectivity is a very poor philosophy for doing that. It’s an extremely weak way of persuading the public that journalism deserves a place in the culture that might otherwise be eclipsed by the entertainment machine. (Rosen, 1993)

Instead, he argued that “... journalism should be involved in re-engaging people in public life” (Rosen, 1993) , and in order to do that, he claimed, it would need to abandon the neutrality of objectivity, and embrace a more activist stance in its relationship to power institutions in society, and for the benefit of the readers.

Rosen’s paper was written at a time in which journalism, in the United States, especially, was an increasingly disrespected and disparaged practice, and in which newspaper readership was rapidly declining. It is important to understand the background to Rosen’s essay, because it places the practice of ‘citizen journalism’ firmly within a context in which the news media are searching for a new audience, and for respect.

There are issues with Rosen’s paper, most notably the concept of ‘objectivity’ - the existence and desirability of which have been extensively debated over the years; and his attribution of the disrepute into which journalism had fallen. However, his paper is noticeable

because of its ‘call to arms’ to journalists to re-engage themselves with the functions of citizenship, and to change both their voice, and their relationship to their audience. Although Rosen referred to this as ‘public journalism’ in 1993, it can be seen as the germination of the idea that led to ‘citizen journalism’.

Dan Gillmor – We The Media

In 2004, Dan Gillmor, a respected journalist and commentator on new technology issues through his column in the San Jose Examiner, and on his blog, released a book that can only be described as a battle-cry. In this book, *We The Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*, Gillmor called for an outright rejection of the overly commercial mainstream media in the United States, and for individuals and community groups to provide their own media, using the new publishing mechanisms provided by the Internet.

Gillmor explicitly referenced some of the founding voices of the United States of America, most notably Thomas Paine, in his book, and he draws a clear line between the pamphleteering of the original American ‘patriots’ and contemporary bloggers. He presents blogging not as a new pastime, but as the practice of American democracy, and as such, his book is fundamentally a political document.

He also specifically refers to the events of September 11th, 2001, as marking a turning point in the relationships between audiences and the news. He writes that the events of that day were so momentous, so earth-shattering, that people were turning to all possible news sources for information, even informal ones.

Another kind of reporting emerged during those appalling hours and days. Via emails, mailing lists, chat groups, personal web journals—all nonstandard news sources—we received valuable context that the major American media couldn’t, or wouldn’t, provide. (Gillmor, 2004: x)

Gillmor then goes on to argue that the mobilization of ‘citizen’ journalists during September 2001 was a watershed; the beginning of a new kind of journalism, detached from the commercial interests of the mainstream media, and providing a new kind of engagement with civil society.

This was not a new idea. Neither the rejection of commercial media in favour of grassroots media, nor the possibilities furnished by new media technologies were particularly innovative,

but Gillmor was the right man, with the right idea, in the right place and at the right time, and citizen journalism was born. (Gillmor, 2004)

‘Citizen journalism’ in the mainstream

The BBC

A more common definition of citizen journalism is that currently in use by many professional, commercial news organisations, such as the BBC. Peter Horrocks, the head of the BBC newsroom, in a speech given at Leeds University, in January 2008, discusses the role of audience feedback, and raw material (especially images and video footage) sent in by the public – something he calls both citizen journalism and ‘user generated content’. He says that “There is little doubt of the enormous value of audience-provided information and media in enhancing the coverage of news events.” (Horrocks, 2008)

He goes on to explain how he sees the relationship between ‘citizen’ and professional journalists:

It [the BBC’s user-generated content unit] will be right alongside the newsgathering teams that deploy our conventional journalistic resources. And the UGC team [i.e., professionals employed by the BBC to edit and package user-generated content] will be deploying and receiving our unconventional journalistic resources – information and opinion from the audience.

When that information is received and assessed it will be passed immediately to our journalists on any platform and will be on air on News 24 [24-hour global satellite news],

Radio 5 Live [global digital radio] or on the site as soon as possible. (Horrocks, 2008)

You can see from this that Horrocks explicitly limits the practice of what he calls citizen journalism, to the gathering of raw footage. The journalistic functions of selection, construction and presentation of events into ‘news’ are limited, in his world view, to the professionals employed by organisations such as his.

This is not intended to disparage the BBC in any way, but to illustrate how many professional ‘mainstream’ news organizations view the practice of ‘citizen journalism’. If the

BBC is unique among news organizations it is not because it exploits amateur newsgatherers, but because it is transparent about its practices.

This co-opting of the phrase ‘citizen journalism’ away from its intended meaning as used by Gillmor, Bowman, Willis and others, has become standard practice by commercial, traditional news organizations.

Reporter.co.za

Reporter.co.za was¹ a citizen journalism website launched in South Africa at the beginning of 2006. In their own words:

Reporter.co.za is a news website written entirely by its readers. We publish articles, images, audio and video from ordinary members of the public. The purpose of Reporter.co.za is to give our readers the opportunity to determine what they regard as news. We welcome news reports, opinion pieces, columns, entertainment news, reviews, interviews and even community-oriented issues. Contributors can report on whatever they deem interesting and think will be of interest to their audience. (Reporter.co.za, 2008)

The site was owned and launched by Johnnic/Avusa, one of the largest media organisations in South Africa, publisher of *The Sunday Times*, *The Sowetan*, and *Business Day* newspapers, numerous magazines, and the owner of Summit Television, among others. This was not immediately transparent on the Reporter.co.za site, although it was not hidden, either.

The site was explicitly created to develop a news source for the commercial entities of Avusa. Although the site paid for stories, the fee was minimal, and in the case of a major story, the tip was certainly worth it for Avusa, who maintained ownership of all content published on the site. Stories submitted to the site were edited by a team of professional journalists, employed by Avusa, and content was controlled in this way, and journalists were given advice and guidance by the team. The approach from Avusa seems to be something of a hybrid between the user-generated content model used by the BBC, a trainee or cadet programme (it is implied fairly

¹ at the time of this writing, November 2008, the site had been inactive since April 2008, saying it was being temporarily closed in order to be ‘transformed to adapt to new technology’

strongly that contributing to Reporter.co.za is one way into the professional media, and it seems that a fair number of contributors were student journalists), and a true citizen or community media site. On the other hand, it is also clear that the site was not intended as a purely commercial entity, and that several members of the community took it seriously as a part of the citizen journalism movement. As Setumo Stone noted:

That is precisely what media should be about: the story of the citizens; not the story of the journalists, editors, commentators or analysts; unless they first recognize themselves as citizens and nothing else “above” that. [...] Open up a space for citizens to pretend to be journalists, and then you will realize the true value of what media should be: diverse and unpretending opinions. It is not about sucking up to corporate moguls for an invite to the next elite function, or sucking up to politicians for possibilities of a future job in government. That is what Reporter was not about! (Stone, 2008)

It is hard to judge how successful Reporter.co.za was, since it is now closed, and an analysis of whether any stories migrated from the Reporter.co.za site to any of the commercial entities owned by Avusa study (which seems to have been Avusa’s goal) is well beyond the scope of this, but a brief perusal of the content seems to indicate that much of the material submitted was in the form of opinion pieces, or highly personal stories about people’s lives.

The editors themselves acknowledged this in their final posting to the site: “It’s true that we ended up with far too many pictures of Table Mountain and pets, but there were some excellent photographs as well. [...] One of the less successful aspects of our coverage was the tendency to comment on the news of the day rather than break hard news stories.”(Ed’s Note, 2008)

Discussion

It is important to note that much of the material presented above is by Americans, and largely from people are explicitly writing about American media, for an American audience. There are things unique to the American situation which need to be noted, most importantly the overwhelming commercialisation of the American news media, the high penetration of the Internet in American life, and the oft-discussed first Amendment to the US constitution, which has created some interesting distortions in the media landscape of the USA.

The commercialisation of American news media is very important. Alone among developed nations, the USA has no legally mandated public broadcaster. It is a common misconception that National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) are equivalent to the BBC in the UK, or the SABC in South Africa. Although in terms of content both organisations aspire to the quality and standards of the BBC; both are non-profit, voluntary, charitable organisations, unlike a true public broadcaster which exists by government mandate, and which is subject to official oversight by a public board. Both PBS and NPR have a relatively limited audience and reach. This lack of a news organisation in the mix which is required by law to be impartial and balanced, and which is accessible to the majority of the population, has resulted in news organizations which are entirely dependent on advertising (and hence, on audience share). This dependence on audience share has, ironically, resulted in news media which are sometimes perceived to be ignoring stories which are unpalatable to their advertising clients, in favour of sensationalism and pursuit of the lowest common denominator. In this context, the call for ‘citizen journalism’ makes sense for an audience looking for more analytic, detailed and in-depth news.

The high level of penetration of the Internet in American life makes an online-only alternative news source, and a team of connected ‘citizen journalists’, with access to the technology and the connections required, a logical proposition. Obviously, in the developing countries, such a proposition would be difficult to justify under the rubric of ‘expanding access’.

However, despite the differences, the practice of journalism is remarkably similar across the world (especially across those parts of the world which are, broadly speaking, free market democracies), and the commercial media sector is increasingly globalised. It is possible to speak of a global media landscape, and to discern common practices and situations within that. The practice of media production in America and in Europe, is increasingly viewed as the standard, and globally media organisations look to the first world for direction and focus. Within this context, any discussion of media practices in places other than the first world needs at the very least, a grounding in the context of media practices there.

In the articles presented above, you can see three distinct trends emerging, each one defining citizen journalism slightly differently. Rosen’s argument is not with the institutions of the mainstream press, but with the ideology of ‘objectivity’ which he sees as rendering the practice

of journalism heartless and isolated from its community. His solution is for journalists to re-embrace the point of view, and to re-engage with audiences by re-connecting with them.

Gillmor takes on the corporate commercial news organisations, and advocates the establishment of alternative news communities, each providing content to their local community, released from the infrastructural requirements of traditional media.

With regards to the co-opting of citizen journalism by the mainstream media, the cynical point of view would simply be that news organisations are exploiting people, and saving their own costs by using unpaid amateurs as newsgatherers. Although this point of view is not entirely wrong (news websites are under considerable pressure to provide a wide range of content, updated constantly, and user-generated content is definitely a cheap alternative to hiring more journalists), it is not that simple. By using ‘citizen’ contributors, and user-generated content, news organisations can considerably expand the range of sources and voices extant within their content.

News organisations have always relied on tips and contacts within their communities of audiences for information as to what is going on, although traditionally this has been done by phone calls and visits, not email and blogs. In South Africa, particularly, the creation of a community of resources for information is very important, given the imperative of reaching a much larger, and more diverse community. The creation of citizen journalism networks such as reporter.co.za allows a news organization based in one of the major cities, and staffed by people who were privileged enough to attend university, access to the communities they serve in a way that might not otherwise be possible. In the context of the considerable criticism of news organisations for relying too heavily on institutional sources (government and industry, particularly) for stories, any access for the wider community, however it is managed, can only be a kind of progress.

Newspapers and television stations also have a long tradition of acquiring images and footage of major events from members of the public who happened to be on the scene when journalists were not. This is particularly true since the eighties, when personal video cameras became common, and enterprising citizens would go out and look for traffic accidents and crime scenes with the explicit purpose of selling the footage to the local television station. Nowadays, the prevalence of cameras is so great that news organisations no longer need to offer financial

compensation for material, there is always someone who will give it to them for free, in exchange for the thrill of seeing their material in the media.

What is blogging?

The word blog is an abbreviation of the word weblog, a term coined to refer to a site which is a log of other websites visited by the blogger, and commented on in the weblog. While the term has been shortened, its meaning has expanded. A blog is a website which provides short commentary on various topics, including other websites, news of the day, the personal life of the blogger, or pretty much anything else one can imagine. Weblogs are usually the work of one person, although there are communal weblogs that are very successful, and the site that claims to be the first weblog, boingboing.net, is run by four people.

Blogs have expanded to include the previous forms of the online journal, and personal home page that were popular five years ago. Technically, the term can be loosely applied, and often is, but it is generally assumed that a blog is hosted using one of the many blogging software systems that are available, and which impose basic structural and format conventions on the user. The basic format of the weblog is a series of posts consisting of text, and possibly hyperlinks, which are delineated by time and date, and usually listed in reverse chronological order, with the most recent post at the top. Weblogs allow pictures to be included as well, but most blogging software limits the amount of formatting and fancy layout that the writer can impose. The words, therefore are given priority on a weblog: it is primarily a textual, and hypertextual, form².

Most blogging software also creates a text feed that can be read by a standardised piece of software called an aggregator. The most common format of this is Real Simple Syndication, or RSS, which allows a user to collect the latest posts from a list of blogs and view the content aggregated into a single window. The need for RSS compliance among bloggers further increases the emphasis that blogs place on text, rather than layout or design.

² There are now blogs which focus primarily on images and photographs, several run by professional photographers, or people with cellphone cameras, in which the images are given pride of place. Likewise, podcasting, audioblogging and videoblogging is increasing rapidly, providing content in audio form for users. Although these forms owe a lot to blogging, they are different in many ways, and I have found it necessary to limit my terms of reference to the text-based blog.

Below each post space is given for readers to comment, and for others to respond. This discussion allows for a far greater sense of community than is possible on a conventional website (but less than on a discussion forum or bulletin board), and the back and forth conversation is often more detailed and longer than the initial post.

Another common feature of the blog is the “blogroll” the term used for the writer’s list of recommended sites and other blogs which runs down one side of the page. Since blogging is an activity that works mostly by word of mouth, being mentioned in a popular blogger’s list can rapidly increase the audience for a site. The blogroll phenomenon also creates a sense of community around blogs, since people tend to list each other reciprocally and comment on each other’s sites and posts in their own blogs.

Blogging is increasingly being touted as an alternative to traditional media, as a format or medium in its own right, which will destroy the mainstream media. Although there are examples of bloggers breaking stories that conventional media missed (or deliberately ignored), and it is clear that some bloggers may have some influence in the news agenda, it is important to remember that blogging usually exists in a parasitic (or at its best and rarest, symbiotic) relationship with mainstream media – commenting on, and feeding off the output of the more traditional media formats (whether on the web or not).

This is interesting when taken in conjunction with the discussion of citizen journalism above. Despite initial differences, it appears that much of what appears on citizen journalism sites reads like blog postings, and that some blogging, at least, is very like journalism. The fundamental difference however, is that blogging is largely an independent, solo, activity, whereas citizen journalism is often a collective, if loosely organised, effort.

The big issue for someone examining blogs as a news medium, however, is how little of the material presented in this format is in any way related to news or journalism. The overwhelming majority of blogs are personal diaries, and while the writers may occasionally comment on the news of the day, they are fundamentally not intended in any way to function as journalism, or in relation to it.

Co-option of the voice and style of blogging

In any discussion of new media, it is inevitable that you encounter things that have become so ubiquitously the trend of the moment that it is hard to discern to what, exactly, is happening.

Blogging is, unfortunately, one of those things. Traditional media organisations have adopted blogging wholesale, even if it is in name, or format, only.

Many, if not most, traditional media organisations now offer blogs on their site, and expect journalists to, in addition to their traditional reporting functions, keep an updated blog of events and stories. This functions as a kind of reporters' diary, and it can be an interesting and useful tool when covering a breaking story, or in covering an ongoing event that does not necessarily warrant complete news stories, just more information added as events unfold. The online coverage of cricket matches, for example, has pretty much entirely converted to this form, as it is ideally suited to this situation.

Journalist blogs tend to do one of two things:

1. They provide immediate, almost raw, information from the location of the story, which satisfies the need on the Internet for immediate coverage³.
2. They provide an insight into the mind of the journalist, or the editor, as a kind of personal diary. Although this is extremely useful and interesting to people who study the media, it is questionable how much interest the general public has in these kinds of musings. This does, however, satisfy many journalists' desire to be allowed to express their own thoughts⁴ and in many ways would probably satisfy Jay Rosen's call for more engaged and opinionated journalism.

Only a few news organisations allow the general public to create and maintain blogs on their sites, and when they do, the branding is often considerably different, so as to prevent any assumption that the material presented by the public is in any way associated with the news organisation, although many do invite guests and experts to do so. There is no particular reason not to allow this: technologically, it is fairly straightforward, and it would have the benefit of bringing more traffic to the site, and allowing the publishers to earn money from advertising. However, there is considerable fear of backlash, whether legal or social, should a member of the public post something offensive on servers hosted by the news organisation. In South Africa, which has relatively strong legal protection against hate speech, and a substantial minority of

³ this is rather like the textual version of a live crossing to a journalist on the scene, which is used extensively in broadcast media

⁴ it is often noted that all print journalists secretly want to be columnists – blogging allows this

people who hold views which would be considered offensive by the courts (and have considerable access to new communications technologies), this is particularly an issue, and quite probably the main reason news organisations do not allow this practice.

Alternative and radical media

One of the things most remarkable in the discourse around citizen journalism, is how seldom alternative media is mentioned, or discussed. Gillmor explicitly relates the practice of citizen journalism and of blogging to the pamphleteers of the eighteenth century (whose involvement in, and support for, the American revolution, makes them heroes to the American public), but ignores the far more recent, and prolific, practice of alternative and radical media, from the 1960s onward.

The 1960s saw the rise of radical movements in many parts of the developed world. The civil rights movement, opposition to the war in Vietnam, to colonialism in France, and the rise of feminism and gay rights all tended to create their own alternative and radical media forms and genres along with them. These nascent media were encouraged by changes in technology that made the copying of paper cheaper and easier, and that made other forms of media production more accessible to people with fewer resources. Initially, these media were limited to major cities in which alternative and radical communities existed, but by the beginning of the eighties, almost every city of any size had their own alternative newsweekly, or monthly, and many had several.

Some of these publications went almost mainstream: titles such as *Mother Jones*, the *Utne Reader*, the *Advocate* and *Ms* magazine became, in the eighties, glossy publications available on every newsstand. The *Village Voice* - originally a radical alternative newspaper for the denizens of Greenwich village - is now a mainstream New York publication, available on street corners across the city, and on the web.

In addition to alternative print publications, there was also a rise in co-operative, community and 'pirate' radio stations, although this practice differed considerably across various countries, depending on the particular licensing requirements that existed in each country.

This tradition of alternative media, probably at its height in the late seventies, did not die away, until the nineties, and ironically, the advent of the Internet, which may have been the death knell for alternative newspapers, pirate radio and the like. It is, however, a relatively un-

researched area, probably due to the focus given in media studies to such things as corporate involvement in media production, and the effects of mass media on society. What little research there is, such as Chris Atton's book, *Alternative Media* (2002) draws a direct link between the older practices of alternative media and contemporary online media practices.

In fact, many alternative news outlets moved directly on to the Internet, and newer ones have been founded there. Despite Gillmor and Rosen's reluctance to discuss these outlets, or to consider them extensively within the context of what they present as citizen journalism, it is obvious that some of the best examples of citizen journalism can be found within alternative news organisations and outlets such as GNN and Indymedia, which we will discuss below.

Alternative media in South Africa

South Africa's history and context is obviously very different from that of the developed first world countries, and the country has its own, distinctive and powerful tradition of alternative media, loosely organised around opposition to the Apartheid regime. This history, specific as it is, is also very interesting when examining alternative media in the networked society.

Alternative and oppositional media in South Africa have a long history, and developed in tandem with commercial media interests in the country, and with a variety of viewpoints, however, the history of oppression extant in South Africa for most of the twentieth century resulted in a context in which the dominant media interests, almost by definition, would not cater to the information needs or desires of the majority of the audience. It is in this context that news organisations like *South*, *The New Nation*, *Grassroots*, *Vrye Weekblad*, and *Radio Freedom*, to name only a handful of the alternative radical media organisations that rose, flourished, were shut down, or otherwise vanished, and often rose again with a different name, but with some of the same people and all of the same goals. (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991)

Because these news organisations were explicitly structured around a political goal, and because they were often funded by foreign support organisations, many of them closed after the country's first democratic elections, in 1994. Even those that were not exclusively linked to the

extension of suffrage, but to more abstract and amorphous goals, such as social development, or gender equality, often found themselves without the support they had previously garnered.⁵

In the immediate post-Apartheid era, alternative news organisations mostly either evaporated, or attempted to carve out a niche for themselves as commercial entities. Some, such as the *Mail and Guardian* (originally the *Weekly Mail*), were more successful than others, such as *Sidelines*, or the *New Nation*. Whether the success of the *Mail and Guardian* is at the expense of their ‘selling out’ of their original values is open to debate, but it seems fairly clear that the more radical and subversive titles could not survive in the absence of a clear audience that was appealing to advertisers (i.e. a relatively large and wealthy audience).

Not all community-based media died out, however, and as the country developed a new norm after 1994, there was some resurgence in alternative media such as community radio. It is important to remember, though, that there is little overlap between the communities who have access to the Internet, and communities traditionally served by community radio, although this is changing.

Contemporary international alternative media

Guerrilla News Network

In their own words, the “Guerrilla News Network is an independent news organization... Our mission is to expose people to important global issues through cross-platform guerrilla programming.” (GNN, 2008) GNN is a web-based alternative media outlet that encourages its members and audiences, to produce their own news coverage, and post it on their website. GNN is arguably one of the largest alternative or ‘citizen’ journalism sites on the net, having thousands of articles and blogs hosted on their site, and an active membership in excess of ten thousand. (Marshall, 2008)

GNN is deliberately and provocatively positioned as an alternative voice to mainstream media (the name and logo are a visual nod to the ubiquitous CNN brand), but one that owes as

⁵ Many radical organisations, media-related and others, were funded by foreign countries, and by groups of people fundraising for them in the developed world. Once Apartheid was defeated, these sources of funding dried up.

much to MTV and the punk movement as it does to the earnest and often dry, efforts of radical alternative news organisations. GNN is also explicitly aimed at a younger audience, and identifies itself as a voice for disaffected and radicalised youth. GNN has also produced a number of short documentaries on issues like the second Gulf War, the trade in Blood Diamonds, and anti-globalisation movements, all set to hard-hitting musical soundtracks, and appearing visually as much like a music video as serious documentary.

GNN's approach to journalism is interesting, as it combines the ideology of amateur journalism with the high production values and aesthetic of the most commercial and contemporary television media. This is alternative journalism in content, but not in voice style and it stands in marked contrast to some of the more austere types of alternative journalism.

Independent Media Center - Indymedia

In their own words, "The Independent Media Center is a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth. We work out of a love and inspiration for people who continue to work for a better world, despite corporate media's distortions and unwillingness to cover the efforts to free humanity." (Source?)

Indymedia is currently a network of more than 150 independent Independent Media Centers around the world, each one operating with a degree of independence, but loosely organised around the central principles of the IMC, and around the idea of open publishing (i.e., copyright free media). The Indymedia movement arose out of the anti-globalisation and anti-World Trade Organisation protests in Seattle in 1999, and its ideology remains quite firmly anti-globalisation, and anti-corporatisation, albeit with considerable variation as would be expected from such a decentralised organisation. In many ways, Indymedia is the most true to the ideals of the radical movements of the 1960s, and to the stated ideals of citizen journalism, but for its explicit ideological stance.

Indymedia South Africa

There is an Indymedia South Africa site, and at various points it has been extremely active. At the time of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2003, there were a large number of members and contributors. At the time of this writing, though, the

site, although still active, appears to have been largely taken over by spam, and there are very few recent stories posted.

Issues and conclusion

Returning to the question of what, exactly, citizen journalism is, it is now possible to see that there are a few key issues which need to be resolved. Citizen journalism, as a construct, differs from mainstream journalism in a number of ways:

- In voice and structure (does it mimic mainstream, formal journalism, or does it adopt a different, usually more informal voice?)
- In commercial activity (is it a profit-making venture? Are the contributors paid?)
- In expertise (are the contributors trained journalists?)

Voice and construction

In discussions of the voice and construction of journalism, it is the blogs that differ most markedly from the conventional practice. Blogs, being largely unedited, organised in reverse chronological order, and explicitly personal, are in considerable contrast to the formal remove of traditional journalism. One distinct difference is the way in which time is treated as an ongoing stream, as opposed to the pyramid structure of the traditional news story, which assumes that the event is finished, and can be presented in a complete package. Traditional media theory holds that the news is a construct, that journalism imposes an artificial order and hierarchy on events. Bloggers would claim that their method is somehow truer, and more honest than the constrained form, but critics of bloggers point to the value of the structure in ensuring integrity.

Citizen journalism organisations, on the other hand, although they may differ considerably in how they approach the voice in which their material is presented, tend to attempt to mimic the conventions of journalism, at least in part. As an example, Indymedia differs from mainstream commercial media in their choice of subjects and stories, and of angles, but the voice and structure of their stories tends to imitate the forms of commercial media fairly faithfully. For many citizen journalism organisations that adopt an explicitly ideological stance, this retention of the forms of journalism is part of the endeavour to be taken seriously as news organisations, and in this they are following the lead of their predecessors, activist media.

This alteration in style and construct is probably the easiest for the mainstream media to adopt. Columnists traditionally adopt a similar voice to that used by bloggers, and for some

news organisations, simply increasing the number of columnists is a fairly easy step. There is some evidence that news is becoming less formally structured and more personal than before, and some newspapers, like *The Sun* and *the Daily Mail* are already speaking to their readers in a far more personal voice. This is part also attributed to the ‘tabloidisation’ of the media, which in its turn is a response to the increasing pressure on commercial media to attract and maintain a loyal audience. It is ironic that both the most radical of media and the most commercial and conservative may be adopting similar forms of communication in the attempt to attract an audience, but that discussion is unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter.

Commercial activity and professionalism

Many of the people espousing the new form of citizen journalism are explicitly opposed to the highly commercialised, commodified form that journalism has taken in recent years. Although this is not a new stance, and clearly a well-established aspect of radical and activist media movements, it underwent an ideological renewal in the late twentieth century, especially in the USA.

The increased commercialisation of news organisations, the higher levels of consolidation across media and communities, which resulted in the rationalisation or closure of many small and medium city newspapers were a direct motivator in the call for non-commercial media in the USA. Many people felt that that commercial entities which now produced and owned the news were too beholden to the interests of their owners and shareholders, and not enough to their audience.

This point of view is in direct accord with theorists like Noam Chomsky ([year](#)) and Robert McChesney ([year](#)), although they did not explicitly advocate for the development of non-profit media.

The question of profit is also linked to two others: copyright and professionalism. The question of copyright leads into another extensive discussion of the Creative Commons phenomenon, and the ideological opposition to intellectual property rights and restrictions, which arose both out of the hacker movement of the nineteen eighties, and out of issues of development, information, rights and ownership as marked by the disputes over Monsanto’s ownership of seeds and strains of plants and of the third world’s access to educational materials. Interesting as all of this is, it is well beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say that many

citizen journalism sites (but not all), ascribe to the creative commons ethos which emphasises the sharing of information above and beyond its profit-making potential for the producers.

Professionalism itself refers to two separate things. At its most simplistic, professionalism refers to whether someone is paid for their work. Many citizen journalism sites do not specifically employ people on a professional basis, although they may share the profit from advertising revenue, or pay contributors a nominal fee. In this sense, these sites are not ‘professional’. Professionalism also refers to a more complex idea, and refers back to the question of voice, as well as that of training and expertise. This is far less straightforward, since many people participating in citizen journalism, or blogging, are professional journalists, and have been trained in the formalities of the craft, or profession (the question of whether journalists are professionals or artisans is a long-standing debate in the field, and once again, beyond the scope of this chapter). Professionalism in this instance refers to a set of ideals and beliefs about the practice of journalism, as well as a set of skills applicable to that practice, which journalists may or may not have.

Citizen journalism has by no means a consensus on whether its practitioners are professionals in this sense. Some would argue that citizen journalism is by definition in opposition to professional journalism, taking Rosen’s stance on citizen journalism, and the idea (espoused by Stuart Allan [\(2004\)](#), among others) that objectivity and neutrality are the hallmarks of the ‘professional’ journalist. Others would argue that the absence of formal employment does not remove one from the need to conduct oneself fairly and honourably, and would equate professionalism with ideals such as truth-telling and fairness, aligning themselves firmly as ‘professionals’ in the sense of people who take their work seriously (as opposed to amateurs, in this sense meaning slapdash and casual).

Conclusion South Africa / Africa is missing.

The discussion of professionalism naturally leads one into the question of the ideological stance of the citizen journalist. This is probably where citizen journalism and blogging differs most markedly from mainstream and commercial media. The often explicitly ideological or personal stance taken by bloggers and citizen journalists is in marked contrast to the stance of most commercial news organisations, that of studied neutrality. Whether in fact commercial mainstream news organisations are neutral (as Herman and Chomsky [\(year\)](#) believe they are

not), or whether neutrality or objectivity is possible, or desirable, it remains that this neutrality is fundamental to the traditional practice of journalism, especially in the USA and UK.

Or nominally fundamental, at least. The fact is, that the mainstream commercial media is as subject to vested interests as any other organisation, and that much of the debate around new forms of journalism (of which citizen journalism and blogging form a substantial part) is constructed around specifically this issue: whether the mainstream media is neutral, or fair, enough, for its audience and the purpose it serves. Whether these new forms of journalism sit in direct opposition to the established news media, operate within the norms and conventions of mainstream media as an alternative voice, or simply form one aspect of the mainstream media product, they are forcing the traditional media to examine themselves and their practices more closely, and to decide whether their form of journalism is the best one for the situation.

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Beyond technological determinism: a model for understanding the new participatory networked news environment

ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades the language we use to describe the news media landscape has become increasingly inadequate to the purpose. As the news environment expands and fragments, the meanings of terms like ‘newspaper’ and ‘television channel’ become harder and harder to pin down, and more and more organisations exist for which we have no simple words. In this paper we propose a new mechanism of examining and defining the media landscape for those working within it, consuming it, and researching it. This is not intended as a finite set of definitions, but a framework for analysing and structuring these entities (news media organisations and individuals) around sourcing and output that is flexible and dynamic enough to explain both the contemporary environment, and to cope with the changes we know will come, in the various forms they will take. This model is intended not as a definitive mapping of this continually fluctuating and evolving landscape, but as an attempt to delineate those factors which we believe will be determinate in this new landscape: the nature and number of relationships a journalist has with the community and news environments, and the means in and purpose to which a journalist applies his content and skill.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.1.m [Miscellaneous]: News Media and Social Media – *inputs, outputs and social relationships*

General Terms

Management, Measurement, Economics, Reliability, Human Factors.

Keywords

Social media, news media, journalism, news

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades the language we use to describe the news media landscape has become increasingly inadequate to the purpose. As the news environment expands and fragments, the meanings of terms like ‘newspaper’ and ‘television channel’ become harder and harder to pin down, and more and more organisations exist for which we have no simple words. What is the *Huffington Post*, really? What are *Boing-Boing*, Guido Fawkes’ blog, or Stephen Fry’s Twitter feed? How about the Guardian’s *Comment is Free* site? How do you describe them?

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The dichotomous division between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media is likewise becoming meaningless – talking to a room full of students who had not yet learned to talk when the world wide web was invented and referring to it as ‘new’ makes one realise how meaningless ‘new’ actually is in this context. What is ‘online’ in a world where those of us who have physical ‘lines’ to connect to the internet are increasingly in the minority and where more people have smartphones and computers than have television sets?

And this change and confusion is not just on the institutional level – individuals working within (and outside) these organisations find themselves increasingly unable to define what they do in a single sentence, although they know they are doing it, and doing it well.

This paper is proposing a new mechanism of examining and defining the media landscape for those working within it, consuming it, and researching it. This is not intended as a finite set of definitions, but a framework for analysing and structuring these entities (news media organisations and individuals) that is flexible and dynamic enough to explain both the contemporary environment, and to cope with the changes we know will come, although we don’t currently know what they are.

Traditionally, news organisations are determined by their output mechanism, and hence by their technology. Once the printing press was invented, the newspaper was an almost inevitable consequence; radio and television invented the news broadcast. Since the technology was both the prerequisite, and the locus of a substantial financial investment, we named these organisations for their technology, not their content. We still speak of the “the press” as though the hulking steel machinery in the basements of Fleet Street was the soul of the news media, and the broadcast towers have only recently vanished from the logos of television stations worldwide.

The Internet changed this. We used to measure the importance of a news outlet by the speed of their presses, or a radio station by the power of its antenna, we can’t measure these new outlets by the clock speed of their servers, or the size of their disk array, although the servers perform the same function the towers and presses did for newspapers and broadcast. We don’t do this, because, relatively-speaking, a server costs a pittance, compared to the cost of a printing press, or and much more importantly, compared to the cost of the people who make the content that is distributed by mechanisms new and old. Almost anyone can set up a site, anyone can get a blog, a twitter account, a Facebook wall, a platform from which to spread a message – the technology is no longer the stumbling block, the content and connectivity are.

Just as the technology determined the nature of the enterprise it also had a huge influence on the content that was produced. Marshall McLuhan may have fallen out of favour, but his assertion that the medium determined the message has value, albeit possibly only through convention and traditional practice[8]. News organisations produced news in recognisable

shapes and formats for recognisable outlets consumed by recognisable consumers in predictable ways. As the technology changed, and more and more sources of news became available online and competed with other sources of information and news, in a myriad of new shapes and sizes. You can still find the third-person-objective inverted pyramid news story, and the traditional 'package' for broadcast on the Internet, but you also find liveblogs and twitter feeds from people on the ground and in the office, satirical animations of news events on YouTube and first-person reports, twitpics, blogs, alternative news sites, aggregators, discussion forums, and all sorts of voices and styles all mixed in together, linked and referenced and cross-posted to a range of places and formats.

In this environment, it is no surprise that the limited vocabulary we have to describe the news media in general is unable to cope.

2. The new media landscape – a matrix model

2.1 The macro level

The traditional mechanism of assessing and determining news outlets was based on technological determinism – the medium was both the message and the mechanism of distribution. In this new environment, technology is no longer the determining factor of a news organisation, since it is a rare (and probably endangered) news organisation that is limited to one technological means of distribution, instead, the measurement and determination of a news organisation (or an individual who exists within this landscape as a recognisable entity separate from their role within a larger organisation) is based on two factors, the voice with which they communicate, and the intent of the organisation as a whole.

These two factors are plotted on to a two-dimensional matrix, with voice as the vertical axis and intent as the horizontal.

2.1.1 Vertical axis: Voice

The vertical axis measures the voice of the news outlet. Traditionally, newsmaking is a process that takes events and turns them into recognisable news packages, using the "third-person objective" voice of authority that we have come to associate with news. This voice is at the bottom of this axis. At the top of the axis is the loose, unedited, stream-of-consciousness voice of the personal blogger or tweeter, or the chaotic and unedited footage taken by a participant in a protest. The amount of shaping, formatting and editing that goes in to a story decreases as you rise up the axis, while the immediacy and rawness of the information increases.

- At the bottom of this axis is the fully researched and written front-page story detailing exactly what had happened in Tahrir Square in Cairo, with comments and interviews with experts and bystanders carefully woven into a cohesive narrative.
- Moving up this axis we have the hourly bulletin updates from a reporter standing in the square, still formatted and structured in a predictable way - the journalist standing in front of the camera holding microphone: "I'm standing in Tahrir Square while all around me protesters shout slogans at the army. Earlier today the ministry of defence said..." – the journalist is still acting as interpreter of events for the public, still working within defined formats and expected forms of address, although the material is live and unedited, and lacks the formal structure of the news package.
- Even further up, you have the liveblog feed of a news website, bringing inside information, comment from readers, twitter feeds and video uploads from people on

the scene and information from other news sources together in a chaotic stream of information which no longer functions as cohesive narrative or story, but which still maintains some of the elements of journalistic practice, verification, mixing of sources and some consistency of expression.

- At the very top of this axis you have the raw feed of events that appears when you search #tahrir on Twitter, or watch the raw uploaded videos on YouTube and pictures on Twitpic, Facebook or Flickr. At this level, the news is simply the outpouring of data and material of events, unedited, unverified and utterly raw.

Linked to this is the level of personal voice and opinion – as you move up this axis the news content becomes more personal, the traditional authoritative first-person voice is subsumed by the personal, subjective voice of the participant. This links it to Jay Rosen's call for journalists to move 'beyond objectivity', and into the personal in order to re-engage with the public[11].

The vertical axis also measures completeness and insularity of the news product. Traditional news products at the bottom of the axis strive to provide all the information and news one person could need. They were conceived as a single point for each consumer, obviating the need for multiple sources of information. As you move up the axis, the news products become more divergent, providing multiple voices and channels, and creating an environment where, at the very top, one consumer would need to access hundreds of sources to provide an understanding of events.

As a trend, the whole news landscape is moving up this axis, with a rising centre of gravity currently located just below the middle line.

2.1.2 Horizontal axis: intent

In this new media landscape news outlets can find themselves competing with other forms of news, both from outlets that are setting up to directly compete with the news but have no traditional roots in the pre-Internet news age, such as *The Huffington Post*, or from people and organisations that have other goals than becoming a formal, commercial news organisation, such as 'zines, radical news outlets, activist groups online, and entities like Anonymous (and its parent 4chan) and WikiLeaks.

Intent is measured from the formal news outlets that function within the expected and defined fourth estate role on the right, to the radical and activist organisations on the left.

News organisations on the right are those that are registered and subjected to what formal oversight is necessary within their specific national contexts; that exist in order to spread the news within defined parameters of the expected behaviour of news outlets. These are the organisations that have access to the parliamentary press gallery (or its equivalent), that have the protection of the courts to prevent the disclosure of sources, but may likewise be subject to regulations on libel that would not apply to individuals. These are those outlets that are traditionally referred to as the "mainstream" news, as well as those that have been specifically set up to compete with them.

State-funded and publicly-funded news outlets (such as the BBC and those that follow that model) are on the farthest end of this axis, having goals that are primarily civic. Commercial news outlets are slightly left of them, having their civic journalistic goals diluted by their commercial goals.

On the far left of this axis are the groups whose goals are not journalistic in nature, but which nevertheless participate in the

same landscape as the news media by providing the same kinds of information in the same kinds of ways. WikiLeaks exists to the far left of this axis – an organisation that probably provided more raw news information than any other in 2010, but which nonetheless is not journalistic in its goals or outputs. Also on the left of this axis are the news outlets produced by activist organisations or political parties, and the activities of informal groups such as Kuro5hin or Slashdot.org.

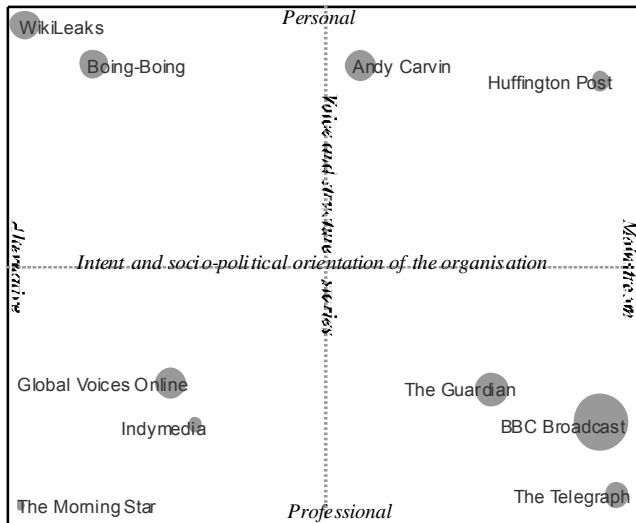


Figure 1: the new media landscape – a matrix model

2.2 The micro level

As the traditional media landscape explodes and fragments into this new media environment, there is an additional factor that becomes more important: the individual journalist. In the traditional, technologically determined landscape, individual journalists were subsumed by their institutions, and their output was constrained by the conventions and technology of the organisation within which they worked. There was little or no need to discuss, or analyse the influence or role of individual players in this environment, except in the rare occasions when an individual journalist gained celebrity status or had a brand strong enough to attract attention back to the institute, *a la* Kate Adie. Journalist was a simple descriptor, encapsulating the role and responsibilities of the job in one word, and needing only the clarification of ‘print’, ‘radio’ or ‘television’.

In this new landscape, as the voice of the individual becomes clearer as we move along the vertical axis, the role becomes less clear, and the fixed meaning of the word ‘journalist’ dissipates. In this new landscape, therefore, it is necessary to look at the individual journalist at the micro-level, to see how they operate within this environment.

But as journalists now operate in an evolving continuum of connectivity and output, neither the products they produce nor the resources on which they draw are fixed.

This matrix illustrates the evolving relationships between a journalist’s input and output: the diagram charts the varying internal operational structures of ‘journalists’, whether bloggers, freelancers, tweeters, Youtube commentators or mainstream reporters, looking at how their relationships with the wider community in terms of both input and output evolve. How do journalists connect with the network as a source? How do they distribute the story back to them? And how can this relationship earn them money? It looks at the journalist as a media firm in its

own right. It charts the nexus between the network for finding news and distributing it, tallying this with the potential for business models and whether these relationships change depending on pay and rewards.

The micro-level measurement locates each journalist on the matrix according to the voice used in their outputs (or their primary outputs – many journalists having multiple channels with which to communicate with their audience), and then examines how they use the network of information to source, create and distribute their own content (again they often combine and embrace a variety of methodologies). Demonstrating both the nature and the quantity of a journalist’s inputs and outputs is done through a similar matrix representation, a third dimension added to the matrix used in the macro-level discussion.

Each journalist is envisioned as a point on a two-dimensional plane, with a horizontal line dividing the plane. This line is analogous to the plane of the first matrix, so that if you were looking at the macro-level matrix from the side, you would see the space divided into the space above and below the macro-level matrix. Below this line is the news information, the raw sources of information that make up the content of the news, above this line are the news outputs, the things that are visible to the public. Each journalist commands an area of this space, above and below the line. The area measures depth (or height), and width, creating two fields of influence – one above, one below, the line.

2.2.1 Sources

The depth of penetration away from the central plane reflects how exclusive the contacts are and how specialist the working journalist’s knowledge is.

- *The Independent’s* award-winning Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk has the contacts and clout to open doors. He embodies all the values of traditional journalism, with exclusive access and mainstream outputs. When Fisk speaks, government officials listen. Someone like Fisk who interviewed Osama Bin Laden three times, is away from the central line with a narrow source curve because he has exclusive access to otherwise elusive officials, contacts which have taken along time to nurture and for whom the level of risk in them contacting a journalist—such as whistleblowers – is high. A major tip off from an exclusive contact would be at the bottom of the vertical, symbolising the notion of journalist as gatekeeper [12:233]. The depth of the space below the line measures the accessibility of the sources to the general public – at the bottom are heads of state, corporate directors, film stars, pop musicians, people to whom the general public have limited access. Journalists who have access to these people trade on those sources as their unique selling point – this is the traditional measure of the success of a journalist’s career, how good their contact book is. Robert Fisk has this access when he reports from Cairo, and he can get information that others can’t via his contacts. Specialist journalists dedicate years cultivating contacts which can open doors and prove to be avenues of trusted communication, especially in times of crisis or when speed and accuracy are of the essence. The space he commands below the line is deep, but fairly narrow. He has few sources, but they are far below the surface which the public can access.

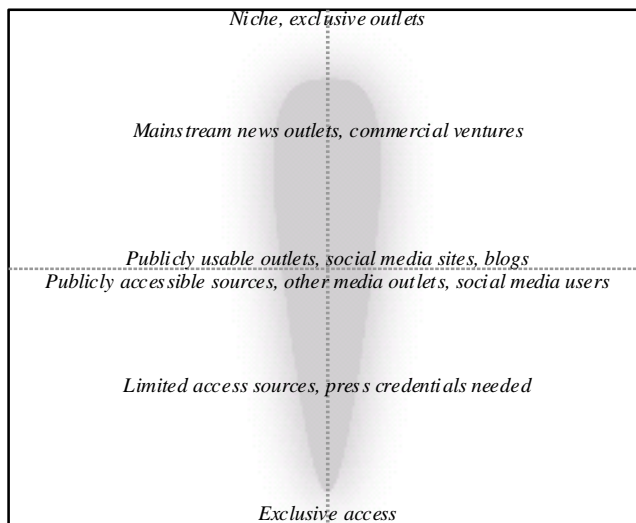


Figure 2: the micro level example one: Robert Fisk

- The penetration into the network however forces the curve down and out to the sides along the horizontal as the journalist has a wider range of contacts with each one having a smaller influence. Freelance Sky journalist Neal Mann harnesses both the power from his contacts leveraged through the brand in combination with the network so would feature in the middle of the matrix.
- Journalists such as Graham Holliday (<http://www.grahamholliday.co.uk/>), or “curators” such as Andy Carvin source stories from a wide range of contacts often on digital platforms. The study builds on the Network Theory [3] where connecting with people is not about everyone - but finding the key people you need to know to get ahead. At the surface are all the other individuals and news organisations that are already participating in this new landscape. A journalist who can access hundreds or thousands of these sources, and organise them into a story or narrative that people will pay for is using the network to their advantage, albeit in a way that is almost completely opposite to the traditional. Andy Carvin, who has 48 000 followers on Twitter, and follows some 1 800 Egyptian and middle-eastern activists, is an example of this. Twittering journalists rely not on the press pass but the network for contacts and sourcing stories. “I see my Twitter account as a newsgathering operation,” he says[7]. They are empowered by the reach of their connectivity: scope rather than depth in both source and output. Journalists have to consider connecting with, as well as being, a hub. Here notions of quantity have their own dimension of defining quality, as networks naturally push and prioritise the best contacts and content to the fore. Through this massive network of individual voices telling him what is going on in their small part of the world, he can create a picture of what is going on in Egypt that is as valid, and as interesting as Robert Fisk’s. His area of influence below the line is wide and shallow – he has many sources, but they are not far below the public surface (although as his reputation grows he will be able to access more and more information and people that are deeper and deeper).

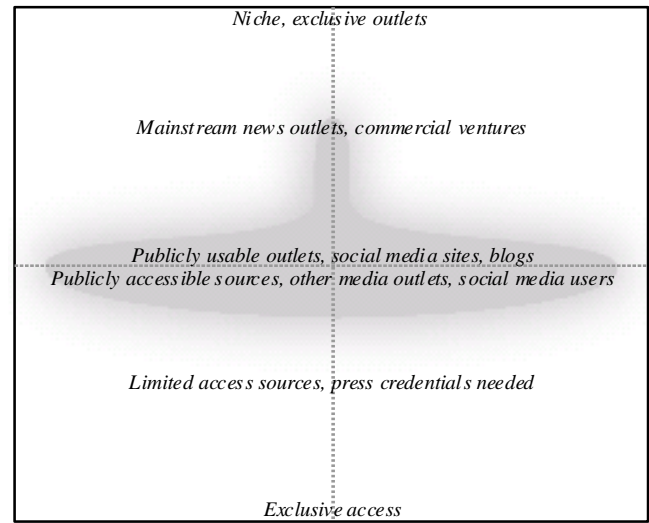


Figure 3: the micro level example two: Andy Carvin

As journalists move their reliance away from the ‘press pack’ and towards the network, the relationship between source and output begin to change. The closer the journalist operates to the network, represented on the horizontal line of the matrix, the more he may rely on many people getting in touch about small issues. The journalist filters and tracks trends to expose threads and themes, to authenticate, prioritise and corroborate. Here the journalist has become a participatory connector[4] where (information - noise) + context = responsible reporting according to Esra Dogramaci, Al Jazeera. The closer the journalist becomes to the network, the media management of the individual also comes to the fore. In what Terry Heaton[5] called unbundled journalism, here the notion of journalists operating as self-managing brands becomes key[9] and the consideration of professional and personal brands need to be managed.

Further exploration into the model reveals that the deeper the penetration away from the horizontal axis in terms of sourcing news is also dependent on training and a corresponding sense of identity as a journalist. A reporter with a traditional working practice, relying on a subset of trusted contacts and traditional notions of expertise, draws his identity as a journalist from title and authority. This comes in part from standing within an organisation. A networked journalist, however, draws his authority and identity from that bestowed on him from the crowd as a continually shifting phenomenon. The study allows for further exploration of several cross-over points where any one journalist can mutually include both the network and traditional news sources in their work.

2.2.2 Outputs

The micro-level model is also used to represent journalistic outputs, drawn above the horizontal axis. Trusted brand content and journalists with a reputation for quality are represented away from the horizontal, with a tall curve. The depth of the space above the line measures output and the level of dissemination platforms to the general public. At the top, furthest away from the horizontal, are edited packages recognisable for branded mainstream media outlets that reach wide audiences. Here the notions of ‘prime time’ and ‘front page news’ still hold weight.

Lower down the matrix towards the horizontal comes journalists working for heavily resourced but less traditional, alternate news outlets such as Al Jazeera. Niche edited news products and news streams which are accessed by large crowds and networks in a

way to have made them seem 'normalised' also feature such as @breakingnews or aggregated sites like The Drudge Report.

In the middle space, the fragmented world of media has identified a raft of dissemination concepts from hyper-local news channels, where content is made up primarily of user-generated material, to using Twitter streams as the fourth broadcasting channel, gaming technology for output and mobile applications. Small teams of journalists have also pooled to use blogging platforms as community sites. The widest and lowest sphere, along the horizontal, rests with social networks that have mass penetration in large areas such as Orkut, Facebook, Twitter and RenRen. The position of output on the matrix is designed to reflect the users relationship with that output and is calculated on the output's quality, reach and penetration. A journalist producing for mainstream prime-time broadcast is not only polished and well produced 'journalistic' content but it is also well trusted, verified and edited. It remains to be a prime source of news for mass audiences.

However the networked journalist[6] operates within a wired up world and content is disseminated back to the crowd. Journalists who act within the network follow the rules of the cloud, sharing and collaborating. This builds on current work exploring journalism as a process rather than a product, particularly advocated by The Guardian newspaper in the UK. Here there is no end point and the journalist can use informal or unedited outputs, which exist closer to the central axis, to connect and drive traffic. Microblogs, photographs and unedited videos form part of packages in the news diamond[2] as much as formal outputs, where collaboration and the wisdom of the crowd can be used in the production process for verification and authenticity as well as determining the news value of content. A niche digital magazine may have a traditional output but the scope is small if it remains undiscovered or endorsed by the network. The crowd use social media and search to facilitate their transmediated discovery [10] of content. Social media is organic and works by the crowd filtering good content to the top - the crowd can't be bought.

The graphic allows for a clearer representation of how individual journalists can occupy more than one space within this fragmented media ecology. The representation of distribution shows how networks at the bottom have very different characteristics as an output platform to the 'primetime' packages associated with mainstream. As their places and roles within the landscape vary, journalists may need to work with different editorial teams, technical tools and face different journalistic issues. The journalist at micro level may have multiple output points, each requiring different identities and skills. They may also find themselves dealing with clashing concerns over professional and private brands, struggling to reconcile the needs of news organisations with the needs of the community, and reconciling innovation with a traditional journalist's toolkit.

Currently, media business models allow for a general correlation between outputs and earning potential. The digital media market does not currently pay for quality unless it is in a traditional dual product model. Journalists who make money from advertising do so because their content can command a high quantity of unique users. As such, journalists who rely on mainstream outputs for their business model are closer to the vertical axis, and those who

rely on niche payments from lots of individuals concurring with Anderson's Long Tail [1] find themselves closer to the horizontal.

3. CONCLUSION

This model is intended not as a definitive mapping of this continually fluctuating and evolving landscape, but as an attempt to delineate those factors which we believe will be determinate in this new landscape: the nature and number of relationships a journalist has with the community and news environments, and the means in and purpose to which a journalist applies his content and skill. In mapping the continuum between source and output at micro and macro levels, a determining relationship between the two helps define the role and scope of journalism for individuals and institutes. Technology is no longer determinate of the news product; relationships are. The important question asked of a journalist used to be what medium they worked in, now the questions are what do you do, with whom, how do you do it, and, why do you do it?

This model is a preliminary tool, and therefore fairly coarse and loose at this point. The authors welcome comment and discussion on the model, in the hopes of generating discussion and further developing the ideas presented in this paper.

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THE ORIGIN OF STORIES: HOW JOURNALISTS FIND AND CREATE NEWS IN AN AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA, COMPETITION AND CHURNALISM

Megan Knight

Newsgathering is an increasingly technological practice, and professional newsgathering is also increasingly under fire from amateur competition in the form of “citizen” or “participatory” journalism. In the public eye the debate is often framed as the “death of traditional journalism” and the rise of the new “digitally empowered” masses. Journalists are increasingly being told that they need to use these new tools to connect with audiences, and news organisations encourage journalists to use tools which are considered to be more efficient, more time-saving and therefore a cost-saving to the news organisation.

Within the context of this changing environment, this qualitative study examines the ways in which journalists use social media as a news gathering tool. Using a multi-dimensional analysis, incorporating participant observation, semi-structured interviews, content and document analysis at one UK national daily, the study determines the source of all stories published during one week, and the mechanisms used by the journalists to cover them. The conclusion of the study is that overwhelmingly, journalists follow traditional methods of finding and making news, and that the use of interactive and social media as a newsgathering tool is effectively non-existent in the newsroom. Although the journalists are aware of social media and its potential, the pressures of work and the speed with which the newsroom has to function has worked against any experimental or alternative newsgathering practices.

Keywords: sourcing; newsgathering; social media; new media; news selection; news production

Literature

The origin of news stories has not been extensively researched, although questions peripheral to this have. Research into news values (Galtung & Ruge 1965; Harcup & O'Neill 2001) looks primarily at the choices made by news organisations with regards to what events to report on and what events not to. Gatekeeping studies look at selection of stories from a larger pool of events (Gans 2004; Shoemaker 1996). However, neither of these examine how stories come to the attention of the newsroom, only their subsequent inclusion or exclusion from the news.

Sourcing is also an aspect of this question. Sigal's (1999) analysis of the reliance of journalists on institutional sources is picked up by Kothari in her discussion (2010) of the coverage of the Darfur crisis. Subsequent studies of the coverage of specific events has also highlighted the close relationship between the press and institutions such as the police (Berrington 2000). This research focuses on specific events and relationships, and does not aim for a comprehensive understanding of where stories come from, and how they come to the attention of the newsroom. A substantial picture does emerge of the close relationship between institutions of state and journalists that has been discussed elsewhere (Davies 2008).

Journalism textbooks do engage with the question of how to find stories, and they tend to the most traditional of perspectives on this (Sissons 2006; Randall 2000; Harcup 2009). Countering that is more recent discussion of newsgathering in a new and social media environment, which encourages students to use Facebook and Twitter to generate ideas and contacts, and to maintain online relationships with other sources (Bradshaw 2007; 2011; Bull 2010; Couldry 2010; Gant 2007).

The advice seems to contradict itself: either rely on the same old processes and contacts journalists have been using for years, the state, the police and, if you are being expansive, institutions of civil society, or move entirely into the new world of social media and locate yourself entirely online, where, we are told, we can find everything needed to report on the world around us. This confusion, and this dichotomy, with tradition on one side, and the somewhat hyperbolic acclaim that greets new media on the other, is what has motivated this study. Initially, the question was asked to what extent do newsrooms rely on social media and the Internet to conduct their primary journalistic research. This was intended to follow on earlier studies into the use of social media as a resource by journalists covering events in Iran in 2009 and North Africa in 2011 (Knight 2010; 2011), which found that traditional power structures remain dominant as a source of news. The simple analysis of the sources quoted proved problematic, since whatever use the newsroom made of social media or new media in reporting was obscured by the process. A broader study was then conceived to examine the process of storymaking, incorporating analysis of the entire production process as well as of the end product.

Context

The United Kingdom has eight national daily newspapers, four that are considered ‘quality’ papers, and four ‘popular’ (the old distinction of tabloid and broadsheet having become meaningless since in format, six of the papers are tabloid and only one is a broadsheet). This is a very high level of competition among newspapers for readership, and the UK newspaper market is considered to be very tight.

Their most important competition is with other news products and outlets. As in most of the developed world, newspaper readership in the UK is declining precipitously, with the quality papers facing the most serious competition from online news, television and mobile phone

applications. All of the newspapers in the UK have been laying off staff and cutting costs, and have been rethinking their relationship to their readers, but the quality papers, particularly, are facing a rough future (Greenslade 2009; McNair 2009).

Within this context the question of how journalism is done, and how newspapers work is important. One possible response is that social media has changed the ways in which journalistic research is done, making it faster, more efficient and more dynamic. This response is common in the public discourse, and even in academic circles – that social media will somehow mitigate the problems created by corporatisation, rising costs and increasing demands for profit at the expense of working journalists (Rusbridger 2010; Stassen 2010; Farhi 2009; Ahmad 2010).

The question of how social media and the internet inform stories is predicated on an understanding of how stories are traditionally made. Our understanding of this is imperfect, although it has been studied in the past (Sigal 1999; Shoemaker 1996; Gans 2004), research into the origins of news has not been conducted much in recent times, and limited analysis has been done since the advent of social media and ubiquitous digital media.

Method

A mixed method of content analysis and interviews/observation was conducted at one quality national daily newspaperⁱ in the UK. A week (six days, excluding the Sunday title which is produced independently of the daily) of stories was analysed, the researcher attended all conference and diary meetings, and conducted interviews with the editorial staff at the paper during that week. This method combines the quantitative (content analysis of the stories published, analysis of the internal daily news diary) with the qualitative (interviews with journalists and editors, observation of meetings and discussions). The method also combines

analysis of the end product with analysis of the process, an approach that avoids the pitfalls of focusing too intently on the process or the product, which can lead to bias, or at least accusations of bias.

Each story published in the main body of the newspaper over the week, excluding sports and entertainment coverage and comment/editorial, was entered into a database. Stories that ran at less than 100 words and were not bylined were also excluded. The news organisation under study did not use any wire service stories in full – so it was not necessary to code for wire services, although a rough analysis of the short stories indicated that these were largely based on wire service stories. This left a corpus of 220 stories, approximately 40 per day, and 23 on the Saturday (which although a larger edition, contained far more comment, arts and sports coverage than ‘news’).

Using analysis of the stories themselves, coupled with notes from the conference meetings and interviews with the journalists, stories were categorised in terms of their origin, and their originality.

Origins

Origins are defined as the event that triggered the story, the original source of information or news, or peg, in journalistic jargon. Ten origins were identified: Surprise (accidents, disasters, unexpected events), Legal (events originated with the justice and law enforcement systems), Conflict (foreign stories originating in areas of war or conflict), Politics (party politics, electioneering, both in the UK and abroad), Government (government and state activities, at all levels), Institutions (Non-governmental organisations, charities, research institutions and institutions of state not linked to politics), Corporate (the business world), Elite persons (activities of well-known people not linked to politics, government or business interests), and

Original (stories which originated with the journalist – entirely self-generated). Although these categories are not explicitly predicated on either Galtung and Ruge (1965) or Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) studies of news values, and in fact is looking at a slightly different aspect of the news story (its origin or genesis, as opposed to its value to the news organisation) there is some slight overlap between the scales.

Harcup and O'Neill's values of Unexpectedness and Celebrity are borne out within the categories of Elite persons and Surprise. In the conference room, discussions linked to other news values, especially relevance and magnitude, made it clear that these values were considered important to the journalists – at least one story was rejected because it was perceived as not having enough of an impact on the readership, and another story was demoted (moved further down the paper and not splashed on the front page) because negativity in this particular area was something that the newspaper was conscious that it had a reputation for, and wanted to downplay.

Originality

Stories were also categorised according to four levels of 'originality' – primary stories are self-generated stories based purely on the journalist's own ideas, secondary stories are based on information or events that are external to the news organisation, but contain as substantial amount of original reporting (at least 30% of the content), tertiary stories are based on press releases or wire service stories with only slight amounts of additional reporting, and quaternary stories are based entirely on reports in other news organisations or wire services. Stories that were classified as "primary", or entirely self-generated were then checked against the Nexis database and using a Google search, that the newspaper had in fact originated the story. Quotes used in secondary stories were then also verified that they had not appeared in wire service copy

or in press releases prior to their use in the newspaper, in other words, to verify that the stories contained original reporting.

These measures were then checked against the notes taken in the conference meetings, and the interviews with the newsroom staff to check that the textual analysis tallied with the observation. All of the stories coded as primary and secondary had been discussed in conference, none of the quaternary stories and only a minority of the tertiary stories had been tabled at conference, indicating that they had been used as filler, and therefore were most likely based on wires and press releases.

This process then results in each story having a two-dimensional measure of its origins – the nature of the event that triggered the story, and the nature of the approach taken by the journalist/news team in covering the story. These two measures, combined, can be used as an indication of the originality of the story, and of the extent to which the news agenda is the result of journalists' own ideas, or of the news agenda of powerful institutions and groups within society.

Findings

Origins

Of the 220 stories that were coded, the largest number (69) originated with research and non-governmental institutions, 40 were from corporate sources, and 23 from government (as well as 17 from the criminal and legal system). Party politicking (as opposed to governmental activities) accounted for 23 stories, and war and conflict only 16 stories. In total, only five stories were classified as unexpected events, such as accidents and disasters (although a further four stories

were institutional and governmental responses to disasters) – despite its importance as a news value.

Figure one: the origin of all stories, by type

The heavy reliance on information from institutional bodies, research reports from scientists, think-tanks, activist and non-governmental groups, as well as from government and the corporate world indicates the extent to which the news organisation depends on news being fed directly to it. Although the organisation responded to these reports critically, and applied original angles and reporting to the stories, the fact of these events and issues being in the news at all is down to the impetus created by these organisations, not the journalists' own motivation and ideas.

Journalists can then be seen from this to be reactive to events initiated by outside organisations, not proactive. This is borne out by the observations in which editors were seen reading and discussing other news outputs, and reading the wire services before conference. Discussions in conference were not focussed on how original a story is, but whether the angle or perspective taken would differ from other news organisations, or would conform. Although the organisation appeared to want to be unique in their take on things, they were perfectly content to be seen to cover the same events as their competitors.

Only one truly primary story was discussed in conference, an analysis of political data undertaken by one of the senior journalists. As it turned out, although the story was discussed on three separate days and placed on the diary, it was removed in favour of other breaking stories, and eventually ran in the Sunday title, and so is not included in this analysis.

Originality

When the stories were ranked according to their ‘originality’, the extent to which the journalist made original contacts or did original research to cover the story, the majority (80%) of stories were either secondary or tertiary, based on public events, press releases or information from institutional sources. Tertiary stories contained no original reporting, relying only on public statements and material available elsewhere, secondary stories contained a mix of original reporting and publically available material. Tertiary and quaternary stories combined were 59% (and 47% of the word count) of the stories printed – these are articles that could have been written without the journalist leaving their desk except to go to a scheduled press conference (although, increasingly, print journalists no longer attend press conferences, preferring to pick up the release online), or picking up the phone.

Primary stories, stories containing no information available elsewhere, were just 7% of the stories, although 10% of the word count. One day of the week, the Thursday, contained no primary stories.

Figure two: the originality of all stories

In the observations and interviews, this was not raised as an issue – increasingly journalists are not seen as being expected to go out and find out what is happening, but to gather information from other, more immediate sources, and synthesise and explain that information to the readers.

This is not to imply that the journalists are lazy, or that they are not doing their jobs. The fact is that the nature of news has changed, and especially that of newspapers. Newspapers are increasingly seen as providing analysis and context to events, not the immediate coverage. The editor himself confirmed this, saying that he believed that the role of the newspaper was to

provide context and meaning to people who already knew the basic facts of what had happened from other sources.

Two stories over the week bear this out. The first is the collapse of Southern Cross, a company that ran care homes for the elderly across the UK. The story ran over four days, with two stories a day, for a total of 5200 words. Only one of the stories is written in hard news style, presenting information that the journalist assumes the reader does not know: that the company has not met its financial obligations that month and faces closure. This story ran on the Wednesday morning. By Wednesday afternoon the company had gone into receivership, and in Thursday's paper the subject was given 1800 words, all in commentary and analysis. At no point in Thursday's paper was the straight information that the company had gone bankrupt included. In discussing the story in conference on Wednesday, and in interviews, the news editors confirmed that they were sure that their readers would have seen the evening news on Wednesday night, or heard it in the morning, and that it was not necessary to repeat information. Extensive discussion was held in conference over how to approach what was clearly an important story without repeating information the readers could get elsewhere, and adding new information. Columnists were consulted, and a series of articles on important issues around the care home failure were written (covering the impact on individuals, the lack of political oversight into standards, the reckless investments that led to the failure and the impact on local councils). The story remained important, and was carried over into the Sunday paper and the following week. The fairly limited genesis of the story – the failure of a property investment company, became the impetus for thousands of words of coverage.

A counter-example to this was an explosion in an oil refinery in Wales on the Wednesday night that killed two people. This kind of event is traditionally major news, having unexpectedness,

bad news and magnitude as major news values. A story like this also plays well visually, and contains substantial human interest. The popular newspapers covered the story with an average of five stories across the following days, including personal information about the victims, extensive picture spreads and headlines that evoke the human emotion of the story (*Two killed in fireball horror, Hell on earth* (Pickin 2011; Phillips 2011)). By contrast, it was decided in Thursday's conference that the story would have been played out overnight, and that no new dimension or perspective could be given on events. As a consequence, the story was given less than two hundred words, based on wire service copy, on the Friday, and a brief follow-up on the Saturday.

The news production process

The newspaper has some 30 full-time journalists on staff, as well as a team of editors, usually three on duty at any given point (news, foreign and business desks). The majority of journalists do not have specific beats, although there are named science, politics and education editors. Beats are not readily apparent at the newspaper – no discussion of beats beyond business and foreign came up in the conference meetings, and there was no sense of needing stories from specific areas and subjects each day. This despite the fact that specialist subjects, especially science and the environment, feature heavily in the coverage. 22 stories, some 13 000 words, were dedicated to scientific and environmental concerns over the week, and it is clear that the newspaper considers these stories important. What is missing, however, is the beat structure imposed on traditional newspapers, with dedicated pages for various subjects. Aside from the distinction between business, news, and sport, the remainder of the space is allocated organically, with no sense of overall pattern. There is little or no competition between areas, and no arguments about the allocation of space to the three main sections were observed.

Over the week of observations, few of the journalists were present in the newsroom, and no meetings were held with the journalists and the editors. Before the morning conference, the news editor (and his counterparts in business and foreign) created a diary from suggestions by journalists sent on email and by phone, and by scanning the wires. All discussion of assignments was done on this kind of ad-hoc basis, one to one. According to the editors, approximately half of the stories that made it on to the diary were suggested by the journalists, and half by the desk. Comparing the content analysis of the origin and originality of the stories with the notes given by the news editors regarding whether the story originated with the journalist or the desk, there is no apparent difference in either scale according to which of the two suggested the story initially.

Conference meetings were held between the editors (section editors, photo editor, production editor and editor-in-chief) three times a day, and the general news diary was discussed. After the second conference meeting a flat plan was created and from then on, the meetings would contain discussion of where each story should go.

The main concern in the conference meeting was visual presentation of stories. Whether a story would ‘picture up’, ie would have a good strong visual element to it, was important, and considerable energy was put into finding and choosing images for the main stories. Although this was a concern, stories were not carried simply because of their visual impact, as can be seen by the rejection of the refinery fire story. Likewise, discussion of the ‘splash’ – the main story on the front page was considerable, especially at the last conference meeting, at 3pm. The concern with the splash was that it shouldn’t be the same as other titles, but also that it should show variety across the week – at least one splash was rejected because it was too similar in subject matter to an earlier one, and the newspaper didn’t want to be seen to be “harping on that story”.

A secondary concern was how their main competitor paper would play a particular story, or whether the story had been done before by someone else. This came up a number of times, and was clearly linked to the paper's agenda of not providing readers with material they could read elsewhere. Other than this specific concern, other news outlets were not discussed extensively, although it was clear from conversation around the meetings that all of the staff were reading and consuming the other quality newspapers and the main radio and television news shows.

Social media was not mentioned, except as a conversational aside by the editor, although most of the staff have accounts, and are active users of the service in their personal capacity. The average age of the editors in the newsroom was low – early to mid-thirties, and technology was clearly not a barrier to any of them, it just didn't seem to be a concern in the news coverage, and whatever use the journalists may make of social or online media in terms of their communication with sources, and with their editors was not apparent, or discussed. Technology, of course, dominates all of the communication between the staff, with the content management system and internal emails being used constantly.

The online presence of the newspaper is run by an entirely separate team whose offices are in a different section of the building, and there was no communication between the two teams. The staff producing the website picked up and presented stories online through the editorial system without discussing them with the editors or journalists, and without having any input into the daily diary.

Workload

The newsroom is extremely busy, and the desk staff appeared to work long shifts with no breaks. There are approximately 30 journalists on staff, according to the editorial team, along with a large cohort of freelancers and stringers to supplement the coverage, especially the foreign

coverage. Looking at the data, it can be seen that 35 journalists are responsible for the majority of the stories (199 of the 220), and some 100 000 words in total. Each of these 35 journalists produced at least three stories over the week, and a subgroup of 20 journalists produced stories on at least four of the six days studied, and at least five stories over the week. These twenty journalists produced an average of just over seven stories and 3500 words in six days, some six hundred words a day, more if one considers that the work week should only be five days (two of the journalists don't seem to – they had stories in every edition of the newspaper over the week).

When the stories produced by these journalists were analysed as to their originality, surprisingly, the data showed a slight increase in the percentage of primary and secondary journalism, as opposed to the more derivative tertiary and quaternary journalism. Of the sixteen stories in the corpus that were ranked as wholly original, 11 were produced by these twenty journalists, accounting for 12% of the total words they produced. Overall, 55% of the work these journalists produced was either primary or secondary journalism. This runs counter to the idea that overworked journalists are simply regurgitating wire and pr copy. It is clear that this happens, but it is less common among the most pressed, bylined, staff writers although possibly not significantly so.

Conclusion

The majority of the material presented as news in the daily paper originated with people other than journalists, and that public relations and state and civic institutions still have substantial influence into the news agenda (and they are increasingly moving into the social media space, in order to consolidate that influence (Broadgate Mainland 2011)). The traditional image of the journalist out on the beat, asking what's going on, watching and observing for himself is no longer relevant, although the question of whether it ever was is an open. Instead, journalists

collect information from their desks (whether in the office, or remotely), and spend more time analysing, synthesising and presenting information that has been given to them by other organisations.

Accusations of ‘churnalism’ are problematic, though – the staff spent considerable time and effort ensuring that their perspective was informed and often critical of the original material presented. The relatively low number of primary stories, stories generated wholly by the news team, might worry a traditional journalist, but the higher proportion of secondary stories, stories that mixed original research with provided material is a sign that the critical faculties of the newsroom have not been entirely blunted by overwork and new technology. It would be unreasonable to expect the journalists to not use pre-prepared statements and wire service material when it is germane to the story. If anything, it has become impossible – the people who used to speak to journalists are now so heavily circumscribed by public relations minders and handlers that it is highly unlikely the journalist would get anything other than the exact same soundbite as presented in the media release, as Damon Green can attest (Sweeney 2011).

This is only a preliminary study into one specific newspaper within a specific set of circumstances. The question of how widespread these practices is remains to be seen, and further analysis of other news organisations would be needed in order to verify the conclusions here.

ⁱⁱ Anonymity was granted to a number of interviewees, and since the newsroom is so small, it has not been possible to honour that and provide the name of the newspaper concerned.

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Figure one:

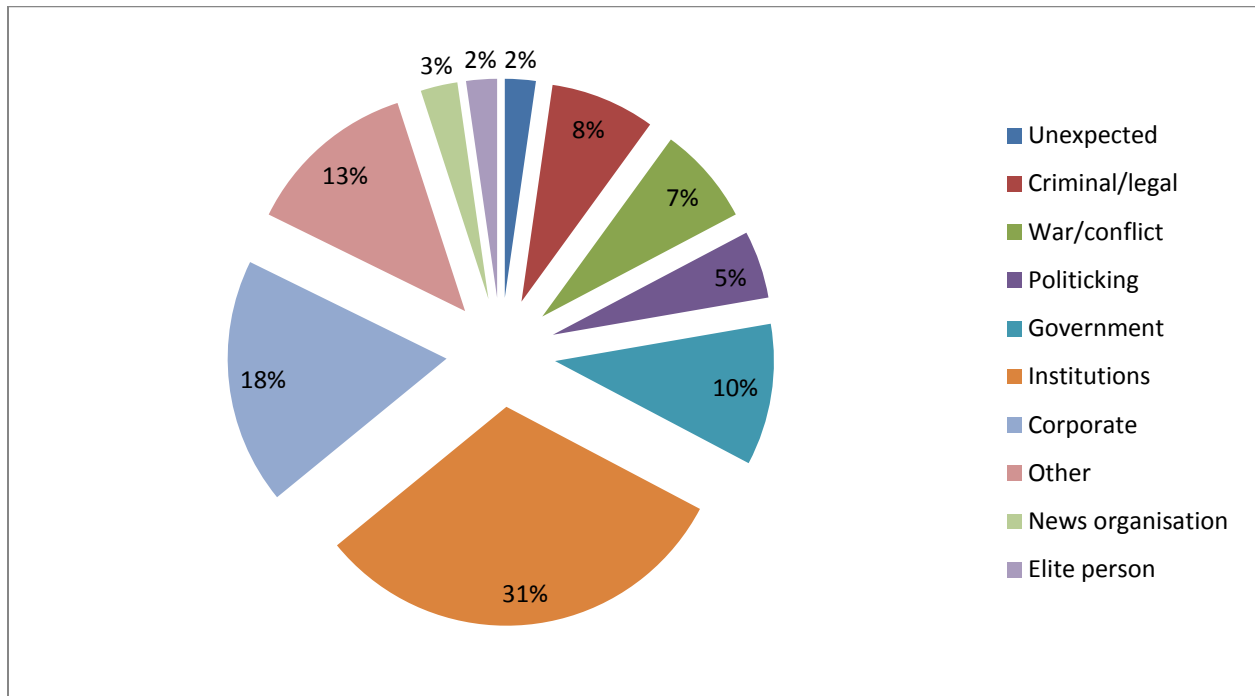
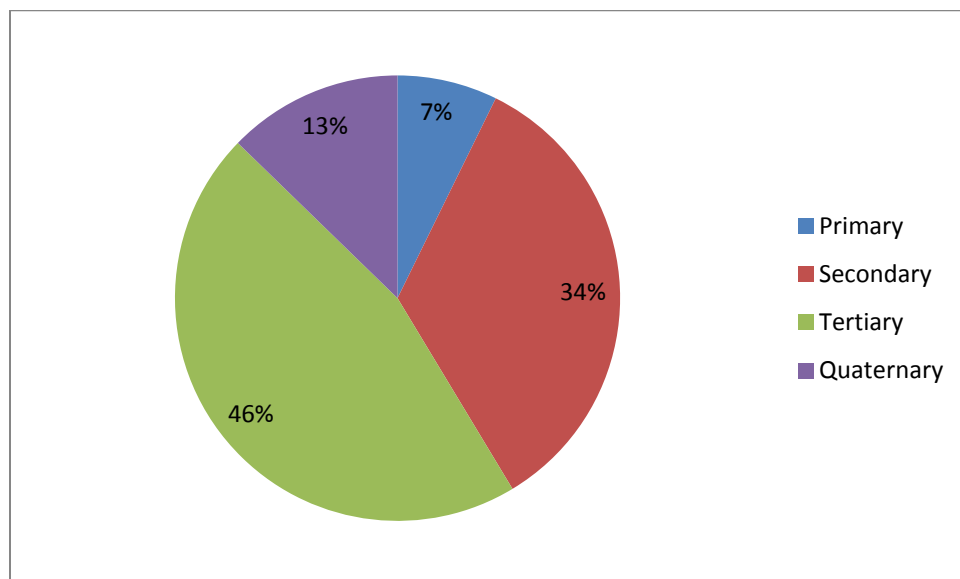
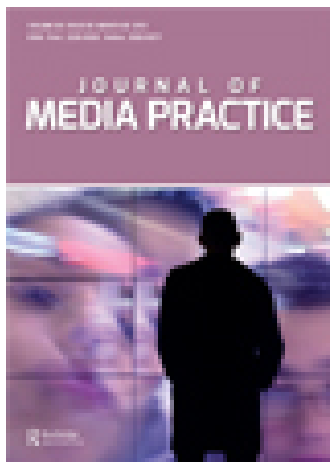


Figure two





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Journalism as usual: The use of social media as a newsgathering tool in the coverage of the Iranian elections in 2009

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Journalism as usual: The use of social media as a newsgathering tool in the coverage of the Iranian elections in 2009

ABSTRACT

The Iranian elections of June 2009 and the ensuing protests were hailed as the 'Twitter revolution' in the media in the United Kingdom. However, this study of the use of sources by journalists covering the events shows that despite their rhetoric of the importance of social media in alerting the global community to events in Iran, journalists themselves did not turn to that social media for their own information, but relied most on traditional sourcing practices: political statements, expert opinion and a handful of 'man on the street' quotes for colour.

This study shows that although the mythology of the Internet as a place where all voices are equal, and have equal access to the public discourse continues – a kind of idealized 'public sphere' – the sourcing practices of journalists and the traditions of coverage continue to ensure that traditional voices and sources are heard above the crowd.

KEYWORDS

social media
sourcing
traditional media
journalism
new media

New and social media are changing the way journalists work, or so we are being told, often by those same journalists. The protests following the Iranian elections in June 2009 were an excellent opportunity for news organizations to use these new tools in their coverage. The protesters were young and digitally connected, they were using Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to tell the world what was going on in their streets, but was the world really listening?

Sources are fundamental to the agenda and framing of a story as it unfolds. Researchers from Chomsky to Rosen and Gillmor have pointed to the reliance on institutional sources as a mechanism by which the public discourse is controlled by power elites within society. The practices of sourcing are therefore a key measure of shifting discourse and power within the media, or whether we are simply being served the same material in 'new bottles' (Phillips 2010).

NEW MEDIA, OLD SOURCES

Sourcing is discussed in literature in two ways: in terms of the selection of sources, especially in how this links to agenda-setting and hegemonic control of the public discourse, and as a process of journalism, specifically in terms of the impact of technology on this.

Sigal's (1973) discussion of sourcing practices is possibly the earliest research into this aspect of journalistic practice, and he characterizes the channels of information as informal, routine and enterprising, and the majority of the material under scrutiny in his study came via routine channels, and from governmental and institutional sources. These findings have been repeatedly borne out in subsequent research and remain the dominant pattern of journalists' engagement with their sources (Awad 2006; Boyce 2006; Davis 2009a; Gans 2004; Ku, Kaid and Pfau 2003; Messner and Distaso 2008).

Later researchers have looked to this reliance on specific kinds of sources and specific ways of communicating with them as a substantial part of the process of framing the story, a key way in which discourse is governed by dominant interests in society. Kothari (2010) links the choice of sources to the angle of the stories presented – the more governmental sources used, the less critical the articles are of US governmental policy. Daley and James (1988) also point to the exclusion of specific sources as being responsible for the presentation of a biased perspective on a story.

Despite the importance of the source-journalist relationship to the production of news, the complexity and influence of these relationships remain somewhat obscure. Gans (2004) describes it as a push-pull relationship, with power shifting from one to the other as stories unfold, a conclusion also reached by Awad (2006) and Davis (2009a). Gans also delineates a number of factors that determine the likelihood of a specific source being used by journalists. He points to past suitability, productivity, reliability, trustworthiness, authoritativeness and articulateness as being the main factors journalists rely on when deciding who to use as a source. It is implicit within these discussions that the relationship between a source and a journalist is an ongoing one that extends beyond a single story, although none of the researchers discuss what this would mean in terms of its impact on the framing of the final story. Oliver Boyd-Barrett (2004) blames the misleading reports written by Judith Miller and published by the *New York Times* in the run-up to the 2003 Gulf War on the closeness of the journalist-source relationship but does not go so far as to claim that this is a pattern of behaviour that extends beyond that specific relationship and story.

While the impact of technology on news production and dissemination has been extensively studied, its influence on sourcing practices is under-researched. Machill and Beiler (2009) concluded that journalists still rely heavily on traditional research methods and habits, such as phone calls and existing contacts, although the Internet has become the predominant source of news background, with journalists accessing archives and doing general research online. However, they focus on the mechanism of communication rather than the nature of the sources used.

Citizen journalism is often touted as either the saviour or the destroyer of traditional media. Although the term (largely attributed to Gillmor (2004)) is problematic, and is used to describe everything from news organizations' acquisition of raw material (usually images or video) from the general public to fully formed, funded and structured alternative media organizations operating on the web (such as GNN or Indymedia), which are more rightly referred to as the inheritors of the tradition of alternative or radical media (Atton 2002), there is no doubt that the Internet provides a whole new environment for the production and dissemination of both the raw material of which news is made and the finished product itself (Knight 2010).

Surprisingly, research into sourcing practices has rarely discussed the use of other news outlets as sources (Sigal 1973) includes other news sources in his category of 'informal' channels, such as leaks and background briefings), it is clear that this is a common, albeit hidden, practice in journalism (Davies 2008). Newer forms of media are being used as sources in similar ways as older forms, although they are possibly being discussed or presented in different ways. Messner and Distaso (2008) concluded that weblogs were increasingly legitimized as news sources, although only a small minority of the weblogs cited was from alternative or non-traditional sources who would not otherwise be quoted in the news. Couldry (2010) concluded that some news aggregators were being used as 'trusted sources' by journalists, but for their completeness, rather than their presentation as an alternative voice. Despite this, citizen journalism is viewed in some contexts, not just as an independent phenomenon, but as part of a chain of communication and conversation, which includes all kinds of media. As Jan Schaffer (2007) puts it, 'Citizen media is emerging as a form of bridge media, linking traditional media with forms of civic participation'. Reich agrees: 'Citizen journalism [...] is becoming less something that is dismissed as the amateur hour before the professionals take the stage and more [as] something that enriches the conversation' (2008).

Although the Internet and weblogs have broken some big news stories, especially political scandals such as those involving Monica Lewinsky (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000, 2004), Trent Lott (Alterman 2003) and others, these specific examples do not demonstrate a widespread pattern of the use of online media as sources, and appear, at least, to fall within the traditional pattern of journalists using rumours and other news sources as sources themselves.

The extent to which online news outlets' use as sources affords them any of the agenda-setting functions of source, or if the relationship is one in which both parties have power has not been discussed. It appears from the public discourse (Anderson 2006; Batty and Dehghan 2009; Berman 2009) around the power of new and social media, however, that it is at least in part their use as sources by non-traditional news outlets that is the origin of that power.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

On 12 June 2009 elections were held in the Islamic Republic of Iran for the position of President. Several polls had reported that the more moderate Mousavi was likely to win, and in the west at least, it appeared that the election would be a close call for incumbent Ahmedinejad. (Butler 2009; Freeman 2009; Tisdall 2009). On 13 June, official agencies announced that Ahmedinejad had won. Mousavi rejected this result and urged his supporters to fight (Freeman 2009). Protests broke out in Tehran and other cities, and continued for more than two weeks. Some four to five thousand people were arrested, and a number of people died during these protests (Amnesty International 2010; Human Rights Watch 2010).

As the protests continued, crackdowns were instituted by the state on communications and journalists. The mobile phone network had been disabled on election day and was intermittently shut down over the following weeks. Internet access was cut off for some time after the results were announced, and various websites, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and the sites of several news organizations, remained inaccessible (Connett 2009; Sullivan 2009).

From 14 June, the state cracked down on journalists. The offices of Al-Arabiya were closed, those of other news organizations were raided and equipment confiscated. Two days later all foreign journalists were informed that they could no longer leave their hotel rooms to see events for themselves (Batty and Dehghan 2009; Reporters Sans Frontières 2009).

From around 25 June onward, the protests began to die down and the coverage of the election and the protests had all but ended by 5 July. These events, summarized briefly here, form the background to the ensuing discussion.

METHODOLOGY

Nexis was searched for articles from national British 'quality' newspapers (dailies and their Sunday counterparts) mentioning 'Iran' and 'Election' as a 'major mention' between 1 June and 5 July 2009. The final search produced a list of 812 articles, but once duplicates from different editions (the final edition article was chosen where earlier versions differed), small mentions and teasers, sports and arts coverage, and some anomalies were removed, a final catalogue of 365 articles, around 25,000 published words, was created for analysis.

Stories were input into a database and coded as follows: type (hard news, analysis, colour, comment, backgrounder, leader and comment), up to ten sources were identified (in order of mention) and coded as to their affiliation, their identity and the channel in which they communicated. Note was also made of bylines and datelines (where included), and whether the story mentioned blogs, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube (or other online video), e-mail, SMS or mobile phone usage or Facebook. Any story that mentioned one of these was then flagged as a story that used social media. These stories were then re-examined and tagged according to Messner and Distaso's 'four uses' (2008), i.e., whether the social media was used as a news topic, news source, a mention or other, or multiple uses.

GENERAL FINDINGS

For the purposes of analysis each daily was paired with its Sunday counterpart, making four 'groups', the Guardian group (*The Guardian* and *The Observer*), the Independent group (*The Independent* and the *Independent on Sunday*), the

Telegraph group (*The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph*) and the Times group (*The Times* and *The Sunday Times*).

Of the 365 articles published, the Guardian group was responsible for close to 40 per cent of them (a total of 142 articles), with the remainder split fairly evenly between *The Telegraph*, *The Times* and *The Independent* (65, 79 and 79).

Overall coverage reached a peak of 30 stories one week after the election, at the height of the protests. Over time the most coverage occurred in the ten days immediately after the election (14–23 June), with relatively less coverage before and after that date. The bulk of the stories appeared after the actual election date (12 June), and it is clear that the story only became a major event once the protests began. The Guardian group was particularly prolific in this period, publishing more than half the total articles on some days, and 78 of the 169 articles published in the week from 14 to 20 June. There is a slight increase in stories towards the end of the sample period: these are after the arrest of an employee of the British Embassy in Tehran, and deal primarily with that event, although they also mention the election, which is why they are included.

Stories were categorized as hard news, analysis, backgrounder, colour, comment, leader, profile and vox pop. Almost half of the stories were hard news, with analysis being the next most common type. None of the newspapers differed much from the norm, although there were some variations: *The Telegraph* had 53 per cent hard news stories, and *The Independent* only 30 per cent. *The Independent* made up the difference with 33 per cent of its coverage being comment and leader. *The Telegraph* had only 10 per cent comment. These findings are not unexpected, given the traditional bents of these newspapers.

SOURCING AS USUAL

Overall, the sourcing for the stories was largely in keeping with traditional journalistic practices. The majority of sources quoted were institutionally affiliated, with either the main political parties in Iran, or with foreign governments. Despite the fairly high usage of ‘person on the street’ or *vox populi* sources, the pattern was almost textbook journalism.

The majority of sources appear to have been contacted through traditional mechanisms as well, although this is less clear than the nature of the sources. Only a small minority of sources quoted were linked to social media in any form.

Sources were identified as any person, organization or publication, named or unnamed, who was quoted or paraphrased in the text. This is a fairly loose definition, and includes such things as ‘unnamed sources’ and general references to public opinion or ‘conventional wisdom’. Despite the broadness of the definition, 129 of the 365 articles contained no reference to any sources or authority.

In the remaining 236 stories, individual and institutional sources were referenced 755 times (including multiple mentions of the same source), either quoted, paraphrased or otherwise referenced. These sources were categorized in three ways: their type, their affiliation and the channel in which they communicated with the journalist.

Types of sources were then regrouped into anonymous or unnamed sources, bystanders (‘man on the street’, this category included social media

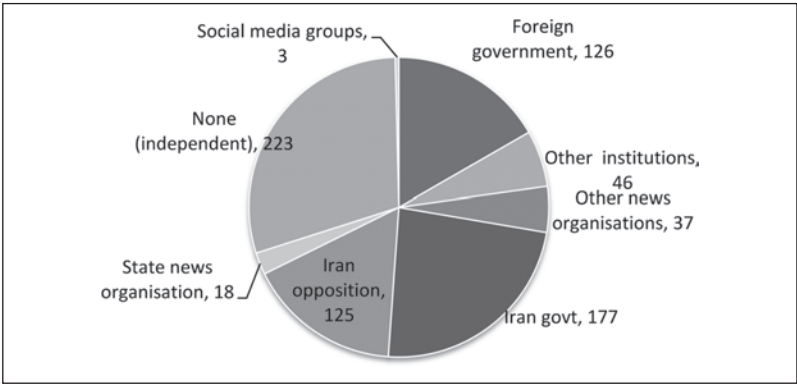


Figure 1: Sources by type.

users who were not otherwise affiliated), political leaders and parties, groups and organizations (excluding political parties), other news sources, experts and other. This typology is an expansion of Sigal’s (1973) characterization of source types and channels.

As Figure 1 shows, the single most commonly quoted source type was political leaders, which is logical for a story of this type. The heavy use of bystanders is unusual, as is the use of unnamed sources, although this category includes unnamed bystanders and the unclarified ‘public opinion’ type of sources: fewer than half were the traditional ‘source who asked not to be named’. Overall, this pattern of source usage is in keeping with the general patterns found by other researchers (Davis 2009b; Dimitrova and Stromback 2009; Gans 2004; Sigal 1973; Stenvall 2008). The fairly high reliance on bystanders and people on the street is somewhat atypical for such a hard news story, but the substantial levels of human interest in the story, and the relative difficulty of accessing other sources in Iran, does go some way towards explaining this.

The use of ‘bystanders’ rose substantially from the day after the election to just over a week later, when the protests began to die down. The use of vox pops and bystander comments in that context of news is completely expected – at that point the protests were the story, and participants in the protests were one of the main sources for coverage.

The majority of sources was either governmentally or politically affiliated, or had no identified affiliation (see Figure 2). This is fairly typical, although the relatively high numbers of ‘independent’ sources is unusual. Again, this can be explained by the nature of Iranian politics – people are less likely to willingly identify themselves as members of a movement or organization when support for that organization may well be outlawed (Human Rights Watch 2010). In addition, the heavy use of bystanders, as seen earlier, is a substantial proportion of the ‘independent’ sources.

Determining the channel by which the journalist communicated with the source is highly problematic, and in almost half of the instances (349 of 755) it was unclear how the communication had taken place (although it is fairly safe to assume that a substantial part of that was personal communication, since journalists are usually expected to identify other kinds of communication). Of the identified channels, personal communication (conversation,

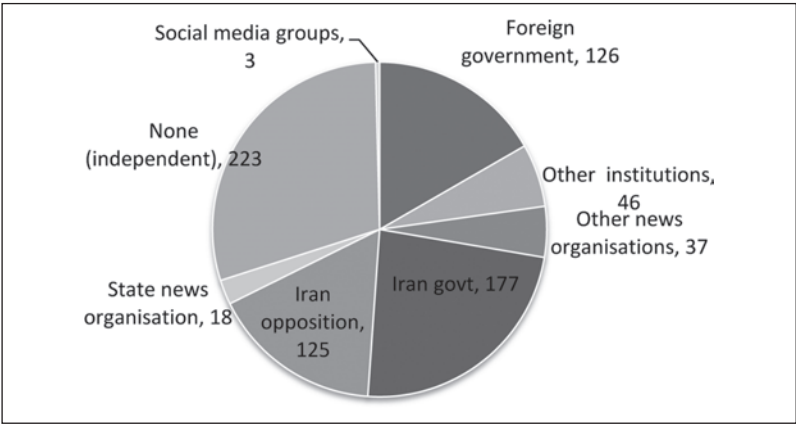


Figure 2: Sources by organizational affiliation.

phone calls and e-mail) was the most common, followed by official statements (press releases, conference and speeches) and other news organizations. Iranian state media was quoted as a source 48 of the 62 instances of journalists using other news organizations as a source. Again, this is not unexpected in Iran, where foreign journalists were not invited to press conferences or given access to leaders, and where the state media is effectively a proxy for the state itself.

Social media and websites were 62 of the 406 instances where a channel was identified (Figure 3). Once the state cracked down, most of the communication with Mousavi and his fellow party members appears to have been through his website. It is reasonable to assume that a part of those sources identified as using press releases from the opposition were doing

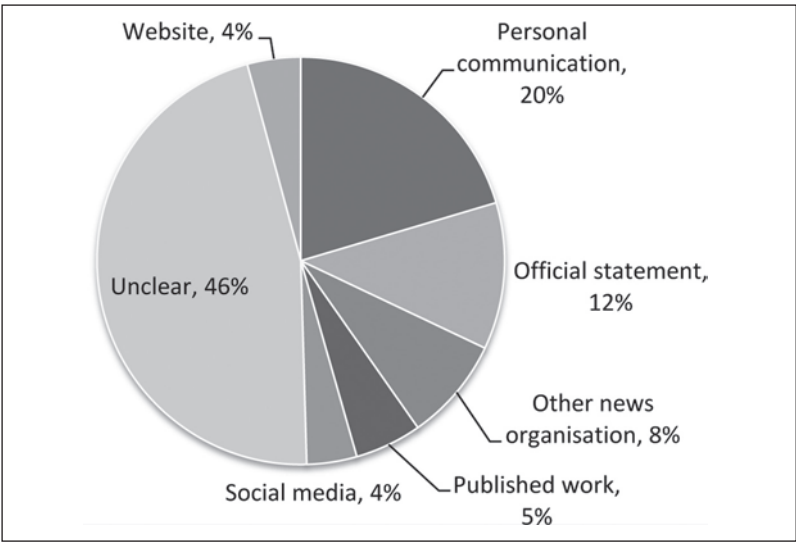


Figure 3: Sources by channel.

so through their website, as well as that a part of the material quoted from other news organizations was via the web (but news sites that exist solely on the web, such as *Balatarin*, were identified as websites, not as news organizations). Social media users were quoted, and the assumption was, unless it was otherwise clear, that the channel for this communication was the social media system itself. These constituted only a small number of the sources used, and 25 of the 30 sources identified as being communicated with by the social media channel had no affiliation. None of them were clearly identified: fifteen were identified by user names or 'handles', the rest were identified simply as 'Twitter user' or 'Facebook commenter' and the like.

This very small percentage of source material that was non-traditionally acquired is at odds with the public discourse regarding the use of social media as a communication channel during the election and subsequent protests (Anon n.d.; Anderson 2009; Batty and Dehghan 2009; Johnson 2009), and in other previous events. The claim that 'Twitter users are providing vital updates on the situation at a time when foreign journalists are facing severe restrictions' (Butterworth 2009) is not borne out by the published material in the newspapers.

Despite their rhetoric of the importance of social media in alerting the global community to events in Iran, the journalists themselves did not turn to that social media for their information, but relied most on traditional sourcing practices: political statements, expert opinion and a handful of 'man on the street' quotes for colour.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS THE STORY AND AS SOURCE

Although social media was not widely used as a source, it was the story in a substantial minority of the overall stories. Thirty stories were primarily about social media as a factor in the election and its aftermath.

Messner and Distaso (2008) posited four uses of websites and blogs within a news report. These are Source, Topic, Mention and Other. Using this system, but dropping 'Other' and adding 'Topic and source' we can differentiate the uses of social media in the 85 stories that made any mention of it (Figure 4).

Only 25 of the stories (29 per cent total), made use of social media as a source, 30 (35 per cent) of the stories were about social media, and of that, 23 made no use of social media as a source (i.e. stories about the social media phenomenon that did not actually reference any material or individuals in that medium). Social media was a minor topic, i.e. mentioned, in 37 (44 per cent) of the stories.

There were two main stories that attracted most of the discussion of social media, and demonstrated the heaviest reliance on it as a source, although not all news organizations were transparent about this use. These two stories demonstrate that in specific contexts, where alternative sources cannot be found, journalists do use social media as a source, but only in specific and bounded ways.

On 20 June, music student Neda Agha-Soltan was shot in the chest, apparently by the Basiji (the state militia) while on her way to join the protests in Tehran. Amateur video of her death, taken by an unnamed bystander and sent to a friend in Amsterdam was uploaded onto YouTube and other social networking and video-sharing sites (Tait and Weaver 2009). On the following day, a Sunday, a number of reports alluded to the footage

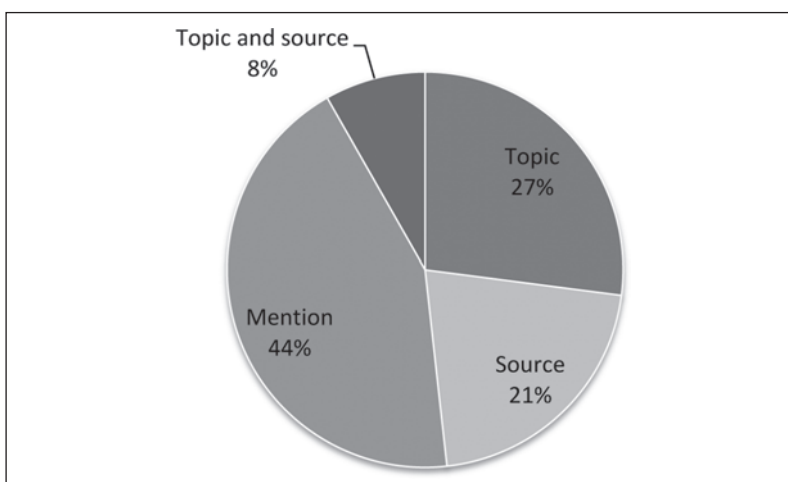


Figure 4: Uses of social media in stories.

of her death: 'graphic video and phone camera footage captured killings and carnage [...] accounts on internet sites such as Twitter or YouTube' (Connett 2009: 8) Marie Colvin in *The Sunday Times* was more explicit: 'The scene, captured on a number of mobile phones [...] two men cradled the woman as she collapsed backwards onto the street, a pool of blood at her feet [...] there was nothing they could do to save her' (Colvin 2009: 28).

By 23 June, all of the papers in the sample had the story, and her name and picture were being published. By the end of the week details of her life and family had been unearthed, and she had been declared the first martyr of the protest, dubbed the 'Angel of Freedom' (McElroy 2009a: 18). In all, twenty stories about her, and the footage of her death, which was described variously as 'film', 'footage', 'video' and 'images' were published.

Of the nineteen descriptions of the footage (one article simply referenced her death) seven articles were clear that this was uploaded onto the Internet (Jardine 2009; McElroy 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Sunday Times 2009; Tait and Weaver 2009), three of those were clear that the footage was shot on mobile phones (by implication amateur footage) (McElroy 2009c; Tait and Weaver 2009). Another two mentioned mobile phones, but did not mention the Internet (Colvin 2009; McDowell 2009). Colvin implies strongly that she had seen the footage on people's mobile phones, linking it with 'eyewitness reports'. The remaining ten articles made no mention of the origin of the video, or the fact that it was not being 'broadcast' or 'circulated' in the traditional mediums associated with those words.

Of the articles that were clear about the origins and nature of the footage, two (Jardine 2009; Tait and Weaver 2009) were explicit about the fact that this was amateur video and explained the process in some detail. Tait and Weaver described the process of getting the video out of Iran and uploading onto the Internet in *The Guardian*. Jardine's article in *The Telegraph* was critical of the footage, discussing both the possibility that it was faked and her opinion that the footage was unethical by western journalistic standards, that it 'violated one of our last taboos: that the moment of death is private

and should be witnessed only by those who care for that person.' She goes on to add,

In the YouTube age, that principle is being eroded. Anyone in the office can now glance at the 'most viewed' list on YouTube, and observe a quick death between a rerun of Susan Boyle's early triumph and Sunday's episode of Top Gear.

(Jardine 2009: 19)

Of the four newspapers, *The Telegraph* and *The Times* were most consistent in explaining the origin of the material, referring to it as 'film', 'footage' or 'video' only three times out of eleven stories. *The Independent* and *The Guardian* were vaguer. *The Independent* never describes the footage as coming from a mobile phone, an amateur journalist or being posted on the Internet. *The Guardian* ran one article explaining the whole process, but aside from that article, there are no clear discussions of the origin of the footage in stories which reference it.

The confusion about the origin of the video (in the published material), and that it had not been shot or circulated within traditional media raises questions as to the regularity with which journalists identify the channels and sources of information. The possibility that far more journalists used social media when gathering their stories than is obvious from the analysis of the published material is raised.

The phrase 'Twitter Revolution' in connection with Iran first appeared in print on 15 June in the *Nation* in the United States, although that article implies that the phrase was already in common use (Berman 2009). An article in *The Guardian* two days later uses the phrase in connection with an uprising in Moldova, but implies that the situation in Iran is similar (Schoenman and Mansoori 2009). Both articles reference blogs, and imply that the phrase is in common use online.

Twitter itself was first mentioned on 15 June, in *The Times* (Maddox 2009) but by the next day it was the subject of an article in *The Guardian* (Anderson 2009). Overall, among social networking sites, Twitter was more likely to be used as the subject of an article (in 48 per cent of articles that mentioned it) as opposed to 35 per cent for all articles mentioning social media. Of the 30 articles that used social media as a topic, 20 were about Twitter, making it by far the most commonly discussed form of social media in the corpus of text.

Of the twenty articles that were about Twitter, eight focused on censorship of social networks (and foreign media) by the regime, and seven discussed social networking in the context of activism and political organizing (including its possible use in the 2010 United Kingdom elections). Two were about Twitter itself, the company and the system. Seven of the articles, more than a third, contained meta-journalism: discussion of the use of social media by journalists as a news-gathering tool. Several of these were critical of the use of Twitter, specifically, 'Twitter is not real politics, any more than Facebook is real friendship' (Jenkins 2009).

Andrew Sullivan in *The Times* was more positive: 'Of course, this model has serious limitations. [...] I could not verify anything. Yet I could use basic common sense and judgment, provide context and caveats' (2009: 18).

Siobhain Butterworth, *The Guardian's* 'Readers' Editor' was more concerned with the journalists' obligation to protect their sources, although she (and others at the newspaper) acknowledge the importance of Twitter to the ongoing coverage and the difficulty of verifying the information: 'As

the number of reporters in Iran falls, you have to recognise what claim to be first-hand accounts and then be open about the fact that you can't verify them' (Butterworth 2009: 27). This meta-journalistic discussion about the use of Twitter implies that the journalists are much more reliant on social media as a source than is apparent from an analysis of the articles.

CONCLUSION

A substantial part of the framing of new and social media in the traditional media is that it will provide alternative voices with access to the public discourse (Curran and Witschge 2010; Gillmor 2004; Johnson 2009; Pax 2003; Schaffer 2007). This has not been borne out by research (Davis 2010; Shin and Cameron 2003), except in the context of specific stories (Pein 2005; Williams and Delli Carpini 2004), but the discussion of social media (and specifically Twitter) and its role in the events in Iran in 2009 continued in that vein. This research shows that although the mythology of the Internet as an equal place where all voices are equal, and have equal access to the public discourse, a kind of idealized 'public sphere' continues, the practices of journalists and the traditions of coverage continue to ensure that traditional voices and sources are heard above the crowd.

In conclusion, the study did not show the extensive use of social media as a source in traditional reporting, although social media sites and, more specifically, Twitter, were used and quoted. However, the substantial number of sources in which the channel of communication was not identified (almost half the total) raises some questions. The analysis of the coverage of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan shows that news organizations are not clear when they are using material sourced via the Internet, or social media (since more than half of the stories did not discuss the origin of the video). This raises the question of whether much more of the information presented in the newspaper articles is sourced via social media sites than is initially apparent.

The lack of specificity when sourcing material from the Internet is interesting since none of the newspapers were consistent on this matter, and it appears that they expected that the readers would know the origin of the footage of Soltan's death. It seems likely that rather than being dishonest about the origins of material (which is one way of interpreting the data) that the use of social media is becoming 'normalized' in such a way that journalists no longer feel it is necessary to identify every instance in which they use such tools to communicate with sources. It was not that long ago that it was thought necessary to explicitly mention that communication with a source had taken place on e-mail, rather than on the telephone or in person: this is no longer expected or required by most style guides.

The meta-journalistic discussions about the use of Twitter imply that the journalists are much more reliant on social media as a source than is apparent from an analysis of the articles. There are only fifteen articles which explicitly use Twitter as a source, and there are seven articles discussing whether this is appropriate. This would also imply that the use of social media is more common than the data would suggest, and that it is in some way hidden. The meta-journalism, however, does not distinguish between material produced for the printed newspaper and material published online only. Sullivan, particularly, seems to be discussing primarily informal online media when he says that 'the point of blogging is a first draft of history, warts and all' (Sullivan 2009: 18), although earlier in the same article he is clearly discussing more traditional journalism.

Since there appears to be a disconnect between the extent to which journalists believe they are relying on social media and the extent to which this is obvious to the readers of the newspaper (but possibly not to the online community of the same news organization), this raises two possible areas for further study: a sociological analysis of journalistic practices at the point of production to determine whether they are using social media sources, and a comparative study of news published on paper and online to determine whether the standards for sourcing differ within those media.

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The revolution will be facebooked, broadcast and published

Megan Knight

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Abstract

Social media is increasingly embedded in our societies, in journalistic practice and in activism. A series of uprisings across north Africa and Arabia (the so-called 'Arab Spring' of 2011) have been credited largely to social media, especially Facebook. As with the protests surrounding the Iranian election of 2009, the world's media have proclaimed that social networking is responsible, and that the way in which journalists work is forever altered by this new technology. In this article, a content analysis of news coverage and interviews with foreign correspondents are used to analyse the extent to which this is true. The article concludes that although social media is now embedded in all aspects of life in modern societies, including journalism, traditional methods of finding and telling stories remain intact, and the dominant form of journalism.

Key words: Social media, Facebook, New Media, networked journalism, media technology

Biography

Megan Knight is Senior Lecturer in International Journalism at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston, UK. The former director of the New Media Lab at Rhodes University, and of the Highway Africa Conference, she researches new media technologies and their effects on the professional identity and practice of journalists, as well as in alternative and radical media. She is the lead author of *Social Media for Journalists: Principles and Practice*, London: Sage, 2013.

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Introduction and background

On December 17th 2010, Tarek-al-Tayyeb Muhammad Bouazizi, a fruit and vegetable seller in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire in front of the governor's office in protest at the way he had been treated by municipal officials.

On January 4th 2011, he died of his injuries. Ten days later the president of Tunisia fled to exile in Saudi Arabia. Over the three weeks between these two events, Tunisia had erupted into riots and protests, eventually ousting the President, and a subsequent series of placeholder leaders. The country remains in flux at the time of writing, and elections are planned for July of 2011.

These events, often dubbed the Tunisian Revolution, for western observers at least, seem to have come out of the blue. Tunisia was a relatively stable, if oppressive, country, and a favoured 'exotic holiday destination' for Europeans looking for sun and a taste of the romanticism of the orient. Even for seasoned observers, the speed with which events unfolded seemed unprecedented, after all there had been local protests and upheavals before in Tunisia (and in other, similar, countries), but none had spread so quickly, or so viciously.

The variable, we were quickly informed, was the Internet, specifically social media, and Facebook. As Ksenia Svetlova put it in the *Jerusalem Post*

Looking at the web, exploding with Tunisia's news and sights, reading the endless posts of Tunisian bloggers and Egyptian Facebookers, it's plain that Mark Zuckerberg's creation and others like it are playing a high-profile role in the unfolding unprecedented people's revolution in Tunisia.(Svetlova 2011)

If Iran's uprisings in 2009 had been dubbed the 'Twitter revolution' (prematurely, as it turned out, since the Iranian state remains intact at this point) (Sullivan 2009), then Tunisia's would be the 'Facebook revolution'(Chrisafis 2011; Mandraud 2011c), or the 'WikiLeaks revolution'(Naughton 2011; Shane 2011a).

This hyperbole is not atypical for the news media – as journalists, we focus on that which is new and different, and any new variable in a situation is likely to be blamed for or credited with, causing that situation. New media technologies are no exception to this rule: the World Wide Web has been heralded as both the saviour and destroyer of the news media since its launch in the early nineties (Pavlik 2001; Hall 2001), and nobody loves a catchphrase like a journalist, especially one that combines the dramatic and exciting (revolution) with the sexy and new (such as Twitter, WikiLeaks or Facebook – recently the subject of an Oscar-nominated film). However, as usual, the truth is more subtle and nuanced than the simple catchphrase would suggest. The specific conditions that led to the overthrow of Ben Ali's regime, and the role that new media technology played in that overthrow are beyond the scope of this article (and of this researcher, who is not a political scientist or historian): but the question remains, how important was social media in getting the coverage of events out to the wider world, and how much did foreign correspondents and journalists rely on it in covering events?

Prior to the 'revolution' Tunisia was not a widely reported-on country. In the year prior to December 2010, there were only 87 articles about Tunisia in four major world newspapers (*Le Monde*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *The Jerusalem Post*), as compared to more than 600 in the three months following. None of the major wire services or news organisations (with the exception of Al Jazeera) maintain a permanent bureau in Tunisⁱ. Revolutions and uprisings are always news, but similar events in other parts of the world, such as the civil war in the Ivory Coast, received less coverage than events in Tunisia, despite being, on the surface, of greater news interest. Was the involvement of technology a factor in

this increased coverage? Did the fact that events were being discussed on Twitter and footage was broadcast on Facebook and other social media make it easier for foreign correspondents to get the story, and therefore increase the coverage of events?

After events had unfolded, the question was asked whether the Internet had assumed the role of ‘a very effective uncensored news agency from which world media have been able to freely source newsfeeds, raw from the scene’. This chapter will test this question, as well as the broader questions of which aspects of the story got the most coverage, in order to clarify whether social media did in fact play as large a role as pundits and commentators believe it did in gaining and keeping the attention of the world. The idea that social media can be both a ground-breaking tool for the telling of news as well as a challenge to the role of journalists in general has become common in the public discourse that surrounds journalism. As a former director of the BBC world service, Richard Sambrook, puts it:

The internet has allowed open access to the public space where once the media played the role of gatekeeper. Any stakeholder in an international event or issue can now communicate directly with the public they seek to influence rather than have to rely on the judgements of journalists to mediate their story. Those who were once reported upon can now report themselves. (2010, p.33)

Foreign correspondence has always been a technological activity. From the telegraph bringing the news of the relief of Mafeking to Britain in 1900, to the announcement of the death of Osama Bin Laden on Twitter more than a century later, foreign correspondents and their editors have always used the quickest and cheapest technology available to them. (Briggs 2001; McPhail 2010) In an environment where being first with the story makes all the difference, the person with the fastest and best communication technology usually wins, at least the first round.

Balanced against this need for speed, however, is the need for accuracy. Verification is an essential part of the journalist’s job, there is no point in being first with the story if you later have to retract it (tabloid muckraking tactics notwithstanding). Twitter may be fast, but it is prone to rumour and amplification of inaccuracies (as the much-reported ‘death’ of Nelson Mandela in January 2011 shows). Veteran foreign correspondents have expressed their concerns with social media’s lack of verification and have raised the possibility that social media can be used as much as a source of disinformation as of information. (Preston 2011; Jardine 2009) The extent to which this is a genuine concern remains hard to establish – journalists had been susceptible to being fooled by imposters well before social media was invented (Ollman et al. 2005), and blaming the technology for mistakes made seems a bit harsh.

On the other hand, it is clear that social media content can be manipulated by state authorities or others with a desire to control the story as it emerges (Kirkpatrick 2011c). The Chinese Communist Party’s ‘50 cent army’ⁱⁱ is best known for this (Bandurski 2006, 2008, 2011), but accusations have been levied against the Iranian authorities and others that they had been manipulating the discourse online, with the specific aim of misleading journalists (Patronus Analytical 2009). David Kirkpatrick of the New York Times also raised this as an issue, saying that he had been informed that the Libyan authorities had been manipulating Twitter, or trying to (2011a). Although journalists are vulnerable to being misled by online information (the recent ‘Jasmine revolution’ protest in Beijing that attracted a large audience of police officers and foreign correspondents, but no discernible protestors is a case in point (Branigan 2011)), this doesn’t appear much more likely than the risk of being misled by a source or a fixer, or by an engineered protest, such as those organised by Ben Ali’s supporters (Mandraud 2011c).

The extent to which journalists do not use social media as a news source because of fears of being misled is hard to establish. It is certainly the most cited reason as to why social media is not to be trusted (Fisk 2009; Schoenman & Mansoori 2009), but whether this is simply a response to the perceived threat social media poses to traditional news, or a genuine concern with regards to the reliability of sources is hard to verify. Since news outlets have traditionally reported information that could not be verified with a qualifying statement clarifying its origins: from the mainstream media reporting that The Drudge Report was reporting that President Bill Clinton had had an affair with an intern (Williams & Delli Carpini 2004), to the initial reports of the death of Michael Jackson, all of which cited TMZ.com as their primary source, journalists have always had a get-out clause for reporting newsworthy, but unverified information. It would seem to someone outside the trade that citing a specific social media source would more reliable than the traditional ‘unnamed sources are claiming that’, which is little more than journalistic euphemism for gossip or rumour, but it remains uncommon for news to be sourced to social media platforms, at least, explicitly.

The research study

The initial study consists of a content analysis of the coverage of events in Tunisia in major newspapers, focussing on the sourcing practices evident in the coverage. Four newspapers were chosen for the study, each the dominant newspaper in their community, and the one best known for extensive foreign coverage: *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* (including *The Observer*, its Sunday sister title), the *Jerusalem Post* and *Le Monde*. These papers represent a range of western opinion and coverage of events, coming from four very different, but important players in international politics. Using the Nexis database, a corpus of stories covering events in Tunisia from December 17th (the date on which Bouazizi committed self-immolation), to the end of March 2011, by which time the story had all but disappeared from the newspapers, was created.

The initial database of 953 stories was then edited down to include those stories that were about Tunisia. Stories that mentioned Tunisia only as a catalyst for change elsewhere in the region, stories that focused on Libyan refugees in Tunisia or that were about Libya or Morocco, but datelined Tunisia, were excluded. Culture and sports stories that made no mention of political events and a handful of travel features that appeared in *Le Monde* in December 2010 were likewise excluded from the corpus, as were letters to the editor. A final database of 386 stories, some 250 000 words, was created. Of these, 223 were from *Le Monde*, by far the greatest number, 65 from *The Guardian*, 61 *The New York Times* and only 37 from the *Jerusalem Post*.

These stories were analysed in terms of the sources used, their type and the means by which the journalist communicated with them (where possible). 883 separate sources were identified and analysed. Stories were also analysed in terms of their main focus, and, in the case of longer stories, how they framed events. This rough analysis was then used to develop an understanding of how events were covered, and coupled with personal commentary by journalists published elsewhere, and semi-structured interviews, a picture of the extent to which social media impacted the telling of the story was established.

Findings

Initial analysis

Timeframe of coverage

Events in Tunisia did not initially spark much interest in the west. The first story to mention the protests was in *Le Monde* on December 26th, almost ten days after the riots started. The *Guardian* ran its first story on December 30th, but the *New York Times* did not turn its attention to events until January 10th, followed by the *Jerusalem Post* on January 11th. The peak of coverage was on January 20th, with 27 stories across all four newspapers - although this is particularly high because *Le Monde* included an eight page supplement on the Tunisian revolution on that day (comprising fifteen stories, along with five others in that day's paper) - and interest in the story was maintained until the first week of February, by which time attention was moving to Egypt and Libya. As events in those countries rose in the news agenda, coverage of Tunisia was reduced. By mid-February, only *Le Monde* was covering the story extensively, most other newspapers were running one story at most every few days, a small update on events. Tunisia had, by then, becoming something of a footnote to much more dramatic and unsettling events in the region, Libya, especially.

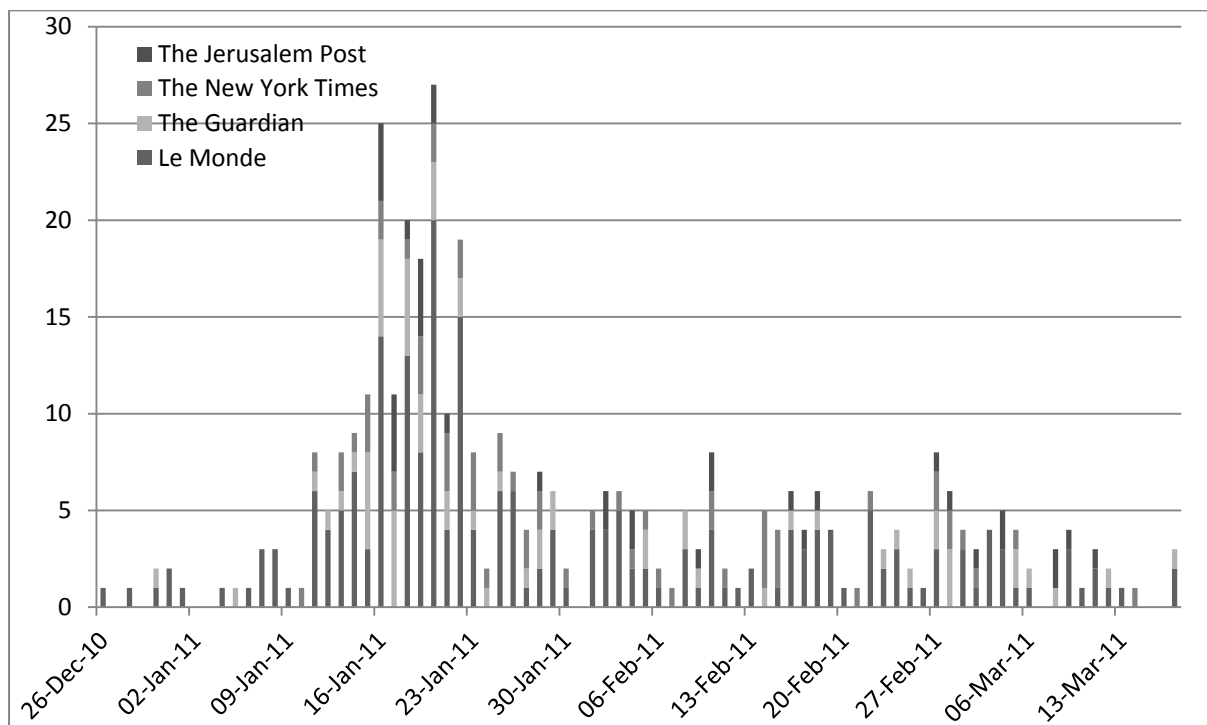


Figure 1: number of stories per day, by newspaper and total.

The relative lack of interest in the story until it had started to become clear that regime change was a real possibility is fairly typical of coverage of these kinds of events – news organisations do not want to waste their precious few foreign correspondents haring off to cover something unless they are reasonably certain that the story has legs, that it will run enough to warrant the expense of sending someone to cover it. Analysis of the stories printed shows that reliance on wire service copy was particularly heavy until the middle of January. Although newspapers were not consistent in crediting wires, half of the hard news stories published prior to January 15th made some reference to wire services, or explicitly credited Reuters or AFP for the story. The first story datelined Tunisia was the *New York Times* story of January 11th, the *Guardian* correspondent first filed from Tunis on the 15th of January, and

the *Le Monde* correspondent did not arrive until January 25th, although they appear to have been using a stringer prior to thatⁱⁱⁱ. The *Jerusalem Post* did not send a correspondent to Tunisia, and relied mostly on Reuters copy.

Types of stories

The majority of the coverage was hard news reporting, 57% of the stories were reports on events in Tunisia (and elsewhere). Analysis and background accounted for 21% of the stories, followed by 12% editorial and opinion, and the remainder colour and profile pieces. Throughout the timeframe of coverage the ratios between these types of stories remained fairly static, after the initial hard news reports, coverage was a mix of hard news supplemented with analysis, background and opinion.

Main issues within the coverage

Most of the stories printed described events in Tunisia or provided background or analysis of those events, but there were a few sub-themes within the coverage. The largest of these was the resignation of Michèle Alliot-Marie, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs who resigned in February following the revelation that she and her family had visited Tunisia on holiday at the expense of Ben Ali's family. This story was the subject of 29 of the 223 stories in *Le Monde*, making up a substantial subsection of the coverage. It was also mentioned in all the other newspapers. The American diplomatic cables leaked to newspapers by the activist group WikiLeaks was also a theme in the coverage, accounting for 21 stories of the total, across all newspapers – this is discussed in more detail below. In the *Jerusalem Post* the effect of the turmoil on Tunis' Jewish community, and the arrival of Jewish refugees was covered in several stories, as well as general discussion of the effect of events on the Palestinian situation.

These stories were included in the corpus for analysis, as they were both affected by and directly affected events in Tunisia.

Social media

Any discussion of social media in news coverage needs to differentiate between its use as a source and itself as a topic of coverage.(Knight 2010; Messner & Distaso 2008) In a later section of this chapter I will do exactly that, but a discussion of how extensively social media was referenced in the news coverage of Tunisia is also relevant in that it demonstrates the extent of people's awareness of the issue and its general penetration of the subject matter.

In a previous analysis of the use of social media as a reporting tool in Iran in June 2009, it was found that social media was discussed in a small minority of stories, only 23% of the stories made any mention of it, and an even smaller minority, 21% of those, 18 stories out of a total of 385, less than 5%, used social media as a source.(Knight 2010)

Analysing the coverage of Tunisia, some 18 months later, discussion of social media in the stories had gone down, to only 17% (68) of the total stories, but that the use of social media as a source is slightly higher, 24 stories (6%) relied at least partially on social media for comment or quote. However, if WikiLeaks is included as a social media activity, the percentage goes up considerably: 22% of stories mentioning either social media or WikiLeaks, and 11% used either as a source.

In the Iran study, it was also found that the use and mention of social media lagged approximately a week behind the coverage of the story. It was not until eight days after the first mention of Iran that social media was mentioned, and although the peak of coverage was on June 17th, the peak of discussion of social media was not until June 22nd. (Knight 2010)

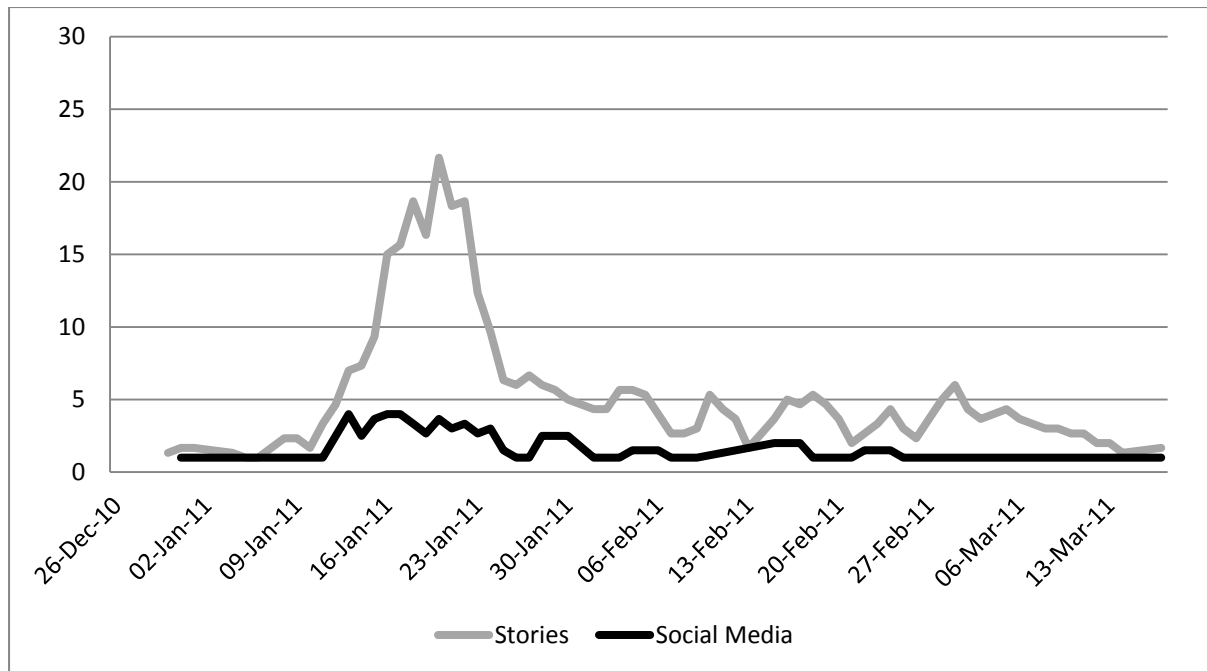


Figure 2: number of stories, and number mentioning social media, across time

In Tunisia, however, the use and mention of social media began much earlier, and followed the pattern of coverage almost identically – the first mention of social media was on December 31st, and from then on, the pattern of social media coverage tracks the overall coverage fairly closely (see figure 2). It is apparent from this that, unlike in Iran, where social media's involvement in events was a separate story from the main event, in Tunisia, social media was embedded in events as they unfolded.

Although there are specific differences in events in Iran in 2009 and in Tunisia in 2011, not least that Iran was initially a planned event (the election) which journalists and newsrooms prepared coverage for in advance, and events in Tunisia were more of a surprise, the slight change in use and mention of social media over the gap of 18 months is in itself interesting, especially in the light of the remarkable growth of all forms of social media, especially Twitter, which more than tripled its membership, during that time frame is remarkable.^{iv}

In addition Tunisia has a higher level of penetration of social media and internet communication technologies than Iran did at the time of the election (and now) and it is important to note that although Iran's social media and Internet usage is largely concentrated in Tehran, Tunisia is a much smaller country, with a much more dispersed penetration of technology (Sysomos 2009a). Facebook is more popular in Tunisia than Twitter (as worldwide) (Kirkpatrick 2011a). In January 2011, there were more than 1.8 million Facebook users in Tunisia, representing more than 15 per cent of the population. (Socialbakers.com 2011) This is the highest penetration of Facebook in Africa, and among the highest in the developing world. This is unsurprising because Tunisia has among the highest internet penetration in Africa as well as a very high penetration of mobile phones (International Telecommunications Union 2009).

Despite this higher penetration of mobile and internet communications technology than in Iran (International Telecommunications Union 2009), the absolute frequency of social media as a topic or source in the news coverage remains similar between the two studies. Given the increase in other coverage of social media at the same time, and the higher rate of use of social media in the country in question, this effectively translates to a relative decline in the discussion of social media within the specific context of these two events.

In addition, the slight increase in the mention of social media in relation to the particular story of the Tunisian revolution is dwarfed by the increase in the mention of Twitter in all news stories. An analysis of leading newspapers on Nexis shows only 82 mentions of Twitter in January 2009, which increases to 671 in June 2009 (the date of the Iranian election and uprising), to 1321 stories in January 2011. Assuming the total number of stories published remains relatively static (and what reason there is to assume otherwise would indicate a decline in the number of stories, not an increase), that is a doubling of coverage of Twitter between the time of the Iranian election and the Tunisian uprising. Viewed in this light, the increase in the use of social media by journalists covering Tunisia seems minimal.

Social media as the story

In examining social media as a story in and of itself, 20 of 85 (24 per cent) of the stories that mentioned social media in the Iran coverage were backgrounders on social media and the technology, including an extensive 'profile' of Twitter and an analysis of how the video of the death of Neda Agha Soltan was created and distributed (Johnson 2009; Tait & Weaver 2009). When social media was mentioned, it was explained and qualified, set off with explanation: 'Twitter, the social networking site which allows instant 'chatter' between users' (Connett 2009); 'Tweets - messages sent through Twitter' (Ahmed 2009)

Only five stories (of 69 in total that mentioned social media) fulfilled that role in the Tunisian coverage, one each in the *New York Times* (Shane 2011b), the *Guardian* (Beaumont 2011) and the *Jerusalem Post* (Svetlova 2011) and two in *Le Monde* (Le Monde 2011b; Mandraud 2011c; Svetlova 2011; Shane 2011b). *Le Monde* also published profiles of Slim Amamou (Mandraud 2011a), a blogger turned cabinet minister and Zouhair Yahyaoui (Beaugé 2011), another blogger who died in custody in 2005. The fact that within this coverage, none of the underpinning technology was specifically discussed, there were no detailed explanations of how social media works, what a tweet is, or how a video can be uploaded to YouTube (all of which was discussed in the Iranian coverage), is a clear indication that in the eighteen months between the two events covered, social media had become normalised to the extent that it had become unremarkable, and unnecessary of special comment or explanation.

Social media as a source

Social media as a story in and of itself has been discussed above, but its usefulness to journalists, especially foreign correspondents, remains in question. In 2009 researchers at the Society for New Communications Research conducted a survey of journalists' use of social media and found that 70% of them were 'using social media', including some 48% using Twitter and 66% using blogs. What is unclear in this research is what is meant by 'using' – are the journalists writing and publishing on social media, or are they reading them? Anecdotal evidence and commentary from editors and news managers would indicate that the main focus of social media within news organisations at this point is their use as a publicity tool – driving readers to stories on the site (Pickard & Catt 2011).

More importantly for this research, are they using social media as a journalistic tool, finding sources, contacting them, and conducting research through these mechanisms? Although commentators and academics have begun to discuss these issues (Ahmad 2010; Nardelli 2011; Hermida 2011), there is little concrete data on the subject available.

In the Iran study, only a minority (some 12%) of stories showed any evidence of having been sourced via social media, and only 3% of sources quoted were in any way connected to social media use^v, and although journalists were not always clear about the mechanism of communication, and even less so about the initial contact, it is clear that social media formed only a small part of the newsgathering conducted by journalists (despite the extensive

discussion of the importance of social media to the newsgathering process by those same news organisations) (Knight 2010).

In Tunisia, a similar, albeit slightly higher, percentage of the sources were contacted via social media, 4% of the 883 sources used, but a much lower percentage of the stories used any sources from social media (8%). This is accounted for by a handful of stories sourced almost entirely from social media, including one based on comments solicited online by *Le Monde* (Mandraud 2011b). The lower figure is interesting in the light of the fact that in only 20% of the sources was the channel of communication unclear. In the Iran study, 46% of source channels were unidentified. It is unclear why this changed – no one newspaper accounts for the large number of unclear source channels, and the one newspaper included in both studies, The Guardian, showed a similar decrease in unidentified source channels.

Other sources used

Overall the range of sources used was fairly typical of this kind of reporting (Sigal 1999), relying heavily on information from the state and formal and informal opposition groups^{vi}. Official state communications counted for 18% of the sources, followed by political organisations and people at 26%. Independent voices (person on the street, bystander comments) were 30%, which is high for political and foreign news in general, but not for situations where protests and riots are ongoing (the Iran study showed 29% of sources were independent or bystanders). Expert opinion was used in 13% of the cases and other news organisations comprised 7% of the sources – this was especially common in the early days when reporters in New York and Paris, particularly, were relying on observation of events on other channels.

Overall, the coverage of Tunisia followed traditional patterns of sourcing, government authorities and opposition members, expert opinions and people on the street. Although social media was discussed, it was not heavily used as a source, at least not in ways that are apparent to the readers of the news.

Social media as a reporting tool

These conclusions are largely upheld by the journalists interviewed for this research. Isabelle Mandraud, a senior foreign correspondent with more than a dozen years' experience at *Le Monde*, relied on traditional forms of sources while covering events, both in Paris and Tunisia (Mandraud was initially denied a visa to travel to Tunisia and did not file a story from there until after the ouster of Ben Ali). She used the contacts in the military, government and political parties that she had built up in years of covering the region, and did not use social media at all. In fact, she describes it as 'dangerous' for journalists, citing the familiar concerns about reliability and verisimilitude. (Mandraud 2011d)

David Kirkpatrick of the New York Times is less opposed to social media, although he says he does not use it extensively himself. He does, however, attribute at least two of the stories he filed from Tunisia to the use of social media (albeit by other people). In a story published on January 13 (Kirkpatrick 2011b) included reportage gathered when Kirkpatrick was informed by a taxi driver that a protest was planned for the French Embassy later that day, information which he had gathered from his mobile phone. When he arrived, he says it was clear that the authorities had been reading the same social media sources as the protestors, because the protest was rapidly broken up. (Kirkpatrick 2011a)

Another story, a much longer one which appeared on page one on January 14th (Kirkpatrick 2011c), only came about because Kirkpatrick's colleague in Cairo, Mona El-Naggar had been reading Facebook and informed Kirkpatrick that protests were planned for the wealthy community outside of Tunis. Kirkpatrick was the only journalist there – a situation every

foreign correspondent dreams of (Kirkpatrick 2011a). Kirkpatrick admits that his reliance on El-Naggar is because of her greater fluency in Arabic, rather than her greater facility with technology and social networks.

Kirkpatrick disagrees with Mandraud and says that he uses social media to find out what is going on, and that journalists do need to have some facility with the services, or know someone who does. What his experience shows is that although journalists may not quote social media directly, their information about what is going on in any given environment is likely to be increasingly informed by social media, at least to the extent that the people journalists traditionally rely on (fixers, assistants, translators, drivers and others) are informed by it. Because the taxi driver was using his mobile phone to connect to the network of information circulating in the region, the journalist was informed of the planned protest indirectly through social media.

Journalists in foreign places rely on a range of sources and contacts, from the formal ones developed through years of reporting, to the informal network of taxi drivers, cafe owners, fixers, translators and other journalists staying in the same hotels. Where each story, and each story idea comes from is hard to quantify, but as the general network of communication and discussion moves more and more online, the more likely it is that journalists will end up relying, if inadvertently, on social networks and online communities for information.

But one of the main sources of information foreign correspondents rely on is local news. When, as in Tunisia, the most accurate and relevant local news is not coming from the traditional outlets, but from social and online media (Kirkpatrick 2011a; Wells 2011), then journalists end up using those sources as much as they would the local news coverage. Lina Ben Mhenni was one of the few people who travelled to Sidi Bouzid in early January to cover the protests, and although she is not credited, it is unlikely that any of the reportage of events in the town prior to the arrival of western journalists did not rely on her blog, *A Tunisian Girl*, whether directly or indirectly for information and news. (Ben Mhenni in Wells, 2011)

This is something that activists using these networks are particularly aware of, going after western journalists and channels aggressively, using social media (Nasser Wedaddy, in Wells, 2011). This became one of the main strategies and goals of the social media movements.

All of the success cases of social media is when they managed to bring the mainstream media on board ... forcing them to pay attention to what is being said, the significance of what is being said and how different it is from the discourse that the mainstream media is echoing.' (Wael Khalil in Wells, 2011)

This, of course, locates social media firmly within the realm of activism, as opposed to the simpler (or simplistic) idea of the news as 'objectively' reporting the facts. It is possibly this that creates the schism between some journalists and social media: fear of being coerced into taking sides, rather than simply being misled.

Al Jazeera

If the western media were to give credit where credit is due regarding the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East consideration should be given to calling them the Al Jazeera revolutions. The channel, initially conceived in part as a unifying force across the Arabic speaking world (Miles 2005) was perfectly positioned to report events across the region, and was heavily credited with the spread of information. As Rached Ghannouchi, the leader of once-banned Ennahda opposition party in Tunisia put it: 'Its [the revolution's] success is 30% to 40% thanks to Facebook, and the rest to al-Jazeera.' (Steele 2011, p.25)

Although heavy reliance on Al Jazeera as a news source is not initially apparent in the coverage (only five of the 83 mentions of other news organisations are of Al Jazeera), there are examples of stories being picked up from Al Jazeera. Certainly, it was among the first international news outlets to report the protests in Sidi Bouzid, and, despite being blocked by the authorities, it remained an important news source for the people of Tunisia. In fact, among the information circulated on social networks were the ‘satellite frequencies of Al Jazeera, which were continuously being disrupted’ (Beaumont 2011). This close relationship between Al Jazeera and the social networks is also evident in the distribution of El General’s protest rap song, *Rais Le Bled (President, your country)*, which was distributed on Facebook, then picked up by Al Jazeera and spread across the region. (Morgan 2011)

In a slightly different context, Zvi Mazel of the *Jerusalem Post* also credits Al Jazeera with having the power to influence political movements and events in the region. Writing with reference to Egypt, he claims that ‘[it] played a major part in convincing the world that Mubarak had lost the battle and that the protesters had won.’ (Mazel 2011)

Al Jazeera is something of a red-headed stepchild in western journalistic terms. Although commentators in all the newspapers credited it with providing information, and being an important communication tool in the region, the discussion was hedged around with provisos that it is funded by the Qatari state and veiled accusations that it is biased or somehow tainted in its coverage. It is difficult to engage with these questions: certainly to a dispassionate observer, it appears that Al Jazeera has some of the best and most comprehensive coverage of the region, and played an important role in news and inspiration to other Arabic-speaking countries. It is also clear that if other news organisations are ignoring, or pretending to ignore, social media, Al Jazeera has a ‘commitment to using new media as a key source for news and information’ (Derrick Ashong in Sennitt 2011) it solicits comments and tips online and on social media, and has recently launched a daily hour-long show dedicated to social media and news. (Sennitt 2011)

Conclusions

Coverage of the Tunisian uprising in the western media was not directly or explicitly informed by social media, at least not in the ways in which one might traditionally expect, but it is clear that social media has transformed the story and the ways in which it was told. Although quoting social media as a source declined in relative terms between the events in Iran in June 2009 and those in Tunisia in 2011, the journalists were clearly using social media, whether first, second, or third-hand, to find out what was going on. As political movements and activists organisation rely more and more on social networks to organise, recruit and communicate with the world, journalists wishing to cover world events will need to pay more and more attention to these networks. Although at this point, traditional ways of doing journalism, the contact book, the personal interview arranged with the use of one’s name and clout, still work, it is more and more evident that as the people who make the news (the politicians, the activists, the public) move their activities and information online, the journalists will have to follow. David Kirkpatrick’s front page scoop is evidence of that (Kirkpatrick 2011c).

What the Tunisian uprising has shown is that the traditional structure and control of the news agenda is subject to flux and evolution – the days when a journalist with a strong contact book and the clout to interview presidents was the only person who could report on what was going on are going. Al Jazeera does not have the access to power that older, more ‘respected’ news organisations might command, but as long as they are paying more attention to the people on the ground, and are listening to them directly, they are in a better position to know what is going on than many others.

As social media gets more sophisticated and complex, and as journalists and their sources become more familiar with and reliant on it, we may expect to see the stories change, and possibly, to reflect the world more realistically.

ⁱ Some of this can be blamed on the former regime's hostility to the press (Reporters Sans Frontières 2010) but the fact remains that Tunisia was not a major focus of coverage, even within the francophone media, prior to the events of January 2011.

ⁱⁱ So-called because agents are paid 50 cents (50 jiao) for every pro-CCP message posted on discussion forums and blogs to direct the conversation.

ⁱⁱⁱ Le Monde was banned from distributing in, and presumably reporting from, Tunisia until January 18th (Le Monde 2011a; Kauffman 2011). Given the difficulty of physically getting to the country once the unrest had spread, and the existing hostility to the newspaper prior to that, the failure of the newspaper to place a correspondent in Tunisia should in not be taken to mean that the interest was not high. Le Monde covered the story to a far greater extent than any other newspaper in the corpus, and by extrapolation, than any other newspaper not in the country itself.

^{iv} Finding reliable information on the number of Twitter accounts is surprisingly hard, not least because the company declined to respond to questions, but the best estimates available show 100 million accounts on the site in January 2011 (Sysomos 2010), up from 11 million in May 2009. (Sysomos 2009b)

^v Mousavi's party accounted for the majority of this, since foreign reporters were restricted from contacting him directly.

^{vi} Within this story, identifying opposition and governmental groups was problematic, not only because the government evolved and changed to include new organisations as the story progressed, but also because the opposition in Tunisia is complex and fragmented into interest groups and political parties, unlike in Iran, where the opposition rapidly coalesced around Mousavi, the main rival for the Presidency. In this study, any person or organisation that identified itself as being in opposition to Ben Ali was included as an 'opposition' voice, whether they were identified as a political party, or not.

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Social Media for Journalists principles & practice







Megan Knight
and Clare Cook



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>> Chapter 1 <<

INTRODUCTION: NETWORKED JOURNALISM

Overview

The media are changing. This is obvious to anyone who has been paying attention, but over the last decade the pace of change has increased beyond even the ability of the language we use to describe it or the rules we use to govern it. Who is a blogger, really? What is citizen journalism? Who operates under what privileges? A new media ecology has emerged, one that is social and fluid, and trades on connections and collaborative relations. This shift is fundamental to everything we do as journalists and journalism trainers. This is the ecology of the new media environment. This book proposes a new way of examining the practical skills that are necessary to thrive as a journalist, and the principles governing the new media ecology for those working within it, consuming it and researching it.

Key concepts

- Citizen journalism
- Connections
- Media landscape
- Networks
- New media ecology
- Relationships
- Reporting
- Social media
- Traditional media
- User-generated content

Introduction

Introduction

An ecology is an interdependent network of living things, each fulfilling its own function within the system, but with no one thing dominating or monopolising it. You do not control it, or master it: you find your niche, your relationships, your dependencies and you thrive – as long as the system thrives.

This book is a guide on how to find – or create – your niche in the ecology of new media, and how to understand and nurture the connections that will allow you to thrive. Throughout this book, you will be encouraged to think about relationships, to think about the rest of the system – the other players and participants (not only other producers, but audiences and advertisers as well) – and to work with them, not against them, to create great journalism.

We propose a new way of talking about and operating within the news environment, a new way of examining and defining the media landscape for those working within it, consuming it and researching it. We are not hoping to pin down the definition of what the news landscape now is, but to describe its trajectory in a way that is flexible and dynamic enough to explain both the contemporary ways of reporting, and to illuminate the changes we know will come, although we don't yet know what they are.

A broken model

As the news environment has expanded and fragmented, coalesced and converged, the meanings of terms like 'newspaper' and 'television channel' have become harder and harder to pin down, and more organisations exist for which we have no simple definition. The dichotomy of 'old' and 'new' media is likewise becoming meaningless – talking to a room full of students who were not yet born when the World Wide Web was invented and referring to it as 'new' makes one realise how meaningless 'new' actually is in this context. What is 'online' in a world where those of us who have physical 'lines' to connect to the internet are increasingly in the minority, and where more people have smartphones, tablets and laptop computers than have television sets?

And this change and confusion is not just on the institutional level – individuals working within (and outside) these organisations have found themselves increasingly unable to define what they do in a single sentence, although they know what they are doing, and doing it well.

Traditionally, news organisations were constructed and determined by their output mechanism, and hence by their technology. Once the printing press was invented, the newspaper was an almost inevitable consequence; and radio and television engendered the news broadcast. Since the technology was both the prerequisite for production, and the locus of a substantial financial investment, we named these organisations for their technology, not their content. We still speak of 'the press' as though the hulking steel machinery in the basements of Fleet Street was the soul of the news media, and the broadcast towers have only recently vanished from the logos of television stations worldwide – as they are vanishing from the physical landscape.

The internet was the agent of this change. We used to measure the importance of a news outlet by the speed of their presses, or a radio station by the power of its antenna, which were themselves functions of the size of their capital investment. We can't measure these new outlets by the clock speed of their servers, or the size of their disk array, although the servers perform the same function the presses and towers did for newspapers and broadcasting. We don't do this because, relatively speaking, a server costs a pittance compared with the cost of a printing press or, and much more importantly, compared

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with the cost of the people who make the content that is distributed by mechanisms new and old. Almost anyone can set up a site, anyone can create a blog, a Twitter account, a Facebook wall, a platform from which to spread a message – the technology is no longer the stumbling block; the content and connectivity are.

Just as the technology determined the nature of the enterprise, it also had a huge influence on the content that was produced. News organisations produced news in recognisable shapes and formats for recognisable outlets consumed by recognisable consumers in predictable ways. As the technology changed, more and more sources of news became available online and competed with other sources of information and news, in myriad new shapes and sizes. You can still find the third-person-objective inverted pyramid news story and the traditional ‘package’ for broadcast on the internet, but you also find live blogs and Twitter feeds from people on the ground and in the office, satirical animations of news events on YouTube, and first-person reports, Twitpics, blogs, alternative news sites, aggregators and discussion forums, in all sorts of voices and styles all mixed in together, linked, referenced and cross-posted to a range of places and formats. In this environment, the traditional definitions of what journalism is have inevitably shifted, as have the skills and techniques required to participate in it.

Social media

These changes have created a more social way of doing journalism. More people can be heard. More voices can be included. The focus is less on what platforms to use or what products to produce, and more on whom to speak to and connect with, and how to go about doing that. Everyone steers their way through the network via connections and exchanges, making sense of the content they encounter or use. Journalists are no different.

Relationships emerge as a key unit of currency. These relationships exist at many different levels, but without these voices the web would be nothing more than a structure of portable pieces of code lacking any meaning. News organisations are re-evaluating how they interact with ‘the people formerly known as the audience’ (Rosen, 2006). They have moved towards curated or humanised approaches to distribution rather than automated feeds and abstract ‘packages’ of news. Strangers help us find content through recommendations or reviews. Friends contribute to making that journey more relevant and real (Pickard and Catt, 2011).

Out of these relationships grow communities. Journalists have to appreciate how to act within a community, and take an active part in growing and developing them. In this ecology, journalism trades on participation and connections rather than a top-down approach. It is no longer the case that the moment you signal your need you are given everything you desire. This is a culture of collaboration, not co-optation. There’s a wealth of information in the crowd, but journalists need to understand how to collaborate with users, not simply take from them. Talking, interacting, thanking and crediting all become key. There are new skills and rules to consider if you are to become a trusted and respected part of the online network.

And the crowd – not journalists – are in control. The crowd can seek out imposters and regulate itself, just as they can amplify and ring out changes. The web community expects transparency, even as identities ebb and flow in different spaces. Journalists have to tell people what they are doing and how they are doing it. This new culture of social media in which journalists operate has to be understood if you, as a participant, are to thrive.

Introduction

A word about terminology

The terms that define this new landscape are by no means set, and there is considerable confusion regarding what they mean. For this book, we take ‘social media’ to mean all forms of new media production whose primary function is interaction – not simply presentation of information. Any news product or piece of information that is presented in order to be commented on, discussed, circulated and used within a network of social interaction is, for us, ‘social’ media. This includes what are increasingly thought of as the ‘social media’ applications – Twitter and Facebook – but also stories presented for comment online, television panel shows that incorporate audience commentary, live blogs that curate and collect material from multiple sources, and myriad other ways (some not yet invented) in which the audience and the producers meet and talk.

The new media ecology

In this landscape, there’s more than one way to define media organisations and individual journalists. Traditionally, newsmaking was a process that took events and turned them into recognisable reports or news packages, using the ‘third-person-objective’ voice of authority that we have come to associate with news. This voice still exists, and plays an important role in conveying events to people. These are the shaped, formatted and edited packages that we most easily recognise as journalism. After all, we can’t all physically attend news or events; neither would we want to. We rely, inevitably, on reporters to reach out and expand our worlds, our discovery, our understanding.

But in the social media ecology, this is not the only version of events that exists. Social media have allowed for a vast expansion of voices and participants, sites and streams. We may watch edited news, but we may also listen, watch or participate in the loose, unedited, stream-of-consciousness voice of social media: the personal blogger or tweeter, or the chaotic and unedited video footage taken by a participant in a protest. The news products here are more divergent, incorporating multiple voices and channels, but creating an environment where one user may need to have access to hundreds of sources to provide an understanding of events.

This brings us to the question of gatekeeping. In the past, edited and polished news products were traditionally closed off to the public; professional journalists in the traditional sense constructed the news product based only on their sources and research, and presented a sealed and finite news product to a passive audience. But social media allows for those gates to open, and the public are given potential access to the news production process, more opportunities to participate in and guide the news agenda. In social spaces, the distinction between journalist and audience has vanished completely: the gates have crumbled away.

From our perspective, the news landscape is becoming more and more social, requiring new perspectives on the interplay between the voice and intent of journalists and media outlets. Even the most traditional news organisations have set out an agenda to become more engaged; they are including live blogs of events on their websites, incorporating amateur video into their feeds, and encouraging user comments and feedback in formal and informal ways.

Journalist by definition

The opening up of the new media ecology to include an infinite array of news producers and providers leaves us with plenty to ponder. What is journalism, anyway, and what makes one news organisation different from another?

Introduction

First, not everyone working in journalism has the same intentions. The intent of a news organisation varies tremendously from the traditional, mainstream, commercial and industrialised mass media to organisations whose production of news is entirely secondary, or even accidental, to their main goals. News producers may be registered professionals, subject to the oversight typical of their national context, which sets rules on the dissemination of news and the behaviour of news outlets, or they may be activist journalists dedicated to spreading the truth in aid of a political or social cause, or they may be accidental journalists – passersby caught up in events, whose stories and pictures become part of the narrative. All of these people, and the institutions in which they may or may not work, have different ideas on what they do, what they should do and what it means in the greater scheme of things.

As an example, consider the uprisings that racked Egypt in 2011, and dominated the news around the world, as Tahrir Square in Cairo became the focus of the frustrations and hopes of not only the Egyptian people, but people all over the world. A wide variety of reporters and journalists descended on the square to tell the story.

Purely journalistic institutions – the BBC, CNN, New York Times – would cover Tahrir Square because it fulfils a traditional idea of what news is, and claim to do so in an ‘objective’ way. They would refer to President Mubarak and protestors in the most neutral way possible. Then there are the news organisations that have overt social or political goals. A newspaper with a clearly stated belief in social justice would cover the same events, referring to Mubarak as a dictator or despot and the protestors as campaigners or activists. There are also organisations in which the journalistic goals are less important than the political or social goals. Groups and related blogs may provide reports from Cairo relating directly to the action of the people of Egypt against state repression. At the far extreme, there are organisations whose journalistic goals are incidental to other goals. WikiLeaks’s release of diplomatic cables relating to Egypt, and other documents, are not simply journalistic, but include an element of anarchy, of subversion of power on the principle of it.

In this new media landscape news outlets have to carve out a space and identity alongside all these other forms of news. They find themselves having to coexist with blogs and aggregators online, or reports from people and organisations that have goals other than becoming a formal, commercial news organisation, such as ‘zines, radical news outlets and activist groups online.

There is also a changing relationship between producers and consumers. It is a rare news organisation or journalist who does not invite contributions from the public, feedback or sharing. In its broadest form this has sparked a range of discussions relating to where the boundary lies between journalists and non-journalists, users and producers, curators and sense makers.

As a result of this cacophony of competing voices and ideas, it is little wonder that traditional journalists have felt under threat from the fact that anyone can and does produce content and distribute it. Citizen journalists (the very meaning of which is debatable) have been seen as stepping into the terrain previously guarded as the professional journalistic field, but that is not strictly accurate – their goals are different, so how do they fit into this new media ecology? And what is citizen journalism or user-generated content, anyway? Language and terminology struggle to cope with the multitude of ways in which the traditional barriers of the journalistic profession are breaking down as a result of the changes in technology brought on by social media.

Although many definitions exist, and there is no consensus on meaning, in this book we distinguish citizen journalism from user-generated content based on the final product: citizen journalism is its own discrete product, while user-generated content exists within and forms part of a mainstream news product. This can be a complex distinction, especially where commercial news organisations construct their own news sites for the contribution of user-generated content – which can exist both as a discrete product and provide material for the main site.

Introduction

Individual journalists

These questions have sparked a re-evaluation of what a journalist actually is and what makes us different from anybody else. For almost as long as there have been journalists there has been a struggle over journalistic identity. What, exactly, are we? As actors in society, newsmakers have laid claim to being culturally or socially more significant than plain citizens or even other professions. The role of finding out what is going on and reporting it to others is deemed to have a certain significance, a certain privilege.

The individual journalist has become more visible as the traditional media landscape has exploded and fragmented. In a social-media landscape, the voice of the individual becomes clearer. Journalists working within (and outside) media organisations find themselves in direct contact with audiences and with more options than ever as to where they source or output their work. They are increasingly unable to define what they do or slot their role and interactions under neat labels. They exist in an evolving network of connectivity, across sources and outputs.

Many people have framed this debate as being about the conflict between bloggers and journalists, a perceived standoff between formal and informal journalism. In the new media ecology, however, neither the products journalists produce nor the resources on which they draw are fixed. As a result, the meaning of the word ‘journalist’ has dissipated. There are lots of people operating as journalists, but they may be bloggers, freelancers, tweeters, YouTube commentators or mainstream reporters – or any combination of these. The waters have become increasingly muddled because amateur journalists can publish material and aggregate content as much as anyone bestowed with a press pass, salary or academic qualification (Knight and Cook, 2011).

The fluidity across these spaces may also spark legal and ethical considerations – if the law or the state recognises ‘journalist’ as a specific class of person, with differing privileges and obligations to those of the general public, then who can be a journalist becomes a legal, as well as a personal, question.

In both practice and principle, journalists have much to acknowledge and synthesise if they are to thrive in this new media ecology. They need different skills as they move around networked spaces. It is important for a journalist to understand the rules of engagement when sourcing content from the crowd, just as they need to know how best to verify information, avoid being hoaxed, or how to operate fairly. We need to have a clearer sense of what legal and ethical implications our decisions have. Similarly, there’s a vast scope of considerations in how best to tell and disseminate stories when the range of possible outputs is so vast. Journalists need to understand their choices in social storytelling for networked distribution. When and how should you produce speedy updates compared to immersive packages in rich media? In terms of practical journalism skills, this book advocates that social-media activities run concurrent to the core principles of traditional reporting.

As journalism re-boots itself within these new parameters, there can be a wealth of exciting opportunities to define great journalism anew. This is a time for innovation. Journalists are looking for ways to reinvent their careers, and are flexing their muscles launching dynamic sites, services and products. We recognise the valid place in the new media ecology for such media entities, which may exist in a more structured way to a freelance journalist, and the increasing likelihood for journalists to work within, alongside or indeed launch such organisations.

This book frames a clearer understanding of a journalist’s work as a matter of connections, expectations and reporting norms. Journalists must carve out a new relationship between sources

Introduction

and output, aware of the much wider culture of social media. How you navigate this space is up to you. The amount of time, energy and interest you show in the different sourcing and output practices help you understand what works for you as a journalist. This allows individual reconfiguration of defined roles based more on connections and relationships than saying you are a ‘blogger’ or a ‘local newspaper reporter’. A journalist defined by connections and networks can occupy more than one space within this fragmented media ecology.

Conclusion

As you read through this book, a number of themes and ideas will become apparent. We have, as much as possible, tried to blend discussion of practice and principles together. We have, however, broken the book up into four sections, some more practical, some more theoretical. Throughout the book you will find cross-references to more detailed discussions in other sections, as well as boxes defining terms, giving further reading and discussion, relevant quotes and definitions of terms. The links to further readings, technical information and resources are then included at the end of each chapter, and a complete glossary of all defined terms is found at the end of the book.

The first section of the book, the Networked Journalists’ Toolkit, deals with the finding, creating and distributing of news and information, which is what journalists, fundamentally, do. In this section you will find concrete advice on how social media has affected the practice of journalism – the changing relationships with sources and the changing forms of output that penetrate all aspects of life as a contemporary journalist. It looks at how stories are sourced, and then packaged and distributed in an iterative cycle, offering both practical guidance and a way to frame an understanding of how sourcing practices influence doing journalism.

The next section, The Networked Ecology, takes this process wider, and examines the new contexts and environments in which journalists work, and the newer (and older) entities and ideas which now operate within these spaces. This is the most theoretical section of the book, giving as it does the underlying concepts and ideas of this new landscape, as well as practical advice on working within it.

The New Rules of Engagement discusses the conduct in a space that is not quite public, not quite private. It delineates guidelines and best practice for working ethically and morally in the connected new media ecology. Issues of authenticity and verification in the virtual world, pivotal to the function of a journalist, are also tackled.

The New Economics of Journalism examines the all-important question of money – how to make enough to keep going, to expand, and to make your name and fortune. It acknowledges that media entrepreneurs are finding new and innovative ways to take their place in this landscape, reinventing what it means to do news.

The concluding chapter lays out a typology and mechanism for understanding the landscape of this new media environment: we provide a pair of matrices that examine and define the macro (institutional) and micro (individual) levels of this new ecosystem.

The book is intended both as a primer on how to become a journalist in this new ecosystem, as a guide to navigating the space for experienced journalists, and as an introduction to the theoretical and philosophical ideas which both underpin and rise out of this new landscape. Each chapter and section can be read separately as a guide to the specific issues raised within it, but the book as a whole should serve as a guide to the entire system – the one book the new, social, connected journalist should need.



Part 1

THE NETWORKED JOURNALISTS' TOOLKIT

>>Chapter 4<<

DATA JOURNALISM AND CROWDSOURCING

Overview

As advances in communication technology and changes in legislation worldwide make more and more information available in mass and in electronic formats, journalists increasingly need to be able to make sense of this information for their audience. From words to maps and moving graphics, to video and interactive features, journalism is increasingly about the collection and presentation of data in a collaborative and interpretative way. This social dimension of data journalism, of finding material, of sharing it and collaborating with the public, puts the new practice of data journalism well within the realm of social journalism.

Key concepts

- Data journalism
- Design
- Interactivity
- Leaks
- Narrative
- Transparency
- Visualisation
- Whistleblowers

The networked journalists' toolkit

Springboard

- *Remember the story*: journalism is about stories; data can be used to tell those stories in more interesting, interactive and comprehensive ways, but data without the story can be dry and off-putting. Always ask yourself: what is this adding to my story?
- *Interaction*: data allows your readers to interact with the story in ways that traditional narratives don't. Think about the ways your readers can use the data, manipulate their views, add to and comment on the data, and keep the channels open for them to feed back to you.
- *Transparency*: give the data back to the public. Making the raw data available to your users can add immeasurably to your story, people can interact, suggest angles or views, and correct any errors you might make. In addition to this, being transparent makes you more trustworthy.
- *Don't fear the technology*: data journalism doesn't need the most sophisticated software or the most qualified programmers. Technology is getting easier and easier to use, and the stories are getting better and better. Online communities are very helpful with technology as well – as long as you give something back, you can get all sorts of help.
- *Cultivate your community*: the more you do, the more open you are with your stories and data, the more you engage with the community of users and journalists, the more you will get back, and the greater your impact and influence within that community will be.

Introduction

Data

Data just means information, nothing more. In the common usage, however, it refers to large amounts of information, often numeric, which can be presented by use of graphs, maps and other illustrative means.

Data journalism has become something of a buzzword in journalistic circles recently and, although conceptually it is not new, changes in both technology and the law have made the acquisition and presentation of data by journalists far more common.

The world is full of data, and modern government and society revels in gathering, storing and analysing that data – from the traffic patterns and accident rates at a local intersection to the move-

ment of troops in a war zone; from broadband access to election results. The world is increasingly explained (and obscured) for us through data.

Financial data is probably the oldest form of data journalism – every newspaper of sufficient size runs graphs of stock movements and pages of fine-printed numbers, but these are intended primarily for expert use. Any person who has ever decided they needed to know more about finance and has picked up the stock-market pages of a major daily in the hopes of learning something can attest to the difficulty of making sense of columns and pages of numbers, codes and names.

Data journalism and crowdsourcing

Although the stocks pages are an important kind of journalism, most news that uses data does so in the service of telling a story, not simply presenting the numbers for analysis. This storytelling is fundamental to the process of journalism – if the audience can access the raw data for themselves (and, except in the cases of the most exclusive leaks, or data collected specifically by the news organisation, they can), then the journalistic function must be to make sense of that data and to tell stories from it, not simply present it.

It is this narrative function that is essential to the process of data journalism, and distinguishes news outlets from everyone else publishing data.

In the new age of social media, data itself become social. There is a new wealth of data that is being created by the social networks, as well as new sources of information and material from users. The practice of crowdsourcing (discussed in Chapter 7) is also important to data journalism, making the analysis and representation of large bodies of data practical for smaller news organisations.

Narrative function

The function of journalists is to tell stories and make sense of raw information. This is particularly evident in data journalism, where the difference between the raw information and the final story is apparent.

Finding data

Data is really just a modern word for information and, in that sense, all journalism is data journalism, since all journalism trades in information of one sort or another. In its common usage, however, the phrase ‘data journalism’ is usually taken to refer to numeric or digital data, or information that is given in such bulk as to be difficult to access or understand by average users. Such data is seen as the product of the modern, digital, age, because technology has made the gathering, storing and dissemination of such data far easier than previously.

Although sources of data abound, and anyone with access to the internet can find enough data to tell hundreds of stories, there are a few common sources of data with which any journalist should be familiar.

Reporting numbers

Numbers are hard for journalists; the need to keep the story going, but also to explain complex numerical concepts, often fight with each other. A few key concepts: percentages make sense only when you know the context – a percentage of ‘what’ total? Don’t report percentage changes – report the actual change. A 50 per cent increase in the cancer rate sounds different to an increase from 0.05 per cent to 0.075 per cent. Even better, use the actual numbers – last year 375 people were diagnosed with cancer, out of the population of 500,000, an increase of 125 over the year before.

More advice on using numbers in stories can be found at: the BBC College of Journalism (2012) and the Royal Statistical Society (Marshall, 2012; Royal Statistical Society, 2012).

Commissioned data

Many large news organisations may commission the gathering of data themselves for the purposes of news stories: the most common example of this is commissioned polls, often on political questions. Political

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polling has been a standby of political coverage for decades, and although it is expensive it is often considered essential for coverage. Occasionally, a news organisation will commission other kinds of data or information for a story, but given the expense and the time involved, this is rare. What is more common is to commission teams and tools to work on ways of collating existing data.

Polling

Polling usually refers to asking the electorate whom they will vote for, but in principle it simply means asking a range of people their opinions. Polling can be as formal as that conducted by professional organisations, or as informal as asking people at the bus stop what they think (a vox pop), or asking a question on a website, social network or microblog feed.

In 2004, in the run-up to the national elections, and the local-council elections the following year, the South African Broadcasting Corporation commissioned a team including the Council of Scientific and Economic Research, Tata Technology, and their own journalists and experts to create tools that would collate data from previous elections with economic and housing data, the census, and incoming election results that would then be used to create stories that linked economic and social issues with election outcomes. The subsequent stories included issues around the delivery of basic services (such as plumbing and waste disposal) to communities, and have been credited

with the ongoing campaigns in South Africa to hold councils to account for lack of delivery (Gerber et al., 2010).

If you are working with a news organisation that is commissioning polling or other data, this is an excellent opportunity to think about what stories you would like to tell, and whether you can request that the data include specific information. If you anticipate a split in voter choices along specific lines (age, geographic location, size of household), you may be able to request that the polling company include those questions when asking. Think creatively about what stories you could find beyond the simple 'Who are you going to vote?', and try to work with the pollsters to get more out of the time and effort expended in conducting the poll. Also think beyond the election – would any of this information be useful in storytelling then?

Smaller news organisations may not have the resources to commission large-scale studies, but they often have considerable data about the communities they serve, usually in their circulation, advertising and audience departments. Although information about the news organisation's reach and market is not necessarily news (except to other journalists and editors) there may well be information about increases and declines in circulation, or changes in advertising patterns that can be linked to events in the community, and then to stories. It is also possible that these departments have purchased proprietary information such as mapping and business data that could also be used by the newsroom.

Government and institutional data

This is by far the largest source of data for any news organisation. From census data, which in most democratic countries is publicly accessible, to voters' rolls, to company registrations, to crime statistics, the apparatus of government is awash in data that journalists may be able to use in stories.

Most countries will have a government office of statistics which is where much of this information will be made available. A simple search should provide links to this. Although many democratic countries make this information available to the public, others make no information accessible – however,

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organisations such as the United Nations (and its constituent organisations such as UNICEF, UNESCO and the WFP) have considerable data on many countries around the world (United Nations, 2011b). Large charity and activist groups such as Oxfam (Oxfam, 2011) and Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 2011) may also have material, although you may need to request to see the raw data, rather than their news releases based on it.

Business and financial entities may also have data available – chambers of commerce, or local groups of businesses may be able to provide information on activity and changes within the regions. Stock and share market data (for those who understand it) can provide invaluable insight into patterns and stories.

Depending on the circumstances, differing levels of government may have different information available. In the UK, for example, almost all data is available via the Office for National Statistics, even down to local-council level (Office for National Statistics, 2011). In the USA, on the other hand, each level of government will maintain its own data, and you may need to go through several levels of town, county, state and federal agencies to find what you are looking for. Get into the habit as well of checking in with these organisations regularly to see what information they have that is new.

Finding local data

Keep a set of bookmarks of which organisations (government, non-profit and business) maintain and distribute data about your community or beat. Although many organisations will provide media releases when new data is made available, not all will. Make contact with the people who collate and manage this data – they can be very helpful with finding and massaging the data you need.

Freedom of information

In recent years a number of countries have passed legislation guaranteeing the public's freedom of access to information, often referred to as the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This legislation generally allows for any member of the public to request information from the government (FOIAs usually exclude corporations, individuals and private entities) and, provided the information does not violate specific requirements (usually issues of national security and the privacy of individuals will be excluded), the information must be provided.

In November 2011, the BBC's Inside Out programme used data obtained through the Freedom of Information Act to analyse how much money councils raised from parking fees and fines: £186 million over three years. The issue of the cost of parking in London remains a highly contentious one for residents, and this story added considerably to the debate, and may well affect the outcomes of local politics (Good, 2011).

Although Freedom of Information legislation has been enacted in more than 85 countries, and in supranational bodies such as the Council of Europe, the African Union, the Organisation of American States and the United Nations, the implementation of such laws is erratic, and extracting information from the relevant government bodies can be difficult (Banisar, 2006). However, this should not deter

FOIA

Freedom of Information Acts, or FOIAs, are any legislation that guarantees the legal right of access to government or corporate information – part of the stated democratic goal of transparency. Specific countries may use different titles for the legislation, but they are often referred to as FOIA, and in the USA at least, FOIA is now a verb – journalists talk about 'FOIAing' a government institution.

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journalists from requesting information that they believe is in the public interest to know and, as FOIA legislation is increasingly used by journalists, the likelihood is that governments will become less reluctant to provide such information.

Large news organisations may have staff whose primary role is to assist in FOI requests, who can prove invaluable. However, in many places non-profit and activist groups also exist to assist people with making FOI requests, who can be extremely useful to journalists needing advice. Freedominfo.org (<http://freedominfo.org/>) and Global Integrity (www.globalintegrity.org/) both maintain archives of information about FOI resources and activists across the globe (Freedominfo, 2011; Global Integrity, 2011).

MPs' expenses

Heather Brooke is an American-British journalist who fought a four-year battle to have the details of Members of Parliament's expenses disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act. She eventually

won the case, but the story was pre-empted by the purchase of the data by the Daily Telegraph newspaper in May 2009. The data went on to become the basis of the biggest political story of the year, and has been credited at least in part with the Labour Party's loss in the election in the following year. Although Brooke was not the first person to see the data, it is unlikely any of it would ever have been released or leaked had she not fought and won a series of court cases. The ruling affected not only data collected to that point, but changed the whole principle of parliamentary privilege and access to information, leaving a legacy of transparency and access (Hayes, 2009; Brooke, 2011).

Information wants to be free

In the second half of the twentieth century computing and communications technology developed to the point that their effect on society and culture could be seen. Stewart Brand, writing in 1987 about the developments taking place at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's New Media Lab, coined the phrase 'information wants to be free', reflecting the idea that the default state of communications technology is accessible. The hacker culture that developed during the late seventies and eighties had been influenced by the social ideas of the sixties and seventies (Stoll 1989; Hafner and Markoff 1991; Barlow 1994), and the concepts of freedom and transparency were to have a profound effect on the development of the internet and new and social media (Battelle and O'Reilly 2004; The Editors, 2011).

The idea that access to information is a cornerstone of democratic society is also embedded in the development of democracy itself. From the Magna Carta to the US Constitution, the idea that government serves the people, and that therefore the people have the right to know what the government is doing runs through political systems. (Katz, 2001)

Other sources

Not all data comes from official sources, or through official channels. Leaky institutions have always been one of the best friends a journalist could have, and leaked information has been used by news organisations throughout their history. Increasingly, what is leaked is data – reports, statistics, numbers, often in large files.

The ethical and legal ramifications of accepting leaked data are complex, and leaks should not be taken lightly. The person providing the data (sometimes called a whistleblower) may have broken the law or a contract in acquiring and distributing it, and the news organisation may be considered an

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accessory to criminal or civil charges. In addition, it is important to consider that data whose origin you are not entirely certain of may in fact not be valid – spreading disinformation to news organisations. Be very cautious and take legal advice whenever you are approached with confidential or damaging information.

Data dumps

Data dumps are similar to leaks in that they contain information that would otherwise not be made available but, instead of being leaked to a specific journalist or news organisation in a one-to-one basis, the information is dumped in public view on the internet, making it available to anyone to use (Wikileaks, 2011). WikiLeaks is probably the best known of these organisations, but more and more alternatives are springing up – some created by news organisations, such as the Wall Street Journal's Safehouse, or Al Jazeera's Transparency Unit; others are independent organisations or individuals. They all work essentially the same way – they provide servers and a list of data, as well as a method of sending the data, that makes it impossible (in theory, at least) for the authorities to know its origin (Marks, 2011).

Bear in mind that information dumped in this way can be even harder to verify than material leaked in traditional ways: when the leaker is unknown it is almost impossible to know whether the data is valid or not. Some clearing houses for leaked data will attempt to vouch for the origins of the material, but this is also hard to judge.

Because the data is public, this may mitigate some of the legal consequences of having or accessing the data, but this is by no means certain. Different countries may have different laws regarding the use of such information, and you should be absolutely certain of your legal and ethical standing before producing any content based on such data.

WikiLeaks is undeniably the biggest repository of dumped data at this point, but other organisations have arisen since the Iraq War logs were released in 2010. These logs documented every death in Iraq

Whistleblowers

Whistleblowers are people who reveal (usually) criminal activity on the part of organisations to the government or the press. In many countries, whistleblowers are protected by the law, so even if they have broken copyright or contract law to make the information available they cannot be held liable if the information is in the public interest. However, this is not a judgement a journalist can make. If you are approached by a whistleblower, seek legal advice before proceeding.

Disinformation

Disinformation is the deliberate spreading of false information via the media. Journalists increasingly need to be on their guard for disinformation, especially any information or data that is provided anonymously. This is discussed in Chapter 9.

WikiLeaks and its imitators

At the time of writing this, WikiLeaks is in a somewhat precarious situation, legally and financially. Regardless of what happens to Julian Assange and that organisation, the method of leaking data online will remain, and several competitors have arisen, ranging from anarchist activists to mainstream news organisations.

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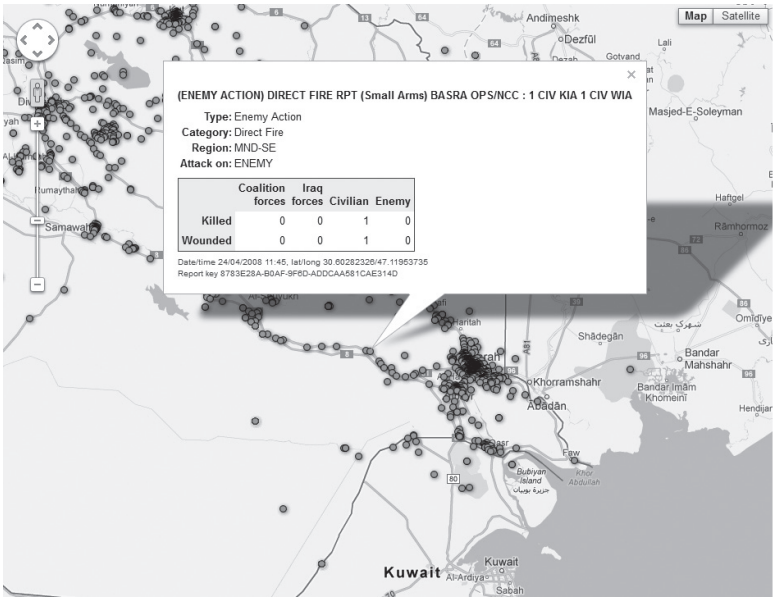


FIGURE 4.1 shows the detail of one of the 400,000 items of information provided by the leak of the Iraq War logs as visualised by the *Guardian's* data blog team (Rogers, 2011b).
Source: www.guardian.co.uk/world/datablog/interactive/2010/oct/23/wikileaks-iraq-deaths-map.

at the hands of the military in the period 2004 to 2009. The data is painstaking and detailed, logged in military jargon and contained in close to 400,000 records. The data was daunting, and inaccessible in many ways to individual users. The *Guardian's* team of data journalists set to work, creating maps of every death, and cluster maps of keywords and information (Rogers, 2011a, 2011b; Stray, 2011).

Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing data is another way news organisations can acquire information. Crowdsourcing uses the public to gather and share data and information about a community, from littering to transport problems. Getting the local community to report what is happening in their neighbourhoods can provide insight and stories, and with the application of some simple technology can provide a powerful source of data, as well as working to increase your readership’s engagement with the news.

Setting up crowdsourced data feeds can be as simple as asking people to email or tweet the news room, or as complex as creating a custom application to run on people’s computers and smartphones. As with any other kind of custom, or commissioned, data, the important thing is to think through what it is you want or need from the information before you start.

In August 2011 riots broke out in a number of London suburbs, following the shooting of Mark Duggan by the London Metropolitan Police. Over five days, rioting spread to a number of other cities in England and became one of the largest stories of the year. It is difficult to cover events like this: aside from the risk to journalists of being attacked, it can be very hard to know where the action is,

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or what is happening everywhere. The Guardian's data-journalism team turned to crowdsourcing, requesting their readers to tell them what was going on in their neighbourhoods. The subsequent map of verified events, linked to pictures and video, became one of the best resources on the riots, and was used in setting up the more academic 'Reading the Riots' study which investigated the causes of the riots (Crowdsourcing, 2011; The Guardian et. al., 2011, Rogers, 2011a).

Using data

Unfortunately, real life is not like the movies, where the hero's geeky sidekick makes three mouse clicks and suddenly all the data they have just stolen from their arch enemy's mega-computer is presented in glorious three-dimensional moving colour, and the key piece of information is just sitting there, waiting to be used. In the real world data is often messy, it comes in strange file formats (governments that have not fully embraced the spirit of Freedom of Information are notorious for this, often providing journalists with un-editable PDF files of information, rather than the original spreadsheet or database files), with spelling mistakes and strange characters. The first thing to do with any data is to clean it up – known as 'massaging' it, in order to make it usable, and importing it into a usable format.

Formats vary but, in general, data used in data journalism will at some point be stored in some kind of delimited database or spreadsheet file, such as that used in Excel or Calc applications. Data in these kinds of files are organised into columns and rows – each column containing a separate kind of information, and each row containing one set of information. A dataset of crimes, for example might have columns for *date*, *time*, *type of crime*, *location* (often expressed in geographic terms such as latitude and longitude or postal or zip codes) and *outcome*. Each row would contain one event – so one row of this dataset would list: *May 21, 2010; 11:15h; Attempted Robbery; 123 Main Street A1B 2C3, suspect arrested*. The next row might read: *May 21; 11:20h; Jaywalking; Corner Main and High Streets A1B 2C3, suspect cautioned*, and so on.

By organising information in this way, it is easy to present it to make sense of things – you can arrange events by time, so you can see if there are particular times of the day, week or year, when certain crimes are more or less common. You can use the location to make a crime map (if the information is available in the correct format); you could then colour-code the marks on the map by the kinds of crime, or by the outcome, or whatever helps to make sense of the information. Once the information is standardised (making sure all the dates are in the same format, making sure all the post-codes are correct, etc.), you can then use the information to find and make stories, as well as generate graphs, maps, charts and other visualisations.

A relational database adds another dimension to this structure, by allowing the creation of additional tables linked to the original one, so a separate table containing voters' roll information could be linked to the original table of crime reports. Since voters' roll data would include the ages of residents, journalists could then look for links between age and certain types of crime (are the elderly more likely to be victims of crime in your community?), or how often crimes are committed in houses with children resident.

A relational database allows for more complex searches to be performed, and allows for the data to be placed on the web and an interactive interface constructed from it. Relational databases, such as Microsoft's Access software, use a Structured Query Language to allow for complex queries to be made from the data, and generally allow for larger datasets (many spreadsheet applications have a limit of 64000 rows of data, and battle to process even that much information).

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Relational databases are not as scary as they sound, and there are plenty of online tutorials and help available. Once you find yourself wanting to use a database, though, a short course can be very useful in understanding the principles. Journalism training institutions may be able to provide this, but even a course aimed at business management staff would be a good springboard.

Presenting data

Getting your data sorted into the correct format is only the start, rather like transcribing your interviews and pulling all your notes together – an essential part of the process, but not the final result.

Once you have your data, and have started to look at it, move it around and re-arrange it, you will start to see stories in it, and to think about how to use the information. At its simplest, data can be simply a precursor to a story told in a more traditional format – crime statistics may lead you to a part of town where crime is particularly bad, and from there you may find a story. National health statistics may show regional patterns of particular diseases which could lead you into stories about research, or human interest.

What is more likely, though, is that at some point you will want to show your data in a visual way – something known as data visualisation. There are many ways of doing this, but some of the most useful to journalists are listed below.

Timelines

News is about telling a story, and stories are about things happening in sequence. A timeline can be a particularly useful way of showing events, especially when you have a long-running story, and you want to remind your audience of things that happened before without explaining all of it.

Timelines can be as simple as a list of events, with a date and explanation attached to each one, or as complex as a standalone application on the web which allows users to zoom in, link to stories (or other media) about each event and customise the view. You could even build a timeline which would allow users to post their own media or information.

The key issue with a timeline, as with any visualisation, is to ensure that it is the appropriate method of telling that story. Timelines work best with a large number of discrete, time-based pieces of information. A story that contains four or five points, each one explained by a paragraph or more, is possibly not the best usage of a timeline. All stories have a chronological element, but timelines work best for stories when the chronology is confused, or is a key element necessary to understanding how events unfolded, and the meaning of those events.

Timelines can be a useful way for a news organisation to use its archive: consider a timeline of stories about a key person to accompany a profile or an obituary. Timelines can also be an excellent way to show a picture collection or archive.

Example

The Guardian's timeline of the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 is an excellent example of how to use the medium to show a range of linked events. The timeline has 17 strands, one for each country

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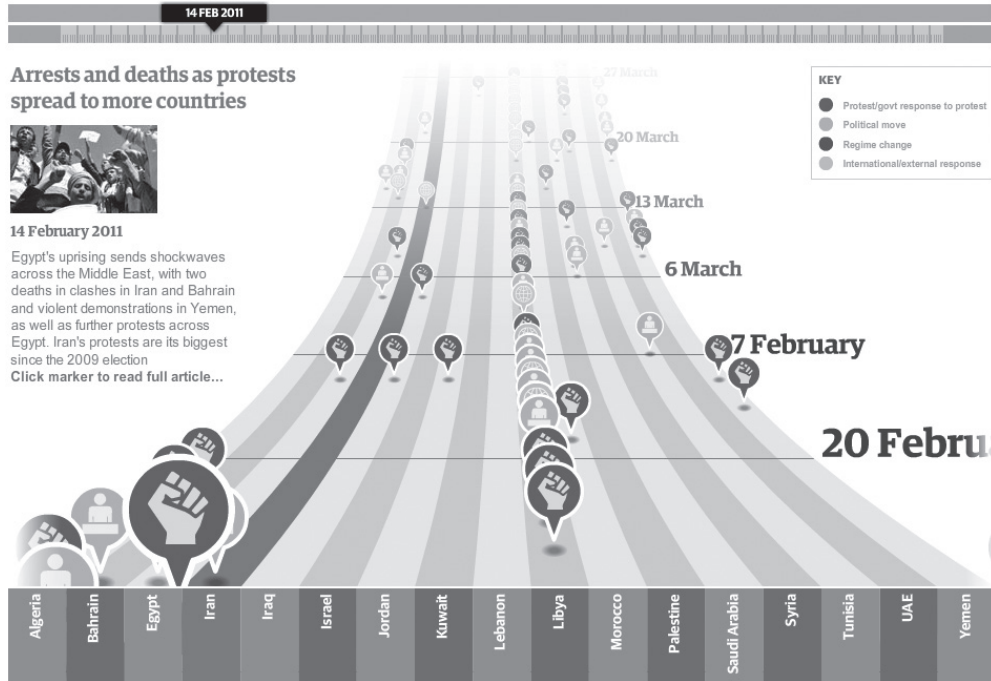


FIGURE 4.2 shows the *Guardian's* Arab Spring Timeline: www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline.

involved in, or affected by, the uprisings. Events are coded with icons indicating protest, political responses, regime change and external responses to events. Scrolling through the timeline one can see how events in Tunisia triggered uprisings and protests elsewhere. Mousing over an icon highlights one strand, and shows a brief explanation of the event concerned. Clicking on it brings up the full story. The whole graphic becomes a way into the entirety of events, and is both comprehensive and accessible (Blight and Pulham, 2011).

Graphs and charts: showing change and comparison

Graphs and charts are the most common form of data visualisation used – everyone is familiar with the visual trope of the line of a graph going up past the edge of the page, or falling off the bottom. Graphs usually show change over time – the horizontal line showing time, the vertical showing an amount of something. Graphs are a kind of visual shorthand – for most of your audience, they can convey the meaning of a set of data far faster than words would but, as with other kinds of shorthand, it's not ideal for presenting complex data that the audience would expect to interrogate or examine closely.

Charts show relationships between elements and numbers, making the relationship between them immediately apparent. A bar chart shows various numbers in side-by-side comparison, a pie chart divides

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a total number into its sub-elements. Charts can also be a kind of shorthand, and useful, but it is very easy to overload them with figures, making them harder to understand than a written explanation would be. A pie chart with six sections makes sense, while one with 26 is likely to be ignored – either try to group the sections, or consider presenting the data in another way.

Example

The US debt crisis of 2011 is a story that is both important and extremely complex to understand. The New York Times used charts to show key elements of the information, the amount of debt, how it was accumulated, the rise in the ceiling over time, and the potential impact of not raising the debt ceiling. Instead of trying to create one graphic or visual analogy that explained everything, they created a series, each chart or graph explaining one key point, but the series adding up to complex information. This is an excellent example of the importance of simplifying and clarifying information, and not creating something that may look dramatic at first sight, but is too overwhelming for the audience to comprehend (New York Times, 2011a).

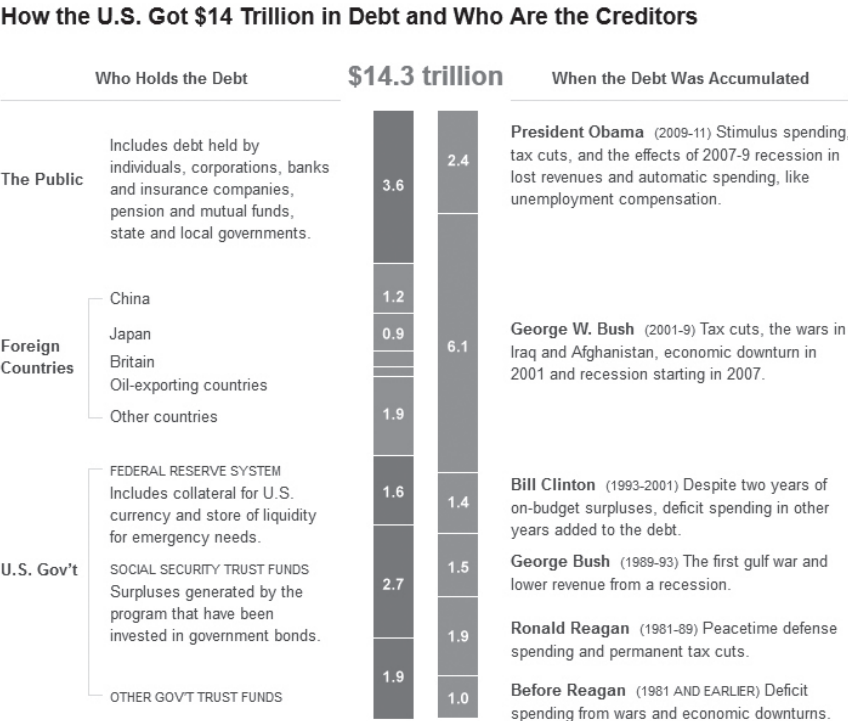


FIGURE 4.3 shows the *New York Times*’ analysis of the US debt crisis: www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/07/28/us/charting-the-american-debt-crisis.html.
Sources: Department of the Treasury, Financial Management Service, Bureau of the Public Debt; Federal Reserve Bank of New York; Office of Management and Budget.

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Maps

Maps are probably the most useful visualisation tool for journalists. From a map that shows the location of traffic accidents in a town, to one showing troop movements in a war, or one coloured to show the voting patterns in a country, maps work extremely well to show the geographic dimension of information and provide a personal connection to the story.

As with other forms of data visualisation, it is important to focus on the information that is important to the story – a map of the USA or UK showing county-level political-party allegiance is useful and interesting because there is a regional aspect to voting patterns in those countries, and the information will be apparent in the visualisation, and readers will recognise that. It is also important to consider your readers’ familiarity with the area being presented – a map of China showing recent pollution incidents may show the regional nature of these, but for an American or British audience, the subtlety might be lost due to a lack of knowledge about China’s geography.

Maps can be combined with other visualisations as well – a map showing the GDP of countries as three-dimensional bar charts is an excellent way of showing relative economic and geographic data, since it incorporates physical location and size into the representation while adding visual interest.

Example

During the riots in the UK in August 2011, the Guardian’s data team produced a map of reported incidents, based on reports received over the days of the rioting. Using a Google Map, every story



FIGURE 4.4 shows a map of Greater Manchester, with riot incidents and rioters’ addresses mapped to a map of poverty in the area.

Source: www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/interactive/2011/aug/16/riots-poverty-map.

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was given a geographic tag and, over time, the map built up into a visualisation of events. Readers could click on any incident and be taken to the story reporting that incident. The map provided readers with both an overall understanding of the spread of event and access to information about their own neighbourhoods (Rogers et al., 2011).

When the riots were over, the Guardian team went a step further, and started relating the data they already had with other information. Poverty was raised as an issue early on in the discussion of the riots, so the Guardian team took existing map data showing poverty levels, and layered the incident map with data showing the addresses of suspects arrested over it. Although the actual incidents happened in a range of places, the map clearly shows that the majority of suspects came from the poorest parts of the cities. This visualisation adds a dimension to the story and the reporting that is immensely useful in understanding events – the primary role of any journalist (Rogers, 2011c).

Interactive

The simplest form of interactivity is to allow your audience to download your raw data and invite them to post their own interpretations and visualisations on your site. Provided you have the legal right to offer the data, this can be an excellent strategy – you get story ideas and feedback, your audience feels involved in the story and in your site. On the other hand, it requires a substantial amount of engagement and interest on the part of your audience, so it may only work for some organisations.

Other forms of interactivity allow users to play with the data, to try their hand at solving the problems of the day. This is sometimes known as gamification and, although it is time consuming and complex

to create, it can have very engaging and interesting results. American Public Media's Budget Heroes game, in which you attempt to balance the USA's national budget, is an example of this – it is both informative about the issues of government spending and a fun challenge. Users can also compare their results to others, comment and tweak their budget plans, all using data provided by the Congress of the United States government. The game is playable at: www.marketplace.org/topics/economy/budget-hero.

In 2010, Sky News produced 'Who should I vote for?', an interactive quiz which advised users

on which political party best represented their views (Sky News, 2010). MTV won a Knight News Foundation grant to build a fantasy-football-style game in which users will be able to pick their 'dream team' to win the 2012 US election (Knight Foundation, 2012).

Maps lend themselves well to interactivity – the online audience is increasingly familiar with tools like Google Earth and Google Maps, so the mechanism of interaction is familiar to them. At their simplest level, maps can be resizable, allowing readers to choose the specific area they wish to view. Timelines can also be made this way, which is especially useful when they are large and complex. Adding a search function, or specific zoom function to allow audiences to easily access the area they are interested in, can add to the usability of the map, and allowing people to save their views and post them to social media can also be an excellent way to get people interacting and attracting other users to your site.

Gamification

This term refers to bringing elements of interactivity and game-design mechanics into other disciplines to make them more engaging. It can incorporate everything from a simple quiz on current events, to elaborate scenarios in which the user role-plays a general, a president or other leader to try to solve a social, political or economic problem.

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If you have the resources, you can also make maps that allow people to add or remove data to the view. Large volumes of data, such as budgets or census information, can be especially effective when presented this way, and a good online application can have people coming back to your site for years. Although the effort to build these tools can be daunting, they can also pay off in future stories, and reuse of information and skills.

Example

A fun example of a large amount of data presented on an interactive graph is the ‘Baby Name Voyager’. Taking all the public records of births in the USA, from the 1880s to the present day, the site shows the top ranked 1000 names for boys and girls in every year since, by rank. One can separate names by boys and girls, or search for a specific name to see how its popularity has changed in 130 years. The graph is very simple to use and understand, and has become immensely popular (Wattenberg, 2011).

The New York Times’s 2010 Census explorer map provides an interactive insight into the population distribution of the USA. Using a simple representation of one dot equalling 200 people, viewers can see both density of population across the chosen area and its racial distribution. Adding colour to the dots to show racial or ethnic groups, income level, education or the cost of housing adds another dimension to the map. Viewers can also zoom down to the area of one city block, or out to view the whole country, and can save, tweet and post their own maps (New York Times, 2011b).

Conclusion

This chapter is by no means a comprehensive guide to data journalism: the possibilities and technicalities are too vast and disparate for any one chapter to do that. What we have tried to do is give an introduction to some of the possibilities of incorporating data, visualisations, crowdsourcing and interactivity in to your storytelling.

The list of resources and tools at the end of this chapter will give you some guidance on where to learn more, where to hone your skills as a data journalist, and where to find people with whom to collaborate and co-operate.

CASE STUDY

Channel 4’s *Selling Off Britain*

On 7 March 2011, Channel 4 in the UK ran an episode of their current-affairs show *Dispatches* entitled *Selling Off Britain* that asked the question: ‘Could the sale of government properties cover the national debt?’ How seriously to take the proposal is a matter of opinion (although plans were already under way to sell off some of the national forest lands – an idea since partially scrapped), but the story was a great way to highlight a number of key issues – the debt itself, development of council-owned land, and the sheer scale of government assets.

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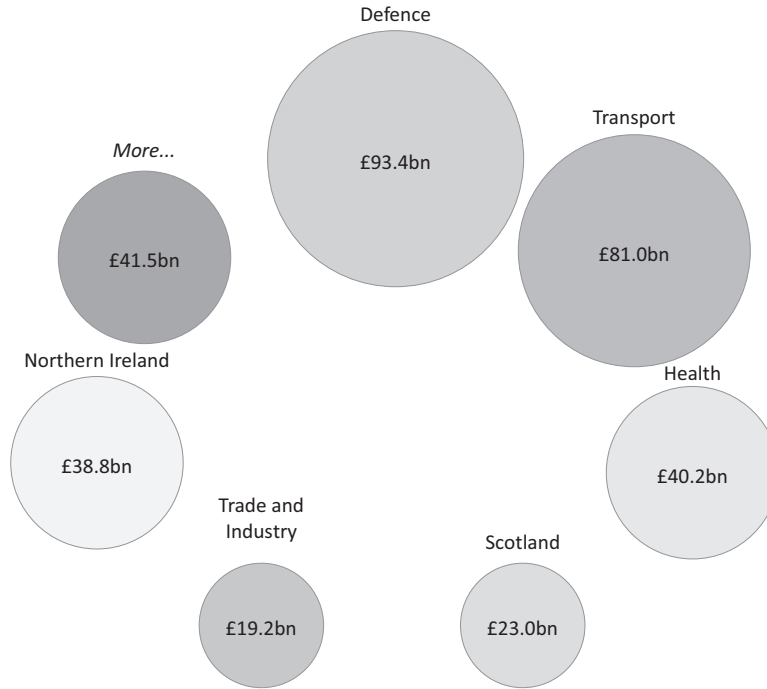


FIGURE 4.5 Picture courtesy Channel 4 and Scraperwiki: <http://blog.scraperwiki.com/2011/03/08/600-lines-of-code-748-revisions-a-load-of-bubbles/>.

The story itself was based on the National Asset Register, a public tranche of data listing everything that the government owns: fairly standard governmental information, and in fairly standard government style, it is recorded in uneditable PDF files. Channel 4 worked with Scraperwiki to first convert the data, then present it in interesting visual ways.

Scraperwiki's team used both technology and old-fashioned human power to convert the data in the PDF files into a spreadsheet of information, identifying each asset, its value, which government department or structure actually owned it and other information. This spreadsheet was then used to build a visualisation showing 'asset bubbles' – renderings showing the amount of money tied up in the asset by changing the size.

This was turned into an interactive tool – users could see the big picture, or drill down to see what specific assets each department or layer of government owned. In addition, land-based assets had been identified in the original PDFs with postcodes, and this allowed Scraperwiki to create an interactive map showing what assets were owned, and allowing users to zoom in to their local area.

Both data presentations were used in a live debate on the issue on Channel 4 – appearing during the broadcast and in a story on the Channel 4 website. Specific pieces of information were also used as the basis of journalistic stories.

By using data-journalism techniques, the team behind this story used freely available government data to not simply tell the story embedded in the data itself, but another story, that of the national debt, and of council developments. The project provided the basis of a considerable amount of content, and

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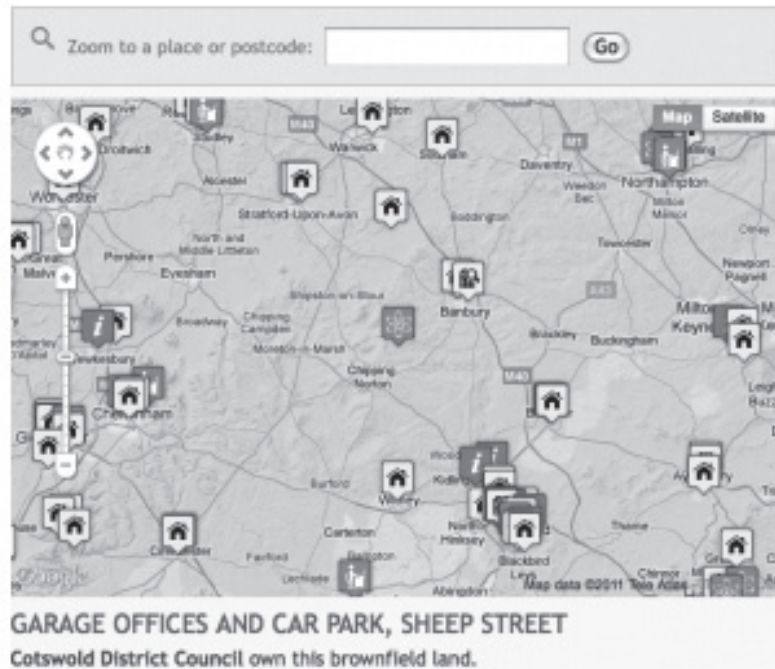


FIGURE 4.6 Picture courtesy Channel 4 and Scrapperwiki: <http://blog.scraperwiki.com/2011/03/08/600-lines-of-code-748-revisions-a-load-of-bubbles/>.

was designed to not only inform, but engage the audience and the public. The map was particularly important to this, and engendered considerable comment and feedback for the team. This was not just a technological exercise, but a fundamentally journalistic one as well (Channel 4 Dispatches, 2011; Guru-Murthy, 2011; Hughes, 2011b).

Key reflections

- Keep your eye on the story. Data is fun, but your users want to know what's going on.
- Give and take: let your readers see the data, see where it came from, and listen to their ideas and interpretations.
- Jump right in: technology is not as scary as it looks; try some tools, play around with them, and use the tools and help available online.
- What kinds of government data are most useful in storytelling?
- Is data journalism an essential part of journalism? What kinds of stories can best be told with it or without it?
- How important is it to have access to data?

The networked journalists' toolkit



Tips and Tools

Google Fusion Tables: (www.google.com/fusiontables/Home) allows the upload of data using standard formats and the visual display of that data via Google's servers. Advanced users can also create their own interactivity features using Google's Application Programming Interface (API). Users can share data or not, as they choose (Google, 2011a).

Google Maps: (<http://maps.google.com/>) provides interactive maps of the entire planet (and the moon) along with layers of data. Users can add their own information and data to the base map and publish it online; data can also be solicited from the public, or via photo and location tools like Twitter (Google, 2011b).

Scraperwiki: (<https://scraperwiki.com>) is an organisation that provides a platform, tools, training and assistance in both finding and presenting data. The platform allows people to create their own visualisations, find people to collaborate with, and use and reuse information provided by other members of the community (all data accessed and published via their platform is public). They conduct training workshops and tutorials, as well as being available for data visualisation commissions (if you need to keep your data and visualisations within copyright) (ScraperWiki, 2011).

Tableau: (www.tableausoftware.com/public) is free data visualisation software that anyone can download and use to publish their data to the web. There are tutorials and forums to help you get started, and they may be available to conduct training. As with Scraperwiki, all data published using their free tool is automatically public: there is a premium service if you need to keep your data private (Tableau, 2011).

A number of online timeline tools exist, such as Dipity (www.dipity.com/) and SIMILE (www.simile-widgets.org/timeline/). ProPublica has its own tool as well, available at: www.propublica.org/tools/.

Mapping: when the story is about where something happened then a map will be the right way to tell it. Mapbuilder.net works with both Google Maps and Yahoo! Maps, or try ZeeMaps, UMapper.com or MapAlist.com.

Event calendars and timelines: these are a great way to compile what's on or present information that is based around the 'when'. Using an external service such as Google Calendars or Local Calendar allows your site to become more collaborative. There are a range of timeline tools which spit out an embeddable graphic: try Tiki-Toki, Dipity, Timeline.js or Timetoast.

Visualisations: Simple editing tools can add interactivity or an impressive dimension to facts and stats. Thinglink or Taggstar allow for information to be laid over images. Try Visual.ly or Infogr.am to bring charts to life.

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Readings and Resources

The Guardian's data journalism site is both a showcase for the work of their team and an excellent resource of ideas, data and collaboration for other journalists. It's viewable at: www.guardian.co.uk/data. Simon Rogers's book about data journalism at the *Guardian*, *Facts are Sacred: The Power of Data* (2011b), is also extremely useful.

The Nieman Lab at Harvard University maintains an excellent site of information and stories about the future of journalism. The archive of their stories on data journalism is available at: www.niemanlab.org/tag/data-journalism/ (Nieman Lab, 2011).

Journalism in the Age of Data is a project of the Nieman Foundation: the full report can be read at: <http://datajournalism.stanford.edu/> (McGhee, 2010).

Data Miner UK is the blog of Nicola Hughes of ScraperWiki. It's got links to tutorials, projects, ideas and resources. It's at: <https://datamineruk.wordpress.com/> (Hughes, 2011a).

The Poynter Institute in Florida also maintains an archive of data journalism stories and resources at www.poynter.org/tag/hackshackers/ (Poynter Institute, 2011).

ProPublica is a non-profit investigative news agency that produces stories for syndication as well as training and supporting investigative journalists around the world. They have an excellent set of resources available at: www.propublica.org/tools/ (ProPublica, 2011).

Hacks and Hackers is a group of journalists, geeks and activists who run projects and training and get people involved in and excited about data journalism. The main site is here: <http://hackshackers.com/> but there are groups all over the world. They also have an excellent glossary of terms at <http://hackshackers.com/resources/hackshackers-survival-glossary/> (Hacks and Hackers, 2011).

Advice on using numbers in journalism can be found at the BBC College of Journalism (www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofjournalism/how-to/how-to-report/reporting-averages-percentages-and-data) and the Royal Statistical Society's Getstats campaign (www.getstats.org.uk/).

Data-gathering resources

Government agencies are usually the best place to start looking for data – government websites should have links to what data is available. The United Nations and its member organisations are also extremely useful – there is a comprehensive list at: <http://data.un.org/Default.aspx> (United Nations, 2011).

For assistance with freedom of information requests, both Global Integrity (www.globalintegrity.org/) and Freedom Info (www.freedominfo.org/) maintain lists of groups and individuals that may be able to provide advice.

For other ways of gathering data, Robert Niles's *Journalist's Guide to Crowdsourcing* can get you started. It's at www.ojr.org/ojr/stories/070731niles/ (Niles, 2007).

Dr Kathleen Woodruff Wickham authors *Math Tools for Journalists* (Marion Street Press, 2003).

>>Chapter 5<<

DISTRIBUTING THE STORY

Overview

Social media have fundamentally shifted the way news producers and users share content. There are myriad ways content can now be distributed to multiple platforms, from feeds to hashtag streams, social networks and links. Distribution strategies form a crucial part of affirming news as a process rather than a finished product, allowing content to 'live' on self-publishing and collaborative platforms way beyond the reach of traditional outputs. This chapter will look at the ways in which new technologies allow users to aggregate, organise and share content, and how this is both a challenge and an opportunity for journalists.

Key concepts

- Aggregation
- Amplification
- Analytics
- Curation
- Filtering
- Referral traffic
- Search
- Search engine optimisation (SEO)
- Sharing
- Social media optimisation (SMO)

>>Chapter 6<<

CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Overview

This chapter introduces the concept of ‘citizen journalism’ and examines some of the key ideas that inform this new movement: the public sphere; the network society; and public or civic journalism. In comparison with other chapters this contains more of the why we do things, and less of the what we are doing. Although this chapter may appear more abstract than others, an understanding of the ideas and motives of the players in the field of social media, as well a grounding in the philosophy of the internet and of journalism, is important in order to be able to understand and prepare for the changes that have already happened, and the ones that are still coming.

Key concepts

- citizen journalism
- fourth estate
- industrial journalism
- network society
- non-profit journalism
- online activism
- public sphere
- social capital

The networked ecology

Springboard

- *Activist, citizen and public journalism*: this collection of terms refers generally to journalism that has an agenda other than the production of news as a commodity to be sold. Conceived in part as a response to the perceived hyper-commercialism of the news industry in the last part of the twentieth century, these new forms of journalism also hark back to the early days of the news media, to the pamphleteers and campaigners of the eighteenth century.
- *Public sphere*: the public sphere is envisioned as the space, whether real or virtual, in which the citizens of a society discuss and negotiate the ways in which that society will be constructed. The internet, the World Wide Web and social media are often presented as the new form of the public sphere.
- *Social capital*: this is the idea that one's value within a community or network can be measured in the impact one's ideas or reputation has, rather than simply in monetary terms.
- *Fourth estate*: in Anglo-Saxon countries, the fourth estate is the media, the watchdog that guards and represents the interests of the public against the activities of the other three estates: the church, the aristocracy and the commons. Nowadays, the phrase is used to refer to the news media in its function as watchdog and protector of the public interest.
- *Online activism*: the internet has become a locus for organising of political and social activism. Online activism may refer specifically to activities conducted online, such as virtual protests, or to activities conducted in all spheres, but planned and organised online.

Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new phrase 'citizen journalism' began to be circulated. Two documents started this discussion: Dan Gillmor's book *We The Media* (2004a), and Bowman and Willis's *We Media* report for the American Press Institute (2003). Both works owe something to a seminal article by Jay Rosen, 'Beyond Objectivity' (1993), in which he exhorted the American news media to reinvent itself in a voice and manner that was more engaged with the audience, more subjective, and would create a closer relationship. Although Rosen's article was written before the World Wide Web became the phenomenon it now is, the web was quickly lept on as the catalyst and location of these possible new forms of journalism: collectively (and loosely) named citizen journalism.

It is important to understand that the citizen journalism movement as it started in the USA was a response to a specific set of circumstances: the rise of corporate news media in the last decade of the twentieth century, and the overall lack of trust in journalists that was prevalent in the USA at the time (some would say as a consequence of the corporatisation). Rosen's call for more subjective, engaged journalism is a response to the American journalistic ideal of objectivity, something that European thinkers had already rejected as impossible and possibly meaningless. However, the corporatisation and commercialisation of the industrial news media remains an issue in many countries, as does the control of the media by political interests in many others.

However, despite the specificity of the circumstances, the phrase citizen journalism caught on and was presented as both a threat to, and possible saviour of, mainstream, commercial, professional journalism. This also tied in with the considerable activist and alternative news organisations which

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had existed alongside mainstream news for hundreds of years, but which were starting to undergo something of a revival, thanks to the internet.

Traditional news media organisations need to be large industrialised organisations. The cost of printing presses, of broadcast towers (and broadcast licences) means that an organisation needs to have a minimum size and revenue in order to be viable. The nature of advertising revenue also tends to favour larger organisations – the more audience you can reach and the more efficient that reach, the more the advertisers will be interested in your product. Corporatisation – the process of bringing small companies together into a single networked organisation – also helps to increase the profits of news organisations, by allowing them to save costs on duplicated services and functions.

Technology has broken the stranglehold that news organisations used to have by virtue their ownership of the means of production and distribution, and made it more possible for smaller news organisations to compete: freedom of the press belonged to those who had one. Now everyone has one, or access to one. In this new landscape, news organisations are competing and collaborating not only with each other, but with organisations and individuals who provide news content and information, but do not adhere to the techniques, intents and principle of the mainstream.

New forms of activist and engaged journalism are not necessarily functions of new technologies, and some of them clearly predate the changes brought by the World Wide Web, but they are greatly enhanced by the lower barriers to entry and ease of distribution that technological changes have provided. These forms of journalism are then themselves informed by ideas about the network and how it functions, while the network is also informed by ideas about communication and politics. It is these interlinking ideas that inform this chapter, and its discussion of the highly confused terms of citizen, public, activist and new journalism.

Citizen journalism

The key ideas that underpin grassroots media and citizen journalism are outlined in Dan Gillmor's 2006 book *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* and in the *We Media* report, published by the American Press Institute (Bowman and Willis, 2003). Both documents are informed by the call to arms for a journalism that moves 'Beyond Objectivity' published by Jay Rosen in 1993.

The phrase 'citizen journalism' is both widely circulated and inconsistently defined. Jay Rosen refers to 'the people formerly known as the audience' as 'citizen journalists', but that definition is too loose for some commentators, including as it does all forms of public engagement and response to the news (Rosen, 2006). Mark Deuze characterises citizen journalists as 'news-producing consumers', but also in opposition to professional journalists – as 'competitor-colleagues' (Deuze 2007: 122). Neither of these definitions go as far as to explain what citizen journalists do, and whether that is different from other forms of journalism.

Citizen journalism

Citizen journalism as a term has been used to signify many different things and ideas over the last two decades. In its original form it was taken to refer to groups of citizens using the internet to report on events in their own communities, something the increasingly corporatised and commercialised press was failing to do. It has also been used to refer to people providing media content to other, more formal, outlets, such as the provision of video footage of events although this is more commonly distinguished as user-generated content.

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Stuart Allan and Einar Thorsen do not attempt to define citizen journalism in their book of the same name, but they do discuss the forms of citizen journalism: blogs, citizen newsgathering and, implicitly, something other than ‘corporate’ news ventures (Allan and Thorsen, 2009).

What is clear from the literature is that the term embraces everything from people commenting on stories or responding to polls (Lewis et al., 2010), to news material provided by the public to mainstream news organisations (Allan and Thorsen, 2009), to personal blogs, to fully fledged, professionally run news organisations that exist in parallel to the mainstream news (Bowman and Willis, 2003).

It is this last definition, that of the *We Media* manifesto, that is used in this chapter. As they put it: ‘The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.’ (Bowman and Willis, 2003). This locates citizen journalism firmly within the field of activism, and within the roles not only of collecting (what we would call user-generated content), but also of producing and distributing the news they have collected: there is a degree of motivation to act in some way journalistically. This narrows down the scope of this chapter, but still leaves a fairly wide range of possibilities to be considered, and two main sub-fields of citizen journalism: public and activist journalism, which inform the citizen journalism movement.

Public journalism

At the time of writing, public journalism as a phrase is almost uniquely American, although the ideas and practices that underpin it are not. Public, or civic, journalism is journalism that has explicitly abandoned the ideology of objectivity or neutrality and has become engaged in civic life, and especially in the defence of democracy. As with other forms of citizen and activist journalism, public journalism is responding to a specific set of circumstances: the corporatisation of the media, and its perceived subsequent move away from the communities it serves (Friedland, 2010).

Public journalism has been advocated by the Kettering Foundation, and its President, David Mathews, as well as by organisations like the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, the Knight Foundation and others. Public journalism is similar to Dan Gillmor’s grassroots journalism in conception: the move away from dispassionate observation and reporting to engagement and activism is key to both ideas, and there are considerable overlaps in these ideas, at least in the USA. In some instances, public journalism is constructed as a deliberate alternative to commercial or corporate forms of journalism, but this is not universal to the movement. In contrast to the more radical form of activist citizen journalism (discussed below), public journalism seeks more to inform and improve existing journalistic forms and outlets than to overthrow them (Rosenberry and St John III, 2010).

ProPublica was launched in 2008 as a non-profit organisation dedicated to investigative journalism in the public interest. Working collaboratively with a number of professional news organisations, and with funding from donations and philanthropic foundations, it provides stories both on its own site and in syndication to its partners: ‘In the best traditions of American journalism in the public service, we seek to stimulate positive change. We uncover unsavory practices in order to stimulate reform. We do this in an entirely non-partisan and non-ideological manner, adhering to the strictest standards of journalistic impartiality. We won’t lobby. We won’t ally with politicians or advocacy groups. We look hard at the critical functions of business and of government, the two biggest centers of power, in

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areas ranging from product safety to securities fraud, from flaws in our system of criminal justice to practices that undermine fair elections.’ (ProPublica, n.d.).

ProPublica is not a citizen-journalist organisation: it is staffed by experienced and professional investigative journalists, but in its ideals it has much in common with forms of journalism that are called citizen journalism, and it is clearly intent on enhancing and supporting the civic public sphere.

Alternative and activist journalism

Alternative news sources (pirate and community radio, underground or alternative newspapers and magazines) have been around for as long as there has been a mainstream press, with a greater or lesser presence, depending on the circumstances. In western societies, these outlets have been largely tolerated; some have even become mainstream themselves over time. The Village Voice in New York has gone from scrappy newsletter presenting the ideas of the beats and hippies to being an entertainment and lifestyle guide for the city; the original Manchester Guardian newspaper founded after the Peterloo Massacre is now firmly part of the British media establishment, although with its original ideals intact (Atton, 2002).

In non-western societies, especially repressive ones, alternative news sources remain(ed) important, although often repressed. Technology made a massive difference to these alternative sources of information. Prior to the development of the internet, these outlets were limited by their access to printing or broadcasting technology and distribution mechanisms. These are expensive, and fairly easily disrupted by the interests of the state. Even in democratic societies, where alternative sources of news were tolerated, they were limited by financial constraints (the number of papers published, the footprint of the broadcast tower). The internet suddenly changed all of that, and alternative and mainstream sources of news were now competing on the relatively level playing field of the internet.

These two ideals, of a new movement of amateur journalism based on the internet, and the existing activist movements that had been using old media forms moving onto the internet, have been joined in the minds of many as a movement of citizen journalists, one that is part of a new, revived, public sphere.

Citizen journalism, inasmuch as it exists, poses a theoretical challenge to the professional identity of journalists, and the boundaries of the journalistic field. Much of the discourse within the commercialised mainstream media regarding social media and citizen journalism constructs it as this – a threat to the very existence of professional news practitioners.

Theoretical understandings

This section introduces some of the key theoretical concepts that underpin this new practice of journalism. In usual practice, traditional journalism has simple motives: for commercial organisations – making money; for public and state-funded organisations – fulfilling social and political requirements. New forms of journalism have more complex varied motives: social engagement, political activism and abstract pursuits of ‘truth’ or ‘justice’. This is not to say that the people working within traditional news structures do not have altruistic or world-changing motives, or that activist and citizen journalists may not be concerned with money, but that as institutions, these organisations tend to concern themselves primarily with these goals.

Citizen, public, activist and non-industrialised journalism locates itself firmly within the context of democratisation and activism, rather than a purely neutral activity, or one located only within

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economic or technological concerns. The theory of journalism practice has always considered journalism within its context of political, social and economic factors. Journalism must always negotiate its relations with the power elites in a society and, within the new, computer-networked environment, all of those considerations remain.

There is a library of works that discuss and analyse the role of journalism and its function within society, but within this chapter we aim to set out some of the key ideas which we believe are most useful in understanding this new media environment. We then show how these ideas can be seen as influencing journalism, especially within the new (or newly rediscovered) forms of citizen and activist journalism.

The public sphere

The public sphere is the space, whether physical or conceptual, in which citizens engage with the broader society, and in which consensus is reached as to the nature of that society. It is not necessarily the explicit spaces in which issues are debated, such as parliaments and congresses, but also includes the media and other areas of public engagement, the places where public, as opposed to private, life is carried out.

Although his is not the first use of the phrase, ‘public sphere’ is most often associated with Jürgen Habermas’s *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, originally published in 1962, and translated into English in 1989 as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. It is a difficult but extremely rewarding book. Craig Calhoun’s 1993 book *Habermas and the Public Sphere* provides an excellent introduction to Habermas’s ideas, and to their impact on specific areas of theory, including the media.

Habermas’s book is famously dense, and spans history, economics, politics, sociology and philosophy, dealing only peripherally with the media, but the key idea for media and journalism theorists is the way in which the media functioned as an enabler of the public sphere (through the first literary products, newspapers and books, in the eighteenth century), and that the modern mass media then served to replace the original ‘authentic’ public sphere with an illusory one: one in which the ‘public’ is replaced by the illusion of participation. Critical engagement with society via the public sphere is replaced by mindless consumption (Habermas, 1989; Calhoun, 1993a; Calhoun, 1993b; Garnham, 1993).

Jürgen Habermas is usually considered a member, or at least the inheritor, of the Frankfurt School – a group of Marxist social theorists based first at Frankfurt University, and then in the USA after the Nazis came to power in Germany. The Frankfurt School has had a great impact on almost all areas of thought in the twentieth century, including media studies.

The network society

The publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in English coincided with the rise of the new internet-enabled ‘networked’ society. The ‘Network Society’ was described by Jan van Dijk and Manuel Castells as one in which society was structured through electronic networks of relationships. Drawing on theories of the information society, as well as on the technological mechanisms used in the construction of computer networks, both argue that communication technology has fundamentally changed society. Castells argues that this new, electronically mediated form of relationship is entirely constructed by computer networks; van Dijk holds that other social relationships still have weight,

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although they may be mediated by electronic, rather than organic, communication networks; but they both agree that the nature of engagement and communication within society has been changed by networked communications (Castells, 2000; Dijk, 2006).

Computer networks such as the internet are not necessarily hierarchical. Egalitarian ones are generally more stable than hierarchical ones – for technical reasons. The internet was largely developed as a collaborative research tool among universities, and it is a legacy of this that access to the network is largely open to the public, and the legacy of collaboration and transparency has persisted into the new social networks. Unlike other mass-media technologies, the differential between the cost of production and that of consumption (compare the cost of a printing press and the cost of a newspaper) is minimal, although not entirely vanished – a server and a web-hosting agreement to run a blog does not cost that much more than a home computer and internet access. Social media, even more so, erase this strictly financial barrier to entry, although other barriers remain.

The matrix discussed in Chapter 1 of this book lays out the landscape as one in which technology, financial capital and infrastructure are less important than reach, intent and voice. Intent and voice are choices, not constraints, and, although reach is something that can be increased through financial investment, money is not a prerequisite. Andy Carvin's reach through Twitter is substantial, and costs only the investment of social relationships and time.

The network, therefore, that makes up the backbone of the network society is one which does not place a huge amount of emphasis on one's status or role within the network (or at least, on the status of the node with which one connects to the network), or the wider community. To the network, you are simply an Internet Protocol (IP) address, just like every other IP address. Unlike the traditional mass media, there is no technological or structural differential between producers and consumers.

This is something of a fantasy, though: although the technology cannot see the difference between a student in a high school in Nairobi and the president of the United States, the internet is still made up of people and as soon as one's identity is known, status can usually be inferred. The fact remains that although the technological barriers to entry are much lower than for other mass media, the content and recognition barriers are not, and it is the best-known organisations that have the largest audiences.

The internet

The internet was originally designed as a robust communication network that would function well in times of war and disaster. Unlike other networks, such as broadcasting or telephone networks, it has no central hub that can be easily damaged. Instead, each node on the network connects to multiple other nodes, providing redundancy and meaning that, even if nodes are destroyed, communication will continue to flow around the gaps. In practice, this is not always the case; many parts of the world are connected to the network by a single cable, and entire countries and regions have spent days and weeks cut off when that cable has failed.

Commodification

Commodification refers to the process of turning something into an object that can be traded, and that has economic value. The commodification of information is a fundamental aspect of the practice of media – information is what is being traded. Habermas and others believe that this commodification is damaging to society as a whole – moving knowledge from a public good to a scarce commodity.

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The original structure and concept of the network, though, was one which does not recognise or credit importance or wealth to messages, but one which allowed free communication to all parties.

It is this that has led thinkers to posit the network as the salvation of the public sphere. Where Habermas saw that commodification of information (through the commercial mass media) and the rise of consumerism had transformed the public sphere from an open forum for discourse and engagement into one in which the mass media simply reinforced the ideas of the dominant elites in society, that is capitalism, proponents saw in the internet the potential for the revival of the original, supposedly egalitarian, public sphere, one in which rational discourse among equals was paramount (Boeder, 2005; Jan, 2011).

The way online interaction is structured and substantially different from other forms of communication is discussed in the works of Manuel Castells (2000) and Jan van Dijk (2006) on network theory, the new, engaged form of computer-aided communication and interaction that informs online lives. Both of these thinkers are informed by Stewart Brand's (1987) discussion of the way the network works. Another internet theorist, Henry Jenkins (2006a, 2006b), discusses participatory and fan cultures online, which although not specific to journalism, have a lot to say about all kinds of online cultures.

Social capital and the journalistic field

Social capital

Social capital may be a relatively new concept for English speakers, but in many societies it is a clearly recognised and structured part of society. Known in Arabic as Wasta and in Chinese as Guanxi, for example, influence is simply part and parcel of all social interactions. The fact that there is no English-word equivalent does not mean that social capital has less influence within western society, simply that we are perhaps less likely to acknowledge it.

Objectivity

Objectivity has often been held up as the ideal of journalistic practice – the completely disinterested and uninvolved commentator, presenting all sides of an argument 'without fear or favor' (Allan, 2010). More recent thinkers, influenced by postmodernism's contention that objective truth is an impossibility, maintain that objectivity is also an impossible goal.

Another theorist whose ideas have contributed to our understanding of the communication and human networks in which we are all engaged is Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu was a French sociologist and philosopher whose work spanned a wide range of disciplines, but the concept that is most often applied to these discussions is that of social capital.

Capital can be defined as the base resource one brings to society, and it usually refers to financial capital. Financial or economic capital is the main source of power in capitalist societies, but Bourdieu and others posited different kinds of capital to the simply financial. Human capital is the resources an individual commands – time and skills – and for most people it is this that they use to engage in the economic marketplace, and gain power in society, but there are still other forms of capital. Cultural capital consists of the knowledge, skills and information one can access and use – one's education; social capital derives from one's relationships – memberships of groups and networks within society; symbolic capital is capital one accrues through status or prestige (Jenkins, 2002).

Bourdieu and others argue that capital of all kinds can be traded or negotiated for power within society, or within the social network and community one operates within. In structured societies, the

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ability to gain and use the various forms of capital may be constrained by other factors (access to education may be limited to those with economic means, group membership may be limited on the basis of gender, or race), and people's ability to advance within the system may be limited (Bourdieu, 1993; Jenkins, 2002; Benson, 2005).

Social capital is usually constructed within a field of endeavour or expertise, so journalists accrue social capital through their status and links within the field of journalism. This is a key idea for students of media, especially of journalism, because despite the importance of the audience to the industry as a whole, journalists look most often to their peers for affirmation, and for judgement on their work (Bourdieu, 1993b).

The rigid hierarchy and boundaries of the field are challenged by the network society, in that the technology of the internet allows access to all comers, without the requirement of prior membership of the field itself. In the mid-nineties, shortly after the development of the World Wide Web, theorists and activists began to posit the idea that this meant the end of professional (commercial) journalism, that the field would be dismantled by the network society and replaced by alternative forms of journalism (Rosen, 1993; Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004).

This projected death of professional journalism led to the development of the concept of citizen journalism.

Profession or Trade?

The question of whether journalism is a profession or a trade is a complex one. In Anglo-Saxon societies, professional status has certain rights, such as the formal right to regulate access to the profession through accreditation, and the right to maintain standards and discipline within the profession (as through medical or legal councils). This grants the professions considerable status within these societies. Journalism is not legally a profession, but it has pretensions to being one, through training councils and self-regulation. The internet, and social media specifically, presents a considerable challenge to the professional identity of journalists. These issues are further discussed in Chapter 10, especially in terms of legal and ethical constraints.

Citizen journalism in practice

Although citizen journalism may or may not exist in the form which Gillmor, Rosen, Bowman and Willis envisioned, it is repeatedly invoked by both professional journalists and the public as an entity, sometimes even a monolithic one. The fear of citizen journalism is evident in much of the public discourse around it, and far in excess of the actual prevalence of citizen journalism in practice.

Sites and practices identified as examples of 'citizen journalism' generally take one of the following forms: user-generated content, blogs, hyperlocal community sites, and activist or alternative sites.

User-generated content is discussed more extensively in the following chapter, but it refers to either raw news material (images, footage, audio recordings or information) that is provided

Sites, pages, blogs, channels, feeds

As technology and social media change, the specifics of what people do online changes. Although initially the website was the common denominator of web-based content and for citizen-journalism activities, increasingly the activities may be centred around a Facebook page, a YouTube channel, a Twitter feed or an actual site that aggregates all of the above. However, it is impossible to refer to a list of sites, pages, blogs, channels or feeds every time one mentions them, so the term site is being used to incorporate all of these things.

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to a news organisation by the public for use within their own edited, constructed news product, or to the comments, discussion and interaction which is created around a formal news product. User-generated content always exists within the constructed news product of a formal outlet, and is mediated by them.

In this book we distinguish citizen journalism from user-generated content, based on the final product: citizen journalism is its own discrete product; user-generated content exists within and forms part of a mainstream news product. This can be a complex distinction, especially where commercial news organisations construct their own sites for the contribution of user-generated content which can both exist as discrete product and provide material for the main site.

Citizen-journalism projects

It is tempting to refer to these, unironically, as ‘true’ or ‘traditional’ citizen-journalism projects, so much has the phrase been borrowed, changed, adapted and abused. We won’t do that, but there are citizen-journalism projects that best embody the principles of citizen journalism, inasmuch as there are concrete principles. There is, however, no one way to do citizen journalism, no one ideal perfect site.

OhMyNews, launched in 2000, in South Korea, is often considered the original citizen-journalism site. The site uses material provided by some 20,000 volunteer reporters, which is posted to the site after being checked by the team of professional journalists. OhMyNews is often held up as the ideal of a successful citizen-journalism project; it is also a commercial enterprise, selling advertising to the same organisations that the mainstream media do (Gillmor, 2004).

Although OhMyNews’s contributors are encouraged to cover stories not included in the mainstream press, the process of publication is similar to any news organisation using a network of freelancers: material is edited and placed on the page by the professional staff. Citizen reporters working for OhMyNews are paid according to how important and useful the professional editors consider

their contributions, creating the possibility that the site’s content will eventually reflect not the interests of the contributors but the professionally paid staff (Kim and Hamilton, 2006).

WikiNews is based on the model of Wikipedia, and is one of the projects run by Wikipedia’s parent organisation, the Wikimedia foundation. WikiNews is a collaborative, citizen-led news site, with contributions from anyone who registers and chooses to upload content. Unlike other citizen-journalism sites, the site does not mimic a news site, but instead follows the structure of Wikipedia, with links and references, the ability

of any user to edit the story, and no bylines. The identification of journalists through bylines is one of the hallmarks of traditional journalism, and the lack of bylines makes WikiNews possibly unique among citizen-journalism projects (Wikinews, n.d.).

The site does not impose a news diary or structure on its contributors, but work is reviewed by more experienced volunteers, and rated on a number of key points. including newsworthiness, verifiability and a neutral point of view, all traditional journalistic goals. The neutral point of view

Wikiwhat

‘Wiki’ is a Hawaiian word meaning quick, but in internet culture it is a kind of shorthand for an open-source, collaborative publishing project such as Wikipedia, the open-source encyclopaedia, WikiLeaks and WikiNews. A wiki can also refer to any site using an interlinked and collaborative structure, as exemplified by Wikipedia.

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is key to the Wikimedia Foundation's goals, but is uncommon among citizen-journalism projects, which tend to embrace opinion and subjectivity (Thorsen, 2008).

Mainstream media's citizen journalism

CNN's iReport, Bild's (Germany) Leserreporter and Avusa's (South Africa) Reporter.co.za are examples. These sites appear(ed) as separate entities from the parent site, but exist as a way for the main news organisation to attract aspiring citizen journalists who will post stories and videos (especially in the case of Bild) which can then be used as a resource by the parent organisation to attract audience, sell advertising and provide content for the main product (Knight, 2010).

As an example of this, CNN's iReport was launched in 2006 to allow non-journalists to upload images, stories and video to a website, www.ireport.com. Stories and material can be viewed on the iReport site, but can also be incorporated into CNN's own coverage. Despite the rhetoric of being a truly independent and collaborative site, and one which attempts to 'expand the current definition of news' (CNN, n.d.), CNN maintains editorial control, suggesting assignments, vetting stories and content, and controlling the news agenda. Although it is true that any citizen can contribute to the site, the overall feel is very much that of a formal news organisation, and the news values and angles that are presented are hardly different from that of the parent organisation.

This form of citizen journalism has been criticised for co-opting the voice and ideas of true citizen journalism, but these sites remain a substantive forum for citizen journalism and contribution (Kperogi, 2010).

Hyperlocal

Hyperlocal news sites are small news organisations, whether commercial, amateur or a mix of both, which represent a community and its interests. First posited (albeit indirectly, since he does not use the term) by John Pavlik in *Journalism and New Media* (Pavlik, 2001), hyperlocal sites are constructed as an alternative to the increasing corporatisation of news outlets within the western world, and the ensuing lack of news available for citizens of smaller communities and towns. Thanks to the increasing financial pressure on news organisations in the twenty-first century, more and more towns and cities in the developed world have no local news outlet, it having been closed or merged with a larger news outlet; hyperlocal sites are arising to fill this gap (Kurpius et al., 2010).

Hyperlocal sites provide an imitation of the norms and behaviours of professional and commercial news production, often using the same funding models and being staffed by professionally trained journalists. Hyperlocal sites in many ways are the strongest evidence of new forms of journalism posing a financial and cultural threat to the entrenched professional and commercial news interests, except for the fact that they tend to thrive best in communities that have been abandoned by those very same interests.

Blogpreston (<http://blogpreston.co.uk/>) is a hyperlocal site, covering the small city of Preston in northern England. The site was launched in January 2009 as 'a hub of news, views and information about the city' (Blog Preston, n.d.), and contains a range of content from professionally written news stories to citizen-submitted photos of the city, to reports on social events organised by the team of volunteers. The site runs advertisements and has also received funding to train local people as

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community journalists – combining the goals of hyperlocal and public journalism. The site is a challenge to the local corporate newspaper in many ways – covering the same ground, in the same ways, and even, to some extent, going after the same advertising.

Activist citizen journalism

Activist citizen-journalism sites are probably the most common form of the medium worldwide, being the direct inheritors of the tradition of activist and alternative news sources that has remained intact through technological and social change. The number of sites and projects have increased, however, since the internet substantially lowers the technological and financial barriers to entry for would-be activists and journalists, and provides considerable sanctuary for sites and projects that would otherwise have been shut down by authorities. The increased dispersion of social media as well has meant that more individual channels exist for people to express their opinions: individual blogs, Twitter feeds and Facebook pages abound, some more ‘journalistic’ than others.

The speed with which these new forms of online publishing can be launched and start functioning is also a factor in their favour. It takes only a minute to create a new feed or channel and, provided the information is newsworthy enough, it will be picked up and circulated immediately. The events of the so-called Arab Spring were publicised in this way, and the speed of the network directly fed into the events, bringing them to the fore much faster than would have happened in the days of samizdat printing presses and pirate radio (Hermida, 2012a).

In addition, a number of projects exist which provide frameworks, expertise, training and infrastructure for those wishing to set up a citizen-journalism site, or wishing to participate in one. Allvoices (www.allvoices.com), Global Voices Online (globalvoices.org), the Guerrilla News Network (GNN.tv – now defunct) and Indymedia (www.indymedia.org) all provide a locus for gathering disparate groups of citizen journalists into a single identifiable framework. Most of these projects are explicitly activist, and many receive funding through charitable organisations and political groups. These kinds of projects are of interest to mainstream journalists primarily because of the insight and information they can provide to reporters and researchers, and their primary journalistic impact is on the news agendas of the world’s media. The events of the so-called Arab Spring of 2011 were heavily discussed and reported on within these networks of activists, social media users, bloggers, citizen journalists and the like, and this did filter its way through to the agenda of the mainstream media (Akinfemisoye, 2011; Knight, 2012, 2013).

Issues in citizen journalism

These forms of citizen journalism are important, at least for the communities in which they function, and interesting, but the questions remain as to their role in relationship to mainstream forms of news media. Whether they pose genuine challenges to mainstream commercial news is hard to quantify, but in specific areas and sectors they may prove to do so.

Financial constraints

The main constraint facing these kinds of projects is financial. Although the barriers to entry are lower than for mainstream media, financial clout (capital, in Bourdieu’s words) is still important. Web

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hosting and development are also expensive, although these costs can be mitigated against with the use of freely available services. Free services tend to make it difficult to generate revenue, though, since control of the linked advertising may remain with the hosting company, and once sites begin to generate enough traffic for the linked revenue to be more than negligible, the hosting costs can become prohibitive.

It is, however, the cost of content that remains the substantive barrier. Journalists need to be paid and, simply put, the more you pay, the better the journalism you get (up to a point). Some citizen journalism sites are run entirely with volunteers, but this can create its own problems, especially with consistency and range of product, and with issues of overall control. Left to their own devices, most people would rather write opinion or columns. Several citizen-journalism projects such as Reporter.co.za, Demotix, Blotter and Global Voices Online tend(ed) to be repositories of comment pieces and photography, all interesting, but it is unclear how they can form a replacement for the mainstream or commercial news sector (Knight, 2010).

Consistency

Audiences expect and want a consistent and predictable news product: a certain amount of hard news, a certain amount of comment, some entertainment or light news, sport, a weather report and, in a printed product, the horoscope, the TV guide and a crossword. This is a reductive list of the content of mainstream news products, yes, but there is considerable truth in it. Citizen or activist journalism products that are looking to become the comprehensive news source for a community may find it hard to provide this kind of range. Many sites at best form a counterpoint to or commentary on the news provided in other contexts and forms.

Sites also need to provide enough material on a regular enough schedule that readers will return consistently. Random updates don't drive audience or advertising. The consistent product which drives loyal readers also drives advertisers – it is difficult to make revenue from advertising unless you can show that you have a consistent product (automatically served Google ads have limited revenue-generating possibility).

For activist projects, one assumes that money is less relevant, or that money is being provided through other means to maintain the project. In addition, in an activist context, the drive and motivation to maintain the project and its content is rooted in something other than the product itself. Most projects function either until the aim is achieved, or the movement that inspired them burns out entirely.

Accusations of bias

One of the main criticisms of amateur journalism from the mainstream media is that it is biased. This bias, whether perceived or real, forms much of the debate around amateur-journalism sites, at least in the way it is presented in professional-journalism contexts. There is considerable doubt as to whether this matters at all to either the audience or the advertisers. Certainly, some of the most popular blogs, forums and information sites on the internet are informed by very clear political aims and points of view (from all parts of the spectrum), and, if anything, the readership is more loyal than that of more middle-of-the-road sites. It is apparent that despite the stated need of communities for unbiased information provided to the audience in a neutral space (a key tenet of democratisation, as reiterated in documents from the American Constitution to the UN Charter of Rights and Freedoms), the desire of

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people is for news and information that reinforces their pre-existing beliefs. The popularity of news organisations that hold specific and clear political views – from Fox News in the USA to the more extreme of the British tabloids – shows that giving the people what they want often means giving them biased and prejudicial information.

But neutrality and freedom from bias is a key part of the ideology of professional journalism (Allan, 2010). The construction of a journalistic identity is built on the bedrock of ‘objectivity’, which in western democratic societies is clearly linked to the independence of the media from political interference or regulation. It is this supposed objectivity that is the magic that transforms ordinary writing into journalism, and then grants it specific legal protections, such as the right to protect ones sources, and the defence of public interest against other possible charges (discussed further in Chapter 10).

The myth of objectivity, which has been thoroughly unpicked and discredited among the media theorists, at least remains firmly entrenched in the professional practice of journalism, and the more the profession comes under fire, the more objectivity is defended as a necessary part of the contribution that news organisations make to society as a whole. Even in countries like the UK, where it is accepted that newspapers, at least, have clear political-party allegiances, the ideal of objectivity is upheld. The UK’s Leveson Inquiry into press standards and phone hacking was more concerned with issues of corruption and illegal behaviour, but the journalists and editors who appeared before it roared their defence of the importance of the free press, on the grounds that professional, objective, neutral journalism is an essential part of a democratic society. Whether any citizens of that democratic society are paying any attention, or whether this, and numerous other, similar, debates that occupy the media pages of the newspapers, or the academic textbooks, are of any interest to the public whose interests we are supposedly so concerned with is an open debate.

Conclusion

The question remains as to whether any of the supposed conflict between citizen or amateur journalism and the more traditional, mainstream journalism is genuine, or whether there is, in fact, any serious threat to the mainstream or commercial news sector posed by these projects.

Certainly, activist news organisations may pose a structural or political threat to the state-backed news organisations that control the free flow of information in undemocratic societies. These contexts, however, move journalism clearly into the realm of politics, and the conflict is inherently political, not journalistic. In societies where there has been a transition of power, the activist news organisations either closed down, or became simply the news media of the new society, in a relationship with the political power of the society that is mirrored across democratic societies worldwide.

In other contexts, however, activist news organisations are a valuable resource for other journalists – every foreign correspondent needs to know the sites and projects that offer an alternative take on events to the state-controlled media.

Other forms of citizen journalism, hyperlocal sites, social-aggregation projects like the Huffington Post and community alternative sites either remain too small and focused on the interests of a specific community (whether geographic, cultural, political or sub-cultural) to be of interest to a larger organisation (although they may well be completely viable as projects in and of themselves), or they are large enough to compete with the mainstream organisations, in which case the distinction between them is irrelevant – media pundits may go on at length about the structural, economic and philosophical differences between the Huffington Post and USA Today, but readers and advertisers don’t often

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care. The fact remains that, despite the constructed tension between ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ journalism, in practice, and to the audience, there is little to be found between them.

Less-constructed forms of ‘citizen’ information sharing, Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, Google+ circles, may well be part of the public sphere that Habermas envisioned, and for a social theorist they are fascinating. It seems unlikely, however, that they would pose any kind of threat to the existence of more traditional, constructed and managed forms of news (if anything, the managed product that news organisations are now moving into these spaces is more of a threat to the amateur efforts than the other way round).

However, it is important to remember that news is an ecosystem, and the effect of amateur, activist and alternative news sites on other sites within that ecosystem is noticeable. Social media might not have provided the perfect public sphere, but the existence of these projects within the same landscape as the more traditional news media can be seen to have an effect. The higher level of engagement with the audience, the greater proportion of opinion to hard news, and the lowered formality of language are all hallmarks of amateur journalism that are increasingly visible within the mainstream. The network has changed everyone within it, not simply the newcomers.

CASE STUDY

‘Netizen’ journalism in China

In July 2011 two high-speed trains running through the eastern city of Wenzhou, China, collided while crossing a viaduct. Four cars were derailed and 40 people died. The accident, as well as being a tragedy, was a great embarrassment for China’s much-publicised high-speed rail programme, and the government moved to limit the public-relations damage by issuing media directives, limiting access to the site and clearing away the wreckage as soon as possible (Blanchard and Wee, 2011).

Media directives are a common way for the Chinese authorities to control a news story: instructions are given to news editors as to what angles to use, and how to construct the story. In the case of the train crash, directives instructed that: ‘Reporting of the accident is to use “in the face of great tragedy, there’s great love” as the major theme. Do not question. Do not elaborate. Do not associate. No re-posting on micro-blogs will be allowed!’ (Hernandez, 2011).

Three years earlier, the Wenchuan earthquake had provoked a similar response from the government, but the prevalence of mobile phones and internet access had resulted in images, news and information being spread across social networks, embarrassing the Chinese authorities and undermining their control of information (Nip, 2009).

In the time between the Wenchuan earthquake and the Wenzhou train crash, Chinese use of the internet rose to some 450 million users (China Internet Watch, 2011), known as ‘netizens’ in China, many of them using microblogging and discussion platforms such as Weibo (a Chinese version of Twitter), Tianye and QQ.

This growing online public was horrified by the news of the train crash, and reports began to appear on the social-media networks in China, reports that contradicted the official version as to the time of the accident, and that began to create a picture not just of ‘in the face of great tragedy, there’s great love’, but of a disaster being covered up because it did not tally with the government’s desires and plans. As the story unfolded, the demands by the families for explanation and compensation was highlighted on the networks, something the directives had not wanted discussed (Chen, 2011).

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The mainstream Chinese media became caught between the official version of events, and the version they could see unfolding online, faster than the online censors could erase it. Many news organisations began to report what was happening on social media, a move that at least one senior editor believed would be seminal in changing the Chinese media: ‘Thanks to micro-blogs, it was providing a convenient platform for people to collect variety information together. Micro-blog can make people get their power together and foster citizen consciousness to help people who need to help, also can supervise our government and society. It’s seems like that micro-blog offer a microphone to everyone, If you got 10 million followers, then what you post on your micro-blog will be concerned by your followers. I think it can be an individual media and everyone can be a journalist in the future. It will make the media in China become more freedom and be responsibility to expose the truth.’ (Liu Xiang, quoted in Chen, 2011)

Whether or not the Chinese media is more free, it is certainly more subject to scrutiny by the new networked and connected educated population, who do use social media as a way to hold the mainstream media to account. The more activist news organisations, the ones that chafed against central government controls, have been emboldened by online activism, and many took the opportunity of repeating and amplifying what was being said online, taking their news agenda guidance from the public, rather than from the state.

Social-media and citizen-media activism in China is still evolving. Certainly there are changes, and the ways in which social media can influence public opinion, and possibly public activism, can be seen. The rising influence of social media can be evidenced in the new guidelines on their use issued by the Beijing government in December 2011. These controls, which include a prohibition against ‘rumour-mongering’ and a ban on accounts not linked to a genuine name, are clearly designed to prevent similar responses to events like the Wenzhou train crash (Bandurski, 2011).

Note: Thanks to Chen Dan Qi, for her assistance with this case study.

Key reflections

- Within this new, fluid environment it is possible for ideas and individuals that do not have access to the elite power structures to be heard, but it is not a given: access must still be fought for.
- Can commercial journalism still maintain the goals of public journalism while serving business interests?
- Is the online space more egalitarian and accessible for people left isolated and ignored by mainstream media, or does it simply reflect the rest of the media?
- Is non-professional journalism still journalism? Does it matter if the people doing it are not trained or certified?
- What can mainstream commercial journalism learn from citizen journalism and community engagement?
- Is social capital in the new media space more useful than financial capital? Why?

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Readings and resources

Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) is a key text for this chapter. Craig Calhoun's 1993 book *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1993a) is a slightly more accessible introduction to the original text, and Pieter Boeder's essay 'Habermas' heritage: the future of the public sphere in a network society' (2005) is a good starting point for the subject.

The network society is discussed primarily by Manuel Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000) and by Jan van Dijk in *The Network Society*. Henry Jenkins is the leading thinker on fan and participatory culture. His main works are the books *Convergence Culture* (2006a) and *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers* (2006b), and he maintains a blog at <http://henryjenkins.org/>.

Dan Gillmor's book *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People for the People* (2004) can almost be considered the manifesto of the citizen-journalism movement. This book, along with Bowman and Willis's 2003 report *We Media*, is core reading for anyone interested in the subject. Dan Gillmor maintains a blog at <http://dangillmor.com/>.

The main works on alternative and activist media are Chris Atton's books *Alternative Media* (2002) and *An Alternative Internet* (2004).

Einar Thorsen writes about citizen journalism in the book *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* (co-edited with Stuart Allan), and in journal articles and other works. He maintains a website at <http://multimedijournalism.info/> and tweets as @einarthorsen.

Indymedia (www.indymedia.org/en/index.shtml) and Global Voices Online (<http://globalvoicesonline.org/>) both provide technology, training and support for citizen journalists, as well as hosting news and material from citizen journalists around the world. Indymedia maintains local organisations in a number of countries as well.

A number of initiatives exist to promote public journalism, including the Knight Community News Network, which is part of the John S. and James L. Knight foundation, and provides a wealth of information and services for aspiring community and public journalists.

The Center for Investigative Reporting (<http://centerforinvestigativereporting.org/>) and ProPublica (www.propublica.org/) both do independent investigative journalism, and provide tools and support for journalists as well.

For a development of alternative media since the 1970s see Tony Harcup's *Alternative Journalism, Alternative Voices* (Routledge, 2012).

>>Chapter 7<<

COLLABORATIVE JOURNALISM AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Overview

In this chapter we discuss the increasing openness and transparency of news organisations to content and users from outside the newsroom. We call this form of journalism 'collaborative' because it incorporates the audience and the public in a collaborative effort to create news. User-generated content, participatory journalism and community creation are key ways in which news organisations can connect with, and make use of, their users as producers. The increasing dependence and community relationship between users and producers is discussed, as well as some of the concerns and limits of the practice.

Key concepts

- Comments and conversations
- Communities
- Crowdsourcing
- Curation
- Live blogging
- Participatory journalism
- Trolls
- Using user-generated content

Collaborative journalism and UGC

Springboard

- *Collaboration, not co-optation*: there's a wealth of information in the crowd, but you need to collaborate with your users, not simply take from them. Talk back, communicate with them, thank them and credit them.
- *Maintain your community*: don't wait until there is a breaking news story to look for people who can contribute: work on finding and maintaining a community of users and contributors from day one. They'll be there when you need them, and, if they know you, they'll trust you (and you will be able to trust them).
- *Be open, but cautious*: online hoaxes do happen, and news organisations do get fooled. Don't let go of your journalistic instincts when you enter the social-media pool – corroborate, check back and, if something smells fishy, consider that it may in fact be bait.
- *Your users are family*: there are thousands of places for people to discuss the news online: you want them to do it at your site. Consider the user experience, the interface and the systems, and listen to your users' comments about it.
- *Be transparent*: the web community expects transparency; tell people what you are doing, tell them how you are doing it, and listen to them. The more of your process and ideas you open up, the more you will get back from the audience.

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the changing relationship between producers and consumers, and the increasing number of ways in which the public (or audience) contribute to news content. It is a rare news organisation these days which does not invite contributions from its consumers, in the form of comments on stories or in a linked forum, feedback to journalists, or following them on Twitter, sharing on Facebook or other social-media sites, or sending original content (especially video and images) direct to the organisation. This practice is sometimes included under the heading of citizen journalism but, as was discussed in Chapter 6, this is an increasingly problematic concept, and a term which no longer adequately covers the multitude of ways in which the traditional barriers of the journalistic profession are breaking down as a result of changes in technology.

The theory of participatory, user-generated and collaborative journalism is discussed in a number of ways. Mark Deuze places these new kinds of collaborative work within the field of sociology of work, and the changes in society which are rendering work a more fluid and flexible part of life: a phenomenon called 'casualisation' (2007, 2011). He then links this to Manuel Castells's theory of the Network Society (discussed in Chapter 6), to generate a theory of networked and collaborative journalism.

Participatory journalism

In their 2011 book, Jane Singer and her co-authors coined the term 'participatory journalism' in order to cover the gap between professional journalists and the people who contribute to the news in ways that are increasingly visible in the end product.

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Jane Singer and her co-authors argue for the term ‘participatory journalism’ because they feel it captures the idea of collaborative and collective – not simply parallel – action. They describe the activities of participatory journalists as engaged in the ‘ongoing process of creating a news website and building a multi-faceted community’ (2011).

This process of collaboratively creating news is not new – Alfred Hermida describes newspapers in the seventeenth century that included blank pages for the reader to write their own news on before being passed on to someone else to read: one imagines people adding family or local news, or commenting on something in the paper, something that evokes the modern phenomenon of reading an article and then posting it on Facebook, with a commentary (Singer et al., 2011).

However, this charming practice rapidly fell out of favour and was replaced by the news product of the twentieth century: constructed by professionals, it was a closed, discrete, packaged product, distinguished clearly from other forms of discourse by its boundaries, access to which was controlled by the requirements of the profession. Contributions from people not members of the journalism trade (or profession) were limited to letters to the editor, whose publication remained firmly within the control of the news organisation itself (and, controversially, were sometimes written by the journalists themselves) (Allan, 1999; Hermida, 2011a).

Despite the continued presence of alternative news organisations (see Chapter 6), the boundaries of this industry only began to be eroded at the very end of the twentieth century, when online news sites began to allow comments on stories posted on the web, and to solicit contributions of images and news stories from the general public. This erosion of professional and product boundaries is considered one of the main ways in which the practice of journalism has changed since the creation of the World Wide Web in 1993.

Although comments are probably the most common means of engaging readers in the production of content, the boundaries between the original story and the comments below it remain as clear as the boundaries between the letters to the editor’s page and the rest of the newspaper. More flexible are the boundaries between professionally acquired news material (especially photographs and video footage) and those created by amateurs and passed on to the professional news organisations (often for money), although most news organisations still go to considerable lengths to ensure that the consumer is aware that the material was ‘non-traditionally acquired’ (O’Sullivan and Heinonen, 2008; Wardle and Williams, 2010; Knight, 2012, 2013).

The ways in which fans and participants influence and collaborate with popular media is discussed by Henry Jenkins, and, although he does not discuss journalism directly, there are valuable insights in his work (2006a, 2006b). Fans of TV shows such as *Star Trek* have always found the internet a valuable space in which to discuss their ideas and reactions to events in the fictional world. Savvy producers and directors, such as Joss Whedon (of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), have used these communities as a sounding board and a resource of ideas.

Breaking news and the accidental journalist

It is important to note that news organisations have always used material, especially visual material, provided by witnesses and passers-by who happened to have cameras. In 1963, Abraham Zapruder happened to have a home-movie camera with him while watching the president visit Dallas, Texas. The film he shot of the assassination of John F. Kennedy was handed over to the Secret Service, but was also sold to Life magazine, which used stills from the film in its next issue (Life Magazine, 1963).

Collaborative journalism and UGC

Twenty-nine years later, George Holliday caught the beating of Rodney King by five officers of the Los Angeles Police Department on a video camera. He gave the video tape to a local television station, which broadcast it on its news show. The content of that tape set off some of the worst riots the US has ever seen (Goldstein, 2006). These instances, of a passer-by happening to have a camera to hand at the moment a dramatic event was unfolding, are notable, but fairly uncommon – what Paul Bradshaw refers to as ‘accidental journalists’ (Bradshaw and Rohumaa, 2011). When it did happen, however, news organisations displayed no qualms about using the footage.

However, the use of this kind of footage on the news was rare until recently, not necessarily because of any particular reticence on the part of the news organisations, but because until the advent of mobile-phone cameras only a minority of people had access to a camera at any given point in time – many events went unrecorded and unnoticed. Technology changed this: by December 2004, when a tsunami ripped through the Indian Ocean, destroying coastal communities from the Seychelles to Indonesia, news organisations were overwhelmed by amateur footage and stills of the event, and the use of ‘user-generated content’ by news organisations has since then been the norm for any major unexpected and public event (Allan et al., 2007).

For on-diary events (still a large part of professional news content), news organisations still tend to rely on professional footage, especially in terms of broadcast material. For off-diary events such as the Haiti earthquake, amateur pictures are becoming increasingly common in news usage. Nicola Bruno’s 2011 study found, however, that although news organisations rely on user-generated content at first, they tend to move to professionally sourced material as the story unfolds (and they are able to get their staff in place).

Active citizens and active sources

Although commentators and researchers tend to frame the use of this kind of material as the expansion of the practice of journalism into the broader community, it could also be seen not so much as the changing practice of journalism, but the changing practice of sourcing, and the evolution of the relationship between journalists and sources.

Traditionally, a source for a news story, especially an unexpected one, is either a bystander or witness to events, or a participant in those events (sourcing is discussed in Chapter 2). The journalist then approaches the source and, after asking a few questions, reframes the person’s experience for inclusion in the constructed news narrative. The source is a passive participant in the story which is actively created by the journalist. It is that passivity which has changed: increasingly, the news organisation will be contacted directly by someone with information or news material, whether via traditional means or through the increasing numbers of portals and channels which social-media outlets provide, and, increasingly, the source will already have published their own version of events, their own footage, their own narrative, which then lives alongside the journalistically constructed one (Jönsson and Örnebring, 2011).

In January 2009 US Airways flight 1549 ran into a flock of geese and had to make an emergency ditching in the Hudson River, in New York City. People both on the plane and in the rounding, densely populated area, began posting tweets and pictures to the recently popularised social networking services. Users on Twitter were among the first to know about the event, and to see pictures of the plane floating on the river and people crowded on the wings awaiting rescue. Janis Krums, who broke the story online with ‘There’s a plane in the Hudson. I’m on the ferry going to pick up the people. Crazy’ (Krums, 2009), took a picture of the plane on his phone which became briefly famous and was reproduced in media all over the world. This event was hailed as the vanguard of a revolution in reporting the news (Beaumont, 2009).

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Later that year, in June, Iran erupted in street demonstrations and protests after the result of the election was declared in favour of the incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad. These protests were widely planned, discussed and reported in both social media and the mainstream media in the west. The uprising came to a head with the death of music student Neda Agha-Soltan on 20 June, apparently at the hands of the state militia. Footage shot on a mobile phone was sent to a friend of the owner in the Netherlands, and then uploaded to YouTube. News organisations leapt on the footage, and it was picked up and shown on news websites and TV channels (often edited, with voiceover and captions added); stills were printed in the newspapers. However, unlike with earlier amateur footage that was used in this way, the original footage remained online, the raw material living alongside the constructed and negotiated use of it, and interaction and comments on that footage expanded the story and filled in the details, in a way that the mainstream news organisations, by that point forbidden to leave their hotel rooms in Tehran, could not (Mortensen, 2011; Knight, 2012).

In a traditional context, the source is a passive tool in the construction of journalism, simply part of the raw material used to construct news. As the sources and the audience become more active in the construction, and the feedback loop tightens, the pool of potential sources gets larger, and the relationship between the source and the journalist gets closer.

Mark Deuze characterises this as the ‘opening’ of the newsroom, and typifies news organisations as ‘open’ or ‘closed’, depending on the extent to which they engage with the public, and allow the public to engage with them (2007, 2011).

Ways and means of opening the gates

Gatekeeping theory is a fundamental part of the study of the practice of journalism. David White’s 1953 study focused on the implicit reasons why events were included or not in the daily newspaper.

Gatekeeping

The ways in which news organisations maintain control of the news agenda by deciding which stories will be published has been referred to as ‘gatekeeping’ since David White used the term in 1950. The image of the gates of news being guarded by journalists is an enduring one, and one that writers from Jane Singer and Axel Bruns to Mark Deuze have all invoked.

‘News values’, a phrase created by Galtung and Ruge in 1965, refers to the criteria that journalists and editors use to decide what is newsworthy (Harcup and O’Neill, 2011). Both of these concepts remain fundamental to journalism theory – how journalists decide what is news. The new social media have challenged the journalist’s right to decide for the public what news is: this process of opening the gates is discussed by Axel Bruns in his 2005 book *Gatewatching*.

There are a number of ways in which news organisations allow ‘the people formerly known as the audience’ (Rosen, 2006) into the news-

production process. These are all things that move an organisation down the macro matrix (see page 234), into the realm of engaged and collaborative media production.

Comments

Commenting is the simplest form of user contribution, and an extension of the more traditional letters to the editor, which have been a part of print news for more than 100 years. Commenting systems allow readers to express their point of view on a story, and comments are then listed below the story, forming an adjunct to the primary narrative of the news. Comments are an important part of the

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appeal of the news for a notable proportion of the audience, and a robust commenting system forms a substantial part of the online strategy for a number of news organisations. The UK's MailOnline, which has among the largest readerships of any English-language news organisation in the world (Ponsford, 2011), relies on the comments system to drive participation and interaction, and to make the site 'sticky', that is to bring people back to the site. A good and interesting (or an outrageous and infuriating) comments thread on a story will bring readers back to the same story repeatedly, as the comments and conversation grow. A robust comment thread will keep a story on the main page of the site, even when the event that precipitated the story is well over (Pickard and Catt, 2011).

The downside of this strategy is that focusing too heavily on stories that will generate comments and traffic at the expense of news can downgrade the credibility of your brand as a serious news organisation, and encourage trolling, but it does create page impressions and drive advertising revenue (Pickard and Catt, 2011).

It is also interesting to note that editors and journalists still control comments, both in the moderation process, and in the decision to allow or disallow commenting on specific stories. Court stories, and ones on controversial topics (such as race), may not have comments permitted, out of fear of legal or social ramifications.

In addition to having comments on the page below the story, news organisations have also created separately branded websites and forums, where debates and conversation can continue without being specifically linked to the original news story (Quandt, 2008). Discussion forums were one of the first ways in which news organisations encouraged participation, and they still persist, albeit in changed form, in such sites as the Guardian's Comment is Free, the Daily Mail's RightMinds and Salon.com's Open Salon (although Salon recently closed their original discussion forum, Table Talk). These sites tend to consist of a combination of blogs and posts by journalists, as well as content created by trusted users and bloggers. The content on these sites is usually explicitly opinion-based and unedited but the discussion is generally linked to current events and news (some might say parasitic upon it), and the material is often extensively cross-linked.

Trolling

The word 'trolling', which has its origins in a fishing technique, refers to participants in an online community who seem to be there simply to create conflict and generate outrage. Trolls can drive initial traffic as people react to their presence with denouncements and outrage, but persistent trolling will also drive people away from a site.

Moderation and post-moderation

Moderation refers to the process of checking comments that users have posted. Depending on the story, and the news organisation, comments may be moderated prior to publication (which is the cautious, but expensive and time-consuming approach) or after (referred to as post-moderation). Moderation may change your legal responsibility for the comments posted, and any company policy should be carefully checked with the legal team.

Identity and anonymity

Identity and anonymity are constant issues for any site that solicits comments and contributions from the public. It is a sad fact that anonymity brings out the worst in people, and maintaining a balance

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Persistent identity

The development of a mechanism to allow users a single persistent identity across websites probably dates to Microsoft's Passport (now Windows LiveID), which was launched in 1999 as a single sign-on service (SSO). Since then a number of competing services have arisen, including OpenId and Disqus. Although an SSO is convenient for users, it can create concerns about privacy and security.

writing a comment that will almost certainly not even be read let alone published, and if it is published won't make any difference anyway, is a waste of that somebody's time' (Anonymous, cited in (Wardle and Williams, 2010).

The creation of social-network plugins for news sites which allow users to use a persistent identity across sites is becoming increasingly popular. Facepile – a plugin that uses people's Facebook identity and allows users to comment on and recommend stories to their friends online – is being used by a number of news organisations, including the Independent. The application allows for both the verification of identity online, thereby obviating some of the worst trolling and spamming, and the tracking of users and their friends through the network. Similarly, other social-media networks increasingly provide plugins

between an open discussion and a free-for-all is a constant battle for site managers. There are a number of strategies that can be used: one is registration (with or without payment required) and the use of verified names and email addresses; another is moderation: the checking of comments before publication. Identity is problematic and, as even Facebook and Google have seen, the web community can be very resistant to the idea of 'real-name' usage (Boyd, 2011; Doctorow, 2011). Moderation is time-consuming and expensive, and the delay in seeing their comments appear may deter users. 'Somebody spending 10 minutes

and extensions that allow news organisations to encourage users to comment using persistent identities, and to continue the discussion in other spaces. Although it is not difficult to create a false Facebook identity simply in order to comment, the extra steps involved in that process and the fact that Facebook itself does some basic checks on identity when an account is created are themselves a deterrent to random trolling. The use of social-media plugins, especially as a means of creating traffic, is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The thinking behind these applications is that if people comment using identities that are also used for broader social interactions, the worst of online behaviour can be reduced – if your grandmother or boss could easily see what you are posting, would you still post it? In addition, since more and more people maintain a social-network presence, and are consistently logged in to those sites, the need for users to remember and manage logins and passwords for multiple sites is removed, making it much easier and simpler for people to comment. There are concerns, of course, the main ones being

Spam

Spam originally referred to unsolicited advertising emails, but now refers to any kind of content that is advertising-based and irrelevant to the original intent. Comment spam is increasingly a problem for any site which does not require registration to use, and even for those which do.

Comment ratings

Allowing users to rate other participants' comments on a site is one of the simplest ways to both build community engagement and maintain some control of the discourse on the site. Rating systems vary from a simple up/down click, to more complex algorithms based on a sliding scale, and on the ratings of the users themselves.

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the same concerns people have about social networks: the loss of privacy, the use of their information and identity for marketing purposes, and the close integration of systems and information with a third party.

Moderation

Moderation, the management of comments to ensure that they aren't advertising, offensive or legally damaging (for more discussion of the legal and ethical issues, see Chapter 10), remains one of the main concerns regarding news sites' use of commenting systems. The decision to moderate or not is a hard one: it can be very time-consuming, but the benefit to the community can be great.

Technology has helped with this, especially the use of ratings and rankings. Sophisticated algorithms exist that allow site managers to work with records of users' interactions, and with other users' comments and ratings, to identify trusted users and commenters. Using a mechanism first implemented by Slashdot.org, but now common in discussion forums and online communities, a new user's posts will be marked for oversight by a moderator, but after a number of posts being approved without changes, the user's status can be updated to allow them to post without moderation – encouraging users to participate more until they achieve trusted status on the site (Bruns, 2005; Poor, 2005).

In December 2011, the New York Times revamped their newspaper's commenting system. Introduced at that time were a number of new features, including threaded comments, readers' picks (the most popular comments according to the users) and the creation of 'trusted' users whose comments do not require moderation. Users must use a Facebook account on the site in order to become 'trusted' (Ingram, 2011; Sonderman, 2011a, 2011b).

Speaking to the Poynter Institute, the New York Times's Marc Frons said of the changes: 'It has to do with increasing the sense of identity and reputation on the site, making it easier to find your social actions

Threaded comments

The simplest way to display comments on a story is to order them chronologically. However, creating a threaded conversation, in which responses to a specific comment are displayed linked to that comment create more of a conversational dynamic, which in turn creates more engagement and discussion. Systems can also be set up to inform a user when someone responds to them directly, bringing them back to the site to contribute again.

Real-name policy

In July 2011, Google introduced its 'real-name' policy which stated that users of its Google+ service would need to use their 'real' names, which is similar to Facebook's requirement that users have only one identity on the site, and that that be linked to their 'real' identity. Both organisations claim that real-name policies result in more civil discourse and discourage anti-social behaviours such as trolling on the networks. However, the policy was criticised heavily: for the heavy-handedness of its execution (some Google users had their accounts suspended with no warning); for their insistence that names follow specifically western-style rubrics of given and family names; their rejection of pseudonyms, even when they had been in use for years; and their failure to understand that anonymity can be a matter of security as much as choice. The fact that real names also makes it easier for trackers to follow and tag individuals, and to customise the marketing of products, did not escape the critics' notice, either. The policy has been relaxed since its initial introduction, but the question of online anonymity remains a controversial one, as it has since the early days of the web (Boyd, 2011; Doctorow, 2011).

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and follow others. That is the main thrust of it.' He added: 'At the same time, we want to be smarter about encouraging our best commenters, our best contributors, and figuring out how to recognise them on the website' (Frons, cited in Sonderman, 2011b)

Comments, while an important part of generating an online community and creating a space in which users interact not only with the content and its creators, but also with each other, remains, in the minds of many journalists, something of a fringe activity to the practice of journalism. Journalists, especially at news organisations still focused on newsprint and broadcast, still tend to treat comments as something after the fact, not relevant to their practice, and tend not to engage with the commenting systems or the users (Singer and Ashman, 2009; Lewis et al., 2010).

News organisations that do engage more with their readers, where journalists respond to comments and get involved in the discussion, tend to report a more robust and respectful online community (Binns, 2012). However, despite some of the rhetoric, it remains a rare comment or user that has any impact on the story directly, or on the news agenda.

User-generated content and audience-sourced news material

Although the phrase 'user-generated content' can be used as a comprehensive term denoting any form of interaction, collaborative production or engagement between the professional news producers and the 'people formerly known as the audience', within this chapter it is used to refer to raw news material that has been acquired by someone not normally employed as a journalist.

Trounced by amateurs

'Never before has there been a major international story where television news crews have been so emphatically trounced in their coverage by amateurs wielding their own cameras' (Anonymous in Allan et al., 2007).

As is discussed above, the use of material (especially images and footage) that has been gathered by non-journalists is not new, but what is new is the sheer volume of such material that is now available to news organisations. If the events of 11 September 2001 became the catalyst for a new kind of community journalism, one in which people harnessed the power of the web to share the kinds of information that they had access to,

and that they needed (Zelizer and Allan, 2003), then the South Asian tsunami of 2004 showed an even greater development in the power of individuals to share and collaborate on news stories, especially stories where the news organisations had been caught flat-footed, with few correspondents in place. However, the region's popularity as a holiday destination, coupled with the season, meant that there was a large number of tourists well equipped with cameras in place. 'Never before has there been a major international story where television news crews have been so emphatically trounced in their coverage by amateurs wielding their own cameras,' observed one British newspaper: 'Producers and professional news cameramen often found themselves being sent not to the scenes of disaster to capture footage of its aftermath, but to the airports where holiday-makers were returning home with footage of the catastrophe as it happened.' (Allan et al., 2007)

This footage became the basis of a large number of news reports and was reprinted in newspapers, shown on air and became thoroughly integrated into the coverage, although not without the usual

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concerns expressed about the quality of the material, or the wisdom of using material not created by trusted sources (Outing, 2005).

However, despite these reservations, things had changed. Writing in 2007, Stuart Allan concludes: 'From today's perspective, the ways in which ordinary members of the public – 'accidental journalists' in the view of some – engaged in impromptu newsgathering can be interpreted as signifying a tipping-point for online news, not least by opening up for redefinition what counts as 'news' and who can be a 'journalist' in ways which continue to reverberate today.' (Allan et al., 2007).

The forms of user-generated content

In 2005, the BBC set up its User-Generated-Content Hub, a centralised mechanism for receiving, sorting, processing and distributing material received from the audience. Currently employing a staff of 23 journalists, the hub processes thousands of bits of information every day, verifying and cataloguing images, videos, audio and text before adding them to the website, or passing them on to news editors across the organisation (Eltringham, 2011a).

The BBC is the most studied example of the use of user-generated content: due to its size, reach and reputation as a benchmark for good journalism. The sheer volume of material the organisation creates and uses, the respect with which its journalism is viewed, its status as a public broadcaster and its resource base make it the industry standard for the use of user-generated content.

Several attempts have been made to categorise or formalise our understanding of how news organisations find, manage and use user-generated content. Wardle and Williams categorised five kinds of user-generated content at the BBC: comments, networked journalism, collaborative content, non-news content and audience content, which they broke down further into footage, experiences and stories (Wardle and Williams, 2010). Jackie Harrison, also studying the BBC, broke contributions down into four types: unsolicited news stories, solicited content linked to an existing story, content solicited as forward planning for a story and watchdog content (i.e. complaints about existing coverage) (Harrison, 2010). Working with both of these typologies, it is possible to see user-generated content as fitting within one of three forms in a newsroom: ideas or suggestions for stories which are then picked up by the newsroom; material sent in to an existing story, whether solicited by the newsroom or not; and unsolicited material not attached to a specific existing story, thereby combining both elements of raw news material and a story idea.

Story ideas are one of the key ways in which users contribute to the news diary. Users contact the newsroom in order to inform journalists of what is going on in their area – whether an unexpected event or an ongoing issue. As with other forms of user-generated content, this is not new (news organisations have always made a phone number or contact details available for users to contact them), but the volume and channel in which these contacts are made is changing. Social media, comments and discussions all add to the more traditional direct forms of contact (letters, email and telephone) that individuals and organisations can use to alert the newsroom to events and issues.

The closer a journalist or news organisation is to their community of readers, the easier it is to link up with that community in order to find and tell stories. The more journalists connect with and communicate with their users, the more users will come to the journalists with stories – part of the culture of being an open newsroom is that it will encourage contributions.

In their study of citizen journalism in local newspapers in Texas, Seth Lewis and his co-authors interviewed an editor who agreed: 'I think we're very involved in it (citizen journalism). I think we

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Explore sources

'We look forward to finding new ways to ... make our reporting process more transparent and accountable, and when we can we'll open source the code so other newsrooms can show their work, too' (Shaw, 2011).

do a good job of letting people participate in the paper, in the content of the paper ... I think any time you get input from your readers, it's good ... We don't really make much of an effort to get citizens involved, but we get it anyway. I think it's hard to explain. Every newspaper has its own personality and people have always had ease submitting things to us, and we pretty well take most of their information.' (Hawkins, in Lewis et al., 2010).

Contributions to existing stories are probably the most publicly visible form of user-generated content. The BBC has a clear policy on this, and ends many stories on the web and on air with an invitation to contribute experiences, data and footage to the organisation. One of the most public occurrences of this was in November 2008, after the attacks on Mumbai that saw almost 200 people killed and a number taken hostage in one of the city's luxury hotels. Mark Abell, a British citizen, was one

To pay or not to pay

Should you pay for user-generated content? Some news organisations, such as the BBC, never pay for content or sources, but others may. Paying for images or footage may grant exclusivity, which can bring traffic, but it can be an expensive proposition, and not worth the investment unless you are certain that your source is the only one (and is genuine).

of those hostages. He contacted the BBC directly after the attacks, and provided updates and information to the newsdesk, who responded by using interviews with him across the coverage. Abell became both source and contributor and, in the words of the BBC's UGC hub editor: 'Hearing the stories directly from the people involved in them changed the way we reported events' (Eltringham, 2011a).

Many other news organisations make use of social media in a similar way to that of the BBC, several even having their own 'citizen journalism'

sites which present the user-generated content within a discrete site, not simply incorporating the content into their own narratives. Sites like Bild's Leserreporter, CNN's IReport and Avusa's Reporter.co.za are examples; these are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Opening up the news process, crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing is also discussed in Chapter 8, in the context of data journalism, but it is not necessarily exclusive to data journalism. Crowdsourcing, like many of the terms used in this book, is still open to interpretation but, in general, it refers to soliciting raw material from the users, the crowd, prior to completing, or sometimes even starting, a story.

Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing refers to the practice of asking the public for input. This can be anything from soliciting pictures to asking for help in the reporting process.

In October 2011, the Guardian newspaper did something that possibly no other news organisation had ever done before: it made its newslist public. The editors were clear about why they were doing this: they wanted the readers to contribute to the process: 'The idea is to publish a carefully selected portion of the national, international and

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business newslists on this daily blog and encourage people to get in touch with reporters and editors via Twitter if they have ideas. ... If readers can see that we've got a reporter looking into the police killing of someone with a Taser – to use a recent example – they might be able to direct us to other recent deaths or the definitive report on their safety risks.' (Roberts, 2011).

Another way of making journalism transparent is to be explicit about the origin of information, linking back to the original source. Journalists have always negotiated the tension between being absolutely clear about the origin of information and constructing a story that flows and is well written. ProPublica, the non-profit US-based investigative-journalism organisation, recently launched a new web feature which they call 'Explore Sources'. This creates links throughout the text, referring the reader to the origin of that piece of information in the text: 'While "Explore Sources" is just an experiment, we look forward to finding new ways to use it to make our reporting process more transparent and accountable, and when we can we'll open source the code so other newsrooms can show their work, too.' (Shaw, 2011).

The interview is the heart of journalistic practice, and it is access to interviewees (as well as the skill of conducting the interview, discussed in Chapter 2) that comes with the status of being a professional journalist. Opening up the interview process to the public can feel like opening the doors of the inner sanctum of journalism, but those that do use open-source interviews find the level of engagement and participation is heightened.

There are two main strategies for opening up the interview to a public process: making the raw material available, and soliciting questions from the public, often live, online. An online question and answer session, such as that used by the Guardian's Greece correspondent, Helena Smith, can be an excellent source of ideas, as well as a news product in and of itself (Smith, 2012). Writing up an interview is of necessity a process of editing, reworking quotes and ideas into a complete narrative. Posting the original interview alongside the final edited story can assist with transparency, and provide greater access and information for the users.

Newslist and diaries

The newslist, or diary, is the news organisation's plan of what they are working on, what stories are building, what the plan for the next edition will be. It has traditionally been very jealously guarded. Increasingly, however, news organisations publicise their newslists online in order to solicit ideas, comments and sources prior to production.

Verification

One of the most often raised concerns with regard to user-generated content is verification – online hoaxes are rife, from the easily refutable 2011 reports that Kanye West was dead, to the provision of faked images to news organisations, which can be harder to establish. Although there are only a few noted cases of faked material being provided to news organisations, it remains a concern: the embarrassment of having made a public mistake of that nature can be unpleasant.

The BBC College of Journalism provides some guidance on how they verify sources, chief among them being the ability to contact the source yourself, independently (2010b, 2010c). Authenticity and verification are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

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Curation and live blogging

Curation is both a research method providing the basis for more complete finished stories and a product in itself. Any collection of public online sources for a story (video, images, tweets, blog posts, comments and the like) could be called curation. Publishing this collection online turns a journalist's personal resource collection into a public one, and opens up the possibility of greater contribution and input from the public.

Some writers have likened curation to the traditional journalistic practice of copytasting – selecting the best stories for publication from the wire services – but, although it has something in common with

Curation

Curation is the process of gathering sources, interviews, comments and facts into a collection, and publishing that online as a finished product (and possibly also as a preliminary to another piece of journalism). Curation is different from aggregation in that it contains at least some of the journalist's own voice, and cannot be automatically generated. Curation is discussed in practical terms in Chapter 5.

that process, requiring similar skills in news judgements, it also has skills in common with source finding and newsgathering, especially within the social web. Finding sources and ideas within the social web is discussed in Chapter 2.

Curation leads almost directly to live blogging, one of the newest forms of online journalism. One of the earliest examples was the coverage of the Haiti earthquake at the beginning of 2010, although the practice of attending a live event and providing updates and comments on a live format has been around for some time longer, especially in sports coverage (Beckett, 2010). At the We Media conference in London in May 2006, the live conference was accompanied by an open live chatroom (referred to as the 'backchannel chat' – this predates Twitter) participated in by members of the audience and the wider public – the channel contained both reports of what people were saying at the conference, as well as comments and discussion from the audience. People participating in the channel then contributed questions and comments that were relayed to the panel. The chat logs remained as a record of the event, and formed a kind of precursor to the live blog.

Live blogging

Live blogging is the online equivalent of rolling news. While an event unfolds, a journalist collects and presents information as it comes into the newsroom, curating clips, quotes and other information into a constantly updated stream of information with the latest news at the top.

Aggregation

Aggregation is a more or less automated collection of information, tweets, facts and reports from the web, collected into a single area. It differs from curation and live blogging in that the editorial input by the journalist is minimal.

A live blog, at its simplest, is a record of an event, published live as it occurs. A journalist attending a football match, for example, would provide a written commentary online: the textual equivalent of a live radio or television report. A single, automatically refreshing web page, with material added to a running narrative with a time

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stamp attached, is created, allowing any user seeing the page to see the entire narrative, but with the latest material at the top.

The journalist can then add to the page as events progress, incorporating comments from users (often tweeted, using a specific hashtag – this is discussed further in Chapter 4), material from other sites or news organisations, comments, links, audio and video. The final live blog then stands as a curated, recorded narrative of events – not a finished news product, packaged and edited into a single narrative, but a comprehensive record, somewhat akin to the notes and research a journalist would have done prior to creating the finished product.

Live blogs can be a vibrant, engaging way of bringing traffic to your site (one report had live blogs providing nine per cent of the Guardian's hits in a month (Wells, 2011)), of providing rolling news in a format that has both the immediacy of a live broadcast and the record of a more formal piece of journalism. On the other hand, they can be confusing and anarchic, and some users may find them frustrating when what they would prefer is a simpler, more familiar, narrative:

Robert Mackay of the New York Times agrees that live blogs are not a substitute for a finished news product: 'You are more or less providing readers with raw material rather than telling them a story. You also tend to get swept up in the rush of events, and don't have nearly as much time as you'd like to think about what's happening and make connections, or write any sort of news analysis.' (Mackay, quoted in (Wells, 2011)).

Live blogging can bring out the best in the new forms of journalism, transparency, immediacy and interaction, but are not the only form of news available, and are not a direct substitute for the traditional summative, authoritative, structured news report. They are also not suited to all stories, and careful consideration needs to be given to the question of whether a specific incident or event is worth the effort of creating and running a live blog, and whether there is sufficient audience or content to make it worthwhile (Anderson, cited in (Wells, 2011)).

“ There is no structure and therefore no sense, and the effect is of being in the middle of a room full of loud, shouty and excitable people all yelling at once with all the phones ringing, the fire alarm going off and a drunken old boy slurring in your ear about 'what it all means'. (Morpork, 2011)

”

Conclusion

User-generated content is frequently cited as both the death and the saviour of traditional journalism. For news organisations facing increasing competition for both readers and amateurs the thought of free content can be very tempting; for the professional journalists employed by that news organisation to see all this material being created by amateurs can be a worrying development. Ironically, it is the sheer volume of amateur content that makes the journalist's job so important. It is possible to follow the hashtag of a news event on Twitter and get some idea of what is happening, but anyone who has done that knows that the sheer volume of tweets can be intimidating and overwhelming to anyone trying to find out the information that is relevant to them. Once you filter out the tweets that reference professional news content, you are left with a haphazard and chaotic collection of comment, observation and unverified eyewitness reports,

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and that's assuming the hashtag hasn't been hijacked by a fringe interest. The journalist is needed to create order out of that chaos, to select and verify information, to structure it into a cohesive whole, to link it with other research and other information provided by professional and institutional sources, and to make sense of it.

The journalist's role has changed, yes, especially becoming more transparent, but their function within society, that of making sense of the events that happen, of selecting, sorting and making meaningful the chaos of life, has not.

CASE STUDY

Ushahidi, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Queensland floods

When the rivers began to rise in the Australian state of Queensland in December 2010, journalists at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation were faced with the challenge of reporting events, and of working with the public and emergency services to gather and provide information and resources that could be used to save lives and rebuild the community.

ABC turned to Kenya, and to technology company Ushahidi, to provide assistance with mapping, using and distributing the massive amount of social media and other forms of information that were being generated as the floodwaters headed towards the urbanised coastline of the state (Bruns, 2011; Gosier, 2011).

Ushahidi, or 'Witness' in Swahili, was originally set up to map texted reports of violence in the wake of the Kenyan elections in 2007. Since then it has developed into a comprehensive suite of disaster- and crisis-reporting tools, including mapping, scraping social networks and interaction. Since its launch, Ushahidi's software has been used to report on and assist with a large number of events, including events in the Arab Spring, and the Haitian and Christchurch earthquakes.

Using a range of tools from Ushahidi, staff at ABC created a number of products, including a crowdsourced map of reports of electricity and road outages, evacuations, hazards, help and services, volunteer efforts, and places where assistance was needed. The map was continuously updated over 24 days, using verified data, eyewitness reports and social media data.

The Corporation solicited information from the public via their own web page, on email and on Twitter, as well as via Ushahidi's own iPhone application. Reports were verified before publishing. By the time the project was archived, at the end of January 2011, 1,500 verified reports had been published, and the site had generated more than 230,000 hits, bringing down the original servers and necessitating emergency backups (Gosier, 2011).

Since then, the ABC has reinforced its commitment to using and harnessing social media as a reporting and community tool, launching several similar projects. Their commitment to community

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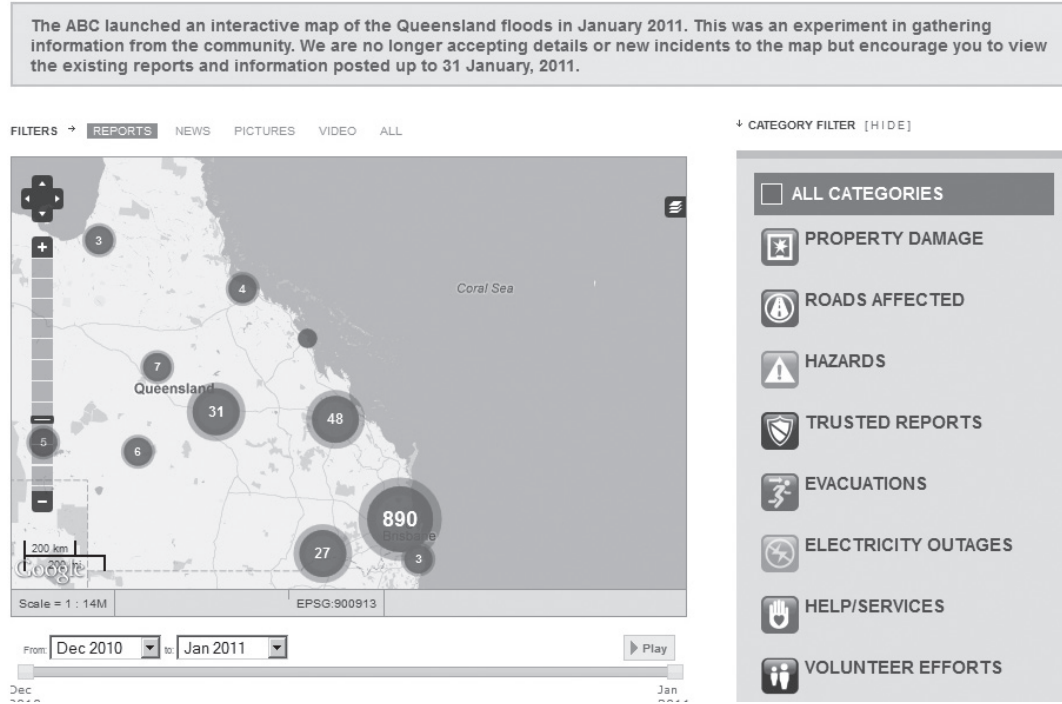


FIGURE 7.1 Picture courtesy of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Crowdmap. <http://queenslandfloods.crowdmap.com/>.

engagement, social media and reporting their communities remains clear. Ping Lo, an information analyst and journalist, highlighted these issues in a blog post for the BBC College of Journalism: ‘The ABC’s experience piloting Ushahidi during the Queensland floods sharpened some questions for the Corporation; in particular, around verification and moderation load, defining its key purpose in using the platform, training (of both staff and the public), and managing expectations’ (Lo, 2011).

Broadcasters (and, by extension, all journalists) need to think about their relationship to their communities in times of crisis: is it simply a reporting role, or is it important to become involved in activism? Should companies manage crowdsourcing and newsgathering themselves, or work with other community organisations? How does one do this without compromising one’s reputation and relationships? But, most importantly: ‘How can all organisations, community groups and individuals combine to produce the clearest, most reliable content possible – that is, minimising duplication and inaccuracy – at a time when people need it most?’ (Lo, 2011).

The networked ecology

Key reflections

- The lines between the journalists, the users and sources have been blurred, if not completely erased.
- Cultivate your community: they are both the source of your news and the audience for it.
- Maintain control of your product, and keep your voice and identity intact within the communal noise.
- What can a journalist learn from the comments on their stories? Should they participate in the discussion?
- Is opening up the news diary and conference to the users (as the Guardian has done) useful, or just a gimmick?
- How can you best prevent malicious users from abusing your community?



Readings and resources

BBC College of Journalism: an invaluable training resource for student and practising journalists alike. The section on citizen journalism, which contains discussion of user-generated content and the UGC hub, is particularly useful, even if you do not have the reach and resources of the BBC. The College's website is at: www.bbc.co.uk/journalism/ and the citizen journalism section is at: www.bbc.co.uk/journalism/skills/citizen-journalism/citizen-journalism-guide/.

Axel Bruns: Axel Bruns's 2005 book *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production* is one of the first studies of collaborative journalism. His ongoing work is discussed on his blog, <http://snurb.info/>, and his twitter feed, @snurb_dot_info.

Mark Deuze: Mark Deuze's books *Media Work* (2007) and *Managing Media Work* (2011) are key to the changing newsroom. He blogs and discusses his work at <http://deuze.blogspot.com/> and at <http://indiana.academia.edu/MarkDeuze>.

Participatory Journalism: *Participatory Journalism* by Jane Singer et al. (2011) 2011) is a comprehensive and seminal study of both the theories and forms of this new kind of journalism.

Alf Hermida: Alf Hermida, former BBC journalist and now Professor of Journalism at the University of British Columbia, maintains an excellent blog at www.reportr.net/ which showcases work and projects in social media. A more formal website listing his academic research is at: <http://alfredhermida.com/>.

The Poynter Institute: the institute, based in St Petersburg, Florida, has been researching and training 'future journalism' since 1975. The website at www.poynter.org/ contains resources on a range of journalism-related material, including information about training courses and resources. The section of the website on social media (www.poynter.org/category/latest-news/media-lab/social-media/) is particularly useful.

Collaborative journalism and UGC

Guardian: like the BBC, the London-based *Guardian* newspaper (www.guardian.co.uk) is considered a world leader in open and participatory journalism. The media section of the site (www.guardian.co.uk/media), the digital subsection of that and the PDA Digital Content Blog (www.guardian.co.uk/media/pda) are all excellent resources on the changes facing the news industry.

Pressthink: Jay Rosen's Pressthink blog contains a wealth of information and material by him and other contributors on the subjects of collaborative and open news media. It can be found at: <http://pressthink.org/>. Jay Rosen also tweets as @jayrosen_nyu.

News Rewired: Journalism.co.uk's recurring conference, News Rewired, covers issues in new and breaking news. The site at www.newsrewired.com remains an astounding repository of presentations, papers, discussions and ideas on the future of journalism.

>>Chapter 8<<

ETHICS AND THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Overview

The change in social relationships and networks that new technology has brought has also altered the way in which journalists are perceived by the public. This has put journalistic practice under far greater scrutiny. In addition, the ways in which private life is increasingly on display on the internet has meant that journalists have a greater resource of material to gather and use in stories, but also a far greater obligation to ensure that they use this material both fairly and ethically. This chapter deals with the fair use of content and information, and with the ethics of participating in these new social spaces as journalists and as people. Open journalism is also discussed, as an ideological stance and, to a lesser extent, as a practice.

Key concepts

- Code of ethics
- Fairness
- Honesty
- Open journalism
- Privacy
- Respect
- Secrecy
- Transparency

The new rules of engagement

Springboard

- *Respect*: respect people, and their content: you are an equal player in this environment, and what goes around comes around. Imagine yourself not only as a journalist, but as the subject of a story. Always remember your sources and subjects are people as well as material.
- *Impact*: consider the impact your words are having: on you, your colleagues, your sources and the wider public. You not only work in this community, you live here too. Could you face your neighbours, your family, your friends if they were the subject of your story?
- *Privacy*: people have a right to some privacy, even online. People have a right to know things that are in their interest. Journalism is a balancing act between the rights of the public to privacy and to know.
- *Backlash*: in this new media landscape, sources and audience are one and the same. Treating sources badly, invading their privacy or abusing their trust can have serious consequences in the form of boycotts and backlash.
- *Open up*: let people know what you are doing. People are not only interested in the journalistic process (make publicising your progress on a story content in and of itself), but can also contribute ideas, feedback and information to the story.

Introduction

The change in social relationships and networks that new technology has brought has also altered the way in which journalists are perceived by the public. This has brought all public figures under far greater scrutiny, journalists included. In addition, the ways in which private life is increasingly on display on the internet has meant that journalists have a greater resource of material to gather and use in stories, but also a far greater obligation to ensure that they use this material both fairly and ethically.

Professional ethics

Journalistic ethics vary considerably across global and organisational constraints; however, in most countries there are professional associations, journalism trade unions, industry associations and other institutional structures which provide guidance and standards for that specific context. Individual news organisations very often will have their own ethical codes to which journalists are expected to subscribe (and adherence to which is usually a condition of continued employment); smaller organisations would do well to adopt one of the codes available.

This chapter grapples with the space between ethics and the law, the new rules of engagement in a new sphere that is not quite public, not quite private. It delineates guidelines and best practices for working within the new media ecology. The authors, however, are not legal experts or lawyers, or experts in the regulation of the news media in any of the countries in which this book is being published, and none of the advice given should be taken as overriding, or more definitive than, the advice of a local and experienced media lawyer or expert. We have tried to provide here, not a set of absolute rules, but a tool for understanding the processes and ideas and, through that, the mechanisms for creating your own set of ethical and social guidelines by which to operate.

Ethics and the code of conduct

Ethics and the internet

Traditional ethical guidelines for journalists tend to assume a level of real-time face-to-face interaction between journalist and source that is increasingly not the case. It is currently accepted that journalists should always identify themselves in any interaction with a potential source or story. This becomes problematic when that interaction takes place within the boundaries of a Facebook group or Twitter feed. The requirement (in many countries a legal requirement, rather than simply an ethical guideline) that both parties agree that a conversation can be recorded is difficult to police when the ‘conversation’ is an online chat, or a series of comments and responses on a blog or website, and the recording may constitute a log file stored on a third party’s server.

Legally, the principle that any information posted online is in the public domain (for the purposes of quoting) may hold but, in practice, members of the public are often outraged or appalled when they find themselves pictured or quoted in the local news after an interaction that they may well have considered to be, if not completely private, at least not fully public. A journalist who uses words or images posted online in a story may have the legal right on their side (note the ‘may’), but if you have offended a member of your audience, or find yourselves on the receiving end of a social-media protest campaign, the legal right becomes a nicety, and may be moot.

Privacy

Privacy is an important legal principle, enshrined in the United Nations declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2011a), but it is not an absolute. A world where privacy was absolute would have no journalism in it – the rights of journalists (and, by extension, the public which those journalists serve) are always weighed against the right of privacy – sometimes in the journalist’s favour, sometimes not. This balancing act between the public’s right to know (and the attached rights of the journalist to investigate and reveal on the public’s behalf) and the individual’s right to privacy is where media law and ethics come into play.

Open ethics

Journalistic ethical codes have traditionally been set by elites within journalism, although there are increasing movements to creating ethics by social consensus, something described as ‘open ethics’ (Ward and Wasserman, 2010).

Public domain

‘Public domain’ most commonly refers to the copyright status of an artefact (see Chapter 10), but it can also refer to material that is not private, i.e. that can be quoted or reproduced for journalistic purposes, and therefore roughly equivalent to ‘on the record’ in traditional journalistic parlance.

Journalistic privilege

Theory regarding journalism ethics tends (at least in the Anglo-Saxon world) to start from issues around the liberal theory of the press, the ‘fourth estate’ and the ideology of objectivity which is closely linked to these ideas. What underpins all of these debates is the fundamental question: What is journalism for? How does it balance its commitment to inform with the requirements of making money and its own continuing survival? How do we, as journalists, balance the human desire for gossip with the need to protect individuals’ privacy? (Merrill, 1997; Friend and Singer, 2007; D.M. Berry, 2008; Ess, 2009; Ward and Wasserman, 2010; Whitehouse, 2010)

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None of this changed when the internet was invented. The overriding legal and ethical principles of journalism (or of life in general) were not altered when we began to interact online, but the fundamental nature of our social interactions did begin to change, in ways we couldn't predict, or even, really, control.

In one of the earliest books published on this new social space, *Life on the Screen*, psychologist Sherry Turkle explores the ways in which people construct 'windows' for their lives online, separating activities in online environments such as chatrooms and game spaces – known as MUDs (or multi-user dungeons) and MOOs (or MUD, object-oriented) – from real life, or 'RL'. This separation is important for the participants, and people are often surprised or shocked when their various lives and personas clash (Turkle, 1995).

Turkle's insights into human behaviour online are important to journalists, because understanding how the public perceives an interaction is necessary in order to behave ethically. Although she was writing in the early days of the internet and the World Wide Web, well before the invention of Facebook and other social media, her insights into human interaction online still have value. The question does remain as to how much, in the age of social media, people still distinguish between 'real life' and online interaction, and whether the two are merging into one, and further research is needed into these assumptions.

Privacy on social media

Muds, Moos, Usenet and BBS (BO)

In its early days, many of the participants and contributors to the internet were attached to universities or the computing industry. Despite the stereotype, many of the functions of the early internet were communication tools. Online text-based gaming environments, the massive discussion forums known as Usenet and smaller, private Bulletin Boards (BBS) were all the precursors to the modern social network: places where communication, identity and interaction were primary.

Social media moved online interaction from something participated in by a small minority of the population (largely those involved in the computer industry in one form or another), and often focused around specific subjects, into something that a substantial portion of the population in developed countries, at least, participate in on a regular basis, in all aspects of their lives. It is notoriously difficult to gauge the actual size of the online community, but reliable sources indicate that Facebook penetration in North America and Europe is near 50 per cent of the population (Socialbakers.com, 2012). Regardless of the extent of penetration, it is increasingly clear that online identity is a key part of life for people in the industrialised world, and in the globalised sectors of the developing world.

As social media grow, concerns about users' privacy are increasingly being discussed and related issues are now often raised in public forums. Initially, much of the publicity around social media's imposition on people's privacy was based on concerns regarding children online, and specifically their targeting by sexual predators. Books such as *Katie.com* (Tarbox, 2001), published in 2001 and widely discussed on chat shows and in the news, were the beginning of awareness of the danger a life online can present, but as the online community grew, further concerns regarding the boundaries of social media arose. Users became aware that the information they posted on the network was not as private as they thought, and as the broader social institutions began to be aware of social networks, the ramifications

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of posting all of one's thoughts and information online began to be apparent (Margulis, 2003; Viegas, 2005; Barnes, 2006; Boyd and Hargittai, 2010).

In 2002, the issue erupted both online and offline when blogger Heather Armstrong (better known as 'dooce') was fired from her job as a web developer for making satirical posts about her work environment on her personal blog. The word 'dooce' has now become slang for being fired from one's job for posting online (Armstrong, 2011).

Despite the lessons learned by Armstrong and others, and despite the discussion of the boundaries between online and offline personas and identities that permeates sectors of the online community, people are still often startled to find that what they post on a social network can be publicly viewed and used. Social networks, which make it easier to participate online, and which have far greater penetration than blogs and personal websites do, make it more likely that people will be caught unawares by the revelation of personal details.

In 2011, a student of ours was offended and angry that we knew that she had lied about being unable to attend class because we had seen her comments on Facebook thanking her friends for covering for her. It was pointed out to the students concerned that if this were a work situation, rather than a university one, she (and also possibly the friends who had lied) would have been fired. She insisted that we had invaded her privacy by reading the post on her 'wall', despite the fact that she had 'friended' us voluntarily. Even after the argument, she did not 'unfriend' either of us, or make any further attempts to block access to information about her social and private life. This naïveté regarding the limits of privacy on social networks remains prevalent, and something an unscrupulous journalist can easily take advantage of.

By 2012, the question of social privacy online had become mainstream, with the debate focusing on three main areas: the use of social data by companies for targeted marketing (see the furore around the various changes and updates to user licence agreements by Google and Facebook); the protection of identity online (particularly that of children); and the question of whether information (words and pictures) posted online can be truly said to be private or confidential.

Use of social-media source material

It is that third point that most concerns journalists – how much of what is said online can be said to be usable by the media? If traditional ethical and sometimes legal guidelines say that a journalist must always identify themselves when interacting with a potential source, how is that to be interpreted online? Journalists are not only journalists, they are citizens, social actors and individuals within this world as well as being reporters.

Note on social and publishing platforms

Although in this book we have tried to avoid using specific sites or applications' names too much, choosing instead to focus on the functions and uses of social media, it is important to distinguish between various kinds of social media, because the ethics and norms of using material from them will vary according to the functions and expectations of the user.

Material posted on social-media networks that are primarily publishing platforms, such as Twitter (and other microblogging services) and blogging platforms (Blogger, Blogspot, Wordpress, Tumblr), can probably be considered to be on the record, and in the public domain for quoting purposes: the

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default setting for those systems is public, and material published on them can usually be considered to have been already published. Photographs posted on these networks may, however, have copyright attached to them (see Chapter 10), and should not be used without permission. Pinterest, particularly, whose main intent is the collection and republishing of material posted elsewhere, is particularly risky in terms of copyright.

Networks whose primary function is not publishing, but forging social connections, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, are a more problematic area: users tend to characterise their interaction on these sites in terms of friendships or relationships, and may well believe that communication on them is private, or at least not fully public. If the material is publicly visible to any internet user (as in an unsecured Facebook profile, or a public page on LinkedIn), then it is probably fair to use, but if you need to ‘friend’ or ‘connect to’ a person, or make some kind of social connection before seeing the material, then the ethical boundaries become blurred. Are they aware you are a journalist? Are you lying or deceiving them in order to gain access to the material? Just as you wouldn’t walk up to someone in the street and ask them questions without first identifying yourself as a journalist, it is probably good practice to identify yourself as a journalist in search of a story when ‘friending’ or ‘connecting’ to someone on a social network, if that act will give you access to more information than that which is publicly available.

In a book published in 2012, in the wake of the phone-hacking scandal that racked British journalism, a number of journalists were interviewed regarding their views on the use of Facebook for information and sources in the wake of a story. Although a number of incidents had already occurred in which the press had been criticised by the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) for the use of photographs published on Facebook and elsewhere online, journalists persisted in their belief that anything published online was ‘fair game’, free to be used by the press (Fletcher, 2007; Cooper, 2012; Newton and Duncan, 2012).

Whether material lifted from social media can be used by journalists is not an absolute rule: the specifics of the story and the circumstances will have a bearing on whether the practice is acceptable. The ethical principle of identifying yourself as a journalist, and of warning people that their words are being recorded, should probably still apply and, at the very least, the people concerned should be contacted to confirm that they agree to have their words used.

The death knock, or ‘pickup’

Journalism often reports on death, and one of the tasks of a journalist covering a death is to visit the family and friends in search of quotes, pictures and other usable information. Visiting people at their most vulnerable is emotionally taxing for journalists, and requires a fine social sense, as well as nerves of steel. Every journalist remembers their first death knock, and although some find it a very rewarding task, many still find it harrowing (Cornies, 2010).

Death knock

The ‘death knock’, or ‘pickup’, is considered one of the most hated tasks in journalism. The cold call or visit to a bereaved family in search of pictures or a quote is one of the hardest things to do and, despite the bravado of old hacks, it doesn’t get easier. Small wonder, then, that journalists have looked for ways to make this less invasive, less harrowing for all concerned, and social media are moving into that gap. Facebook has naturally become a focal point for grieving families, and the creation of memorial pages for a dead friend or relative has become common (Moore, 2009; Cooper, 2012). Journalists may be increasingly tempted to lift quotes and images from these pages, in a practice sometimes

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known as ‘Facebook creeping’. Opinions are divided on this: some journalists liken the practice to lifting quotes from cards left at a public site, while others consider it out of bounds for ethical reasons – the people posting those quotes did not intend them for the media. What must also be considered is whether the practice is good journalism – several journalists think not, saying that the lack of face-to-face contact, and not knowing the relationship of the commenter to the deceased, means that the journalist will not get a true sense of the person, or the best possible quote for the story (Fletcher, 2007; Riehl, 2011; Cooper, 2012; Pugh, 2012).

Although some journalists in the studies quoted above expressed concern regarding the use of social-media material in the event of a tragedy, others felt no such qualms. One reporter quoted even felt that social-media material was better to use because: ‘A lot of the time you get just as good quotes from a SNS (Social Networking Site) because people are happier to say how they feel when they write it than saying it to someone’ (Anonymous, in Newton and Duncan, 2012).

In other words, people in social-media settings say and write things that they would not normally tell a journalist. While this may make for better quotes, and a better story, the ethical concerns cannot be dismissed, and the people quoted may rightly feel violated, and that their words were unfairly used.

One of the concerns regarding the use of material lifted from social-media memorial pages is the risk of offending or hurting the family and friends of the deceased. Journalists should consider the feelings of the wider public, and whether the news value, or public interest, of the story outweighs the potential discomfort or damage to the people involved in the story. In the case of a death story, the concerns of the family and friends should not be outweighed by those of the news organisation; in the words of Larry Cornies: ‘If family members ask to be left alone, respect that. Period’ (2010).

Criminals and victims

Lifting material from social media as an alternative or supplement to interviewing bereaved family members is probably understandable, and any offence caused can (it is hoped) be assumed to be inadvertent. The same cannot be said for material from social networks used by journalists to add to crime stories. When 27-year-old Rebecca Leighton from Manchester was arrested in connection with the deaths of five patients at the hospital where she worked, the British press, especially the tabloids, went straight to her Facebook account. The pictures lifted from the social network showed her behaving rather typically for someone of her age: hugging her fiancé, drinking with friends, mugging for the camera but which, in the light of the charges she faced, were used by the tabloids as evidence

‘Facebook creeping’

‘Creeping’ refers to the practice of looking through someone’s social-media presence without their knowledge or permission, in pursuit of information. It is considered unethical and is against the terms of use of many social networks, but it is used by journalists in search of quotes, contacts or pictures (Riehl, 2011; Pugh 2012).

“ To speak to and for real people means you have to meet them and feel what they feel ... How can I translate the true pain and emotions of a family if I rely on a picture and some stylised words that capture a moment in time from Twitter or Facebook? (Anonymous, in Cooper, 2012).

”

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of her debauched lifestyle – she was branded a party girl, and effectively tried in the court of public opinion. She was never charged with any offence, and threatened to sue several papers for defamation (Arcsott, 2011; BBC News, 2011; Cooper, 2012).

Copyright and pictures

Copyright is discussed in more detail in the following chapter, but the question of what you can use from a social network does not hinge on privacy alone. Photographs have inherent copyright, and the permission of the photographer (not the person in the picture) is needed to reproduce the image.

The same thing had happened to American Amanda Knox, who was at first convicted, then acquitted on appeal, of the 2007 murder of British student Meredith Kercher in Italy. Knox's postings on social networks, including Facebook and MySpace, revealed things that the tabloids took as damning: a violent short story she had written, and a picture of her boyfriend and co-accused dressed up as a butcher for a costume party were particularly emphasised. Even the normally staid

and conservative Telegraph newspaper rooted through her online presence, and even after she was acquitted, the tabloids continued to scrutinise her behaviour and lift comments and images from social networks, as well as using the more traditional techniques of hiring paparazzi to follow her

(Simpson, 2007; Cooper, 2012).

Under-age contacts

The law varies, but in many countries it is illegal or against the ethical code to interview or photograph children without their parents' consent. Social networks may also have age restrictions, but these are often improperly enforced. This creates a situation where a journalist looking for a quote online may inadvertently make contact with a child, creating another set of problems.

In many countries, especially ones that follow broadly Anglo-Saxon legal and social codes, the naming of victims of certain kinds of crimes, especially rape, is either illegal or proscribed by tradition. In addition, the police generally do not release the names of people who have died until their family has been informed. Social media, however, are less controlled and in many cases information that has been traditionally kept out of the public eye by tacit agreement between the mainstream media and the authorities, or by legal injunction, can easily be found online.

In 2003, basketball player Kobe Bryant was charged with the rape of a hotel employee. Within days of the charge being made public, the name, address and photograph of the victim were being circulated online. Some news organisations succumbed to competitive pressure and released the same information; others did not. As radio journalist Lee Bailey said: '[T]here are no standards online – it's like the Wild Wild West' (in Friend and Singer, 2007). More recently, the death of a teenager in Canada caused a similar controversy, with one local news organisation deciding to publish the victim's name against the wishes of her family. The editor, Mike Johnston, justified the decision to go against the family's wishes: 'Many in the community already knew the name so we decided to include it. Our readers who don't use Twitter or Facebook would have questioned who the victim was' (Alzner, 2012; Johnston, 2012).

In 2011, the question of whether information posted online can be considered fully public, even when a court order exists against its publication, came to a head in the UK. A series of scandals involving celebrities who had taken out injunctions against the news media to prevent information about their personal lives being spread caused outrage on social-media networks, and concerted campaigns were launched to make as many people as aware of the details as possible. As Jeremy Clarkson, who was trying to prevent his ex-wife from publishing information about his behaviour, put it: '(I)njunctions

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don't work. You take out an injunction against somebody or some organisation and immediately news of that injunction and the people involved and the story behind the injunction is in a legal-free world on Twitter and the internet. It's pointless' (in Seamark, 2011).

This defence of 'everyone already knows, so we might as well publish' is increasingly common among news organisations. Social networks have increased the publicity of information, and everyone within a community might well 'already know' the details, but that does not mitigate the newspapers' actions in publicising information. The defence that information is readily accessible online is a complicated one: in the case of a legal injunction against publication, the defence might stand as a valid justification for breaking the injunction; but in the case of the name of a victim of a crime, the fact that people on social networks may be discussing the details may not be sufficient justification for the news organisation to break the silence.

The principles and norms by which news organisations decide whether to reveal the name of a victim of a crime (or alleged crime) vary considerably across the world and among news organisations. The rapidly changing online environment has created something of a vacuum in terms of precedent and standards, especially when the relative lawlessness of some social-media environments, such as 4Chan, are considered. However, news organisations which operate within other social constraints (as businesses, as public enterprises, as organisations with access to some level of journalistic privilege) are probably wise to remain within the constraints which have governed their non-online activities. The distinction between online and offline is increasingly blurred, and applying differing sets of standards makes no sense. The internet and social media have brought a new, more personal and engaged, voice to offline news media, but the things that made offline media so valuable to society – fact-checking, integrity, respect and truth-seeking – should not be abandoned.

Although some journalists tend to persist in believing that anything posted online is 'fair game' (Friend and Singer, 2007; Cooper, 2012; Newton and Duncan, 2012), and although preliminary legal opinion (more in the area of employment law than media law) seems to agree, public opinion still seems to hold, in agreement with my student above, that 'what happens on Facebook should stay on Facebook'.

Public interest

Whether material published on social media is open to be reproduced or reported on seems to hinge, at least in the eyes of the UK's PCC, on whether the material, or the individual, is in the 'public interest'. In 2009, two cases of the use of quotes from Facebook were brought to the attention of the PCC. Comments made by a police

4Chan and Anonymous

If the internet is the Wild Wild West, as Lee Bailey would have it, then 4Chan is the rowdiest, drunk-est saloon in town. This online community, which is widely considered to be the birthplace of many of the Internet's most ubiquitous memes (ideas, including jokes, that become popularly replicated and adapted), such as lolcats (pictures of cats with captions attached), is also known as the home of the online (and offline) hacking and activist group Anonymous, and is an environment in which anything goes.

Public interest

Public interest is a common journalistic defence against accusations of invasion of privacy, or even lawbreaking. It's important to remember that what's interesting to the public is not necessarily in the public interest: public interest requires that the information be necessary for the public's continued participation in civic and political life.

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officer about the death of Ian Tomlinson during the G20 protests in London on his Facebook page were deemed to be acceptable, despite only being visible to his ‘friends’ on the site, because of the

Press Complaints Commission (PCC)

In the UK, the PCC is (at the time of writing, at least) an industry body that polices the behaviour of the print press. It has no legal power, but can insist member newspapers apologise or withdraw articles. Its ‘Editors’ Code of Conduct’ is considered to be the ethical standard by which UK newspapers operate.

public interest in the case, and the fact of the man quoted being a law-enforcement official. In a second case, quotes from the Facebook accounts of the survivors of the 1996 Dunblane massacre were deemed not fair use, since the people who posted were not public figures, and there was no public interest in publishing the information (Press Complaints Commission, 2009).

It is worth noting that the PCC did not rule conclusively that material lifted from Facebook was either acceptable or not: it chose instead to focus on the underlying story, and whether it presents a justification for the invasion of pri-

vac. The rulings are different, not because the actions of the journalists were different, but because the stories were different. The behaviour of the survivors of Dunblane were deemed not to be in the public interest; the comments of the police officer were: the matter of Facebook was irrelevant.

Backlash

The Dunblane survivors’ story still makes an interesting case study, because the response to the story shows another of the dangers of interfering with privacy online: backlash. As Mike Jempson explains, although it took three months for the PCC to rule that the story was ‘a serious error of judgement’, it had taken only three weeks before ‘the newspaper had already removed the offending article from its website and published an apology, in response to an online petition which attracted 11,186 signatures’ (Jempson and Powell, 2012).

Anonymous sources

To the public, it may seem that journalists rely extensively on anonymous sources. Strictly speaking, this is not true – the unnamed source is not unknown to the journalist, or the editor, just to the public. Guidelines for major news organisations such as the BBC, Reuters and the New York Times prohibit journalists from using material from sources that they cannot identify. Anonymity is further discussed in Chapter 10.

Social media have a regulatory capacity that is far more powerful than the rules or laws governing its use: in the Dunblane story, it was this social backlash that forced a reaction from the news organisation, not just the regulator. Any news organisation that finds itself on the receiving end of a social-media campaign is likely to learn quickly that the regulatory ethics are not as important as the social ones: being legally in the right doesn’t help when your audience and your advertisers are jamming your communication, and abandoning your sites.

Legally, material posted on social-networking sites may be considered to be in the public eye, and therefore usable. In terms of public expect-

tations, however, the risk of offending or causing a backlash is high – especially when it comes to Facebook – and the possibility of being hoist by your own petard, being attacked through the same social-media networks that you used, is extremely high.

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Setting professional and personal boundaries

One of the hallmarks of the networked social environment is the loss of the clearly delineated identities and personas people had. When your workplace is defined by the physical boundaries of the building in which you worked, and the times in which you were there, it is easy to determine when you are working, and when you are not. Traditionally, journalists have been held to the professional boundaries of the job, and the identity of journalist held, even when outside the physical newsroom – the public knew when they were speaking to a journalist. Most formal ethical codes of journalistic practice require the journalist to identify themselves as such when engaging with the public, and inform people that they are being quoted. In some countries, it can be considered acceptable to deceive someone in order to get a story, but this is usually only permitted in specific cases (i.e. where there is a public interest that is deemed to be more important).

These guidelines are easy to observe in a face-to-face world: it is easy to preface any interaction with ‘I’m a journalist, would you mind answering a few questions?’ In the networked social environment, however, this is more problematic.

One issue is deciding when you are a journalist, and when you are not (this is discussed further in Chapter 11). Traditional journalists have also wrestled with this – a good journalist never truly leaves the newsroom, and always has an eye out for a good story. When socialising with friends, for example, it helps to have an ear for news: however, it is a rare circumstance in which you would find yourself hearing something newsworthy in a context in which the person speaking was not aware that you were a journalist. If you do hear such a thing, there is an ethical dilemma which presents itself: can you use material given to you in those circumstances? Eavesdropping may be considered unethical, but in the offline world, eavesdropping that results in useful information is so rare that the point is almost entirely academic. Even if you overhear a comment on a bus, it can’t be used without speaking to the person to verify their identity, forcing you to make the person aware of your intention to use their words.

In a social-network environment, where the person may not even be aware you are listening or reading, and may never have met you, but where identity (or some form of it) is immediately apparent to any observer, these issues become more blurred. Do you need to contact the person to ask their permission, or inform them of their use in a story? What do you do if they refuse?

Although the ethical guidelines are not clear on this, many journalists agree that material that is visible to the public may be publicly used in any other medium.

Codes of conduct

Although the law is taking considerable time to catch up with the changes that social media have wrought, news organisations have begun to formalise the ways in which their staff engage on social networks. The concerns addressed in these codes of conduct tend to be two-fold: not bringing the organisation into disrepute through material posted online, and not misleading the public.

Bringing the organisation into disrepute through material posted online is not only a concern for news organisations, but of most modern employers. Social media guidelines for Associated Press, the Wall Street Journal, Sky News and the New York Times all proscribe the posting of opinions, or ‘editorialising’ (Halliday, 2012): ‘Sharing your personal opinions, as well as expressing partisan political views, whether on Dow Jones (the parent company of the Wall Street Journal) sites or on the larger

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web, could open us to criticism that we have biases and could make a reporter ineligible to cover topics in the future for Dow Jones' (Lasica, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Halliday, 2012).

The Washington Post agrees that the reputation of the news organisation is paramount, and that reputation is based primarily on 'objectivity': 'When using these networks, nothing we do must call into question the impartiality of our news judgment.' The guidelines also advise against revealing any information regarding the news production process, and posting any information that has not been cleared by the main editorial team (Hohmann and 2010–11 ASNE Ethics and Values Committee, 2011).

In other words, these policies expect you to behave in the social space the way you would in the professional offline world – as nothing more than a reporter for your organisation, a cog in the wheel, as it were, wearing your branded press card on your sleeve at all times. This may not be a realistic way to expect people to engage with social media (and probably not even in the physical world, either), and, more importantly, it is not the way the social network expects people to engage. The network expects that you will participate and contribute content, as well as using the environment as a source and as a place to gain audience. The danger in formal guidelines presented above is when they assume that the network is like the newsstand: that the traffic is one-way only, and that what matters most is the presentation, not the communication.

Other news organisations such as the Guardian and the BBC have a slightly more progressive approach to the social network. The BBC is concerned with its reputation online, but, first, it advises its staff to: 'participate online: don't "broadcast" messages to users' (BBC, 2011). The Guardian's guidelines, likewise, emphasise contribution and communication over the presentation of a unified brand on social media: the first two guidelines are: 'Participate in conversations ...' and 'Focus on the constructive ...' (Guardian, 2010). These guidelines demonstrate a more network-aware understanding of social-media engagement by big news organisations. As Meg Pickard, the Guardian's former head of digital engagement, puts it: 'It's no coincidence that the first word of the guidelines is 'participate'. It's a call to action for journalists not just to use digital and social media platforms as a way of broadcasting our work further than ever, but also to engage with readers over contexts of mutual interest, for mutual benefit.' (2010).

Conclusion

What these more progressive guidelines have in common with each other is that there is a greater emphasis on the autonomy of the journalist, and on their ability to make judgements on how they should behave in any given context. A traditional news organisation has a hierarchy, not only of people, but of content, and only content which has gone through the formal processes of commissioning and editing through to final approval is considered good enough to be published. The traditional newsroom has been likened to a factory: the final product is uniform and packaged. Social media has changed that: the identity of the individual journalist can be as important as the institutional identity, and material published on a blog, a Facebook page or a comment can be as important as material that has gone through the formal manufacturing process. In this environment, it is essential to trust journalists to make their own decisions, to act ethically, and to conduct themselves fairly and professionally in all circumstances, even ones we haven't imagined yet. A good code of ethics will reflect this, giving context to the news organisation's engagements with the public, and giving the journalists tools to enable them to act fairly and professionally with the public.

CASE
STUDY

The social-media backlash

The internet may not still be the Wild Wild West that some proclaimed it to be, but it is clear that the regulation, laws and traditions that govern offline media have not yet fully taken hold in the social-media age.

In 2009, the Scottish Sunday Express ran a story purporting to show the bad behaviour and ‘shame’ of a group of young people who had survived a massacre 13 years earlier. The story was based entirely on material lifted from social-media networks, pictures and posts from a group of mostly young men boasting about the kinds of things young men usually boast about – drinking and having sex, while using bad language.

The outrage was palpable. On the same social media which spawned the story, people shared comments and, more importantly, the contact details of editor Derek Lambie and journalist Paula Murray. People were encouraged to contact the newspaper directly and so many did that, in the words of one reply, ‘As you are no doubt aware – thanks to mass bloggers on the internet – we have been inundated with letters and comments. Many of them have been extremely personal’ (Lambie in Ireland, 2009; Vowl, 2009).



FIGURE 8.1 The *Scottish Sunday Express* prompts a social media backlash Picture courtesy of: www.andrewt.net/blog/sunday-express-smash-world-record-for-tabloid-limbo/.

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Formal complaints were made to the PCC, and they eventually ruled that the story was an unwarranted invasion of privacy not, it is worth noting, because the use of material from social networks is fundamentally an invasion of privacy, but because there was no public interest in the story, but the social network (those mass bloggers on the internet, as the editor clumsily put it) had already acted. A petition demanding an apology collected some 12,000 signatures, and two weeks after the original story appeared, it was removed from the website and the paper apologised (Jempson and Powell, 2012).

This is a perfect example of the way in which the social network works – a kind of self-regulating ethics system, as it were: the journalists made an error of judgement in plundering a social network, and the network responded in its own defence. That is not to say this is a perfect system – crowds may be wise, but they may also be mad. Anonymous, the anarchic protest movement spawned by the even more anarchic discussion forum 4Chan, show this: although they have brought attention to many injustices, including targeting the Fox News channel in the USA for its biased coverage, they have also engaged in actions that many would consider hostile to the social fabric (Saklofske, 2011; Phillips, 2012).

The social network may be a very useful source of material and stories, but it is also an environment with its own rules, ethics and expectations. You cannot expect to simply take from the network – you need to participate in it and contribute to it, and follow its rules.

Key reflections

- You are both the journalist and potentially the subject of interest. The public are both the audience and the source.
- Ethics haven't changed, but the social network has made punishing news organisations for ethical violations more possible. This can help to regulate the behaviour of journalists, but it can also become bullying and abusive itself.
- The boundaries of what is 'public' have blurred. Information that is findable may not have been intended to be publicly accessible, raising the issue of whether it is ethical to use it.
- The need to find a contact to complete a story can be overwhelming, and it is in those desperate moments that ethical (and sometimes legal) rules are broken. Make sure you know what your guidelines are, and what your personal limits are, before you need to test them.



Readings and resources

A number of books give a good overview of modern day journalistic ethics. David Berry's *Journalism, Ethics and Society* (2008b) is an excellent introduction to the practice and the underlying philosophical issues, as is John Merrill's *Journalism Ethics: Philosophical Foundations for News Media* (1997). Merrill is American and Berry British: these books tend to be specific to those contexts.

Ethics and the code of conduct

Friend and Singer's *Online Journalism Ethics: Traditions and Transitions* (2007) and Charles Ess's *Digital Media Ethics* (2009) engage with the changing nature of ethics in this new environment.

A number of media organisations maintain blogs and discussions of the issues that face them. As always, the BBC College of Journalism is an excellent resource on ethics and news productions. The main site is at: www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofjournalism.

The PCC is still in effect at the time of writing, although its future is uncertain. They maintain a set of guidelines at www.pcc.org.uk/cop/practice.html and previous cases and discussion can be seen at: www.pcc.org.uk/cases/index.html.

The American Society of Newspaper Editors' ethics committee publishes regular guidance and advice for news organisations on http://asne.org/Key_Initiatives/Ethics.aspx.

The Poynter Institute in Florida regularly publishes research and advice on ethics. A list of articles on the subject can be found at: www.poynter.org/tag/ethics/.

>>Chapter 9<<

TRUTH AND VERIFICATION

Overview

This chapter will discuss the importance of information verification in the online age, especially for journalists. Specific issues, such as hoaxes, fake identities, disinformation and astroturfing, as well as broader issues pertaining to authenticity both online and offline, are discussed. In this chapter, guidelines for protecting yourself are given, as well as broader social issues that pertain to questions of authenticity and truth in the online environment.

Key concepts

- astroturfing
- authenticity
- authorship
- credits
- hoax
- sharing
- trust
- verification

Truth and Verification

Springboard

- *Develop your instincts*: trust them. If something is too good to be true, it may well be. Everyone wants something: ask yourself ‘Am I being manipulated?’ Why?
- *Crowds are wise*: use them to help you verify information, identify images and keep your contributors honest.
- *Admit when you are wrong*: everyone makes mistakes, but admitting them is essential if you are to maintain your community and support.
- *Be cynical*: always assume someone is lying, until you are certain they aren’t. Check all your information, material and facts.
- *Know the landscape*: develop your patch, your contacts and your knowledge. It will stand you in good stead to develop those hunches.

Introduction

On the internet nobody knows you’re a dog – or so goes the punch-line to a cartoon published in 1993 (Fleishman, 2000). While it is unlikely that there are any actual canines lurking within the network, the truth is it can be impossible to know for sure whether people are what they claim to be online.

This is not a problem that is unique to the online world, of course, but the lack of face-to-face contact makes it particularly problematic. For the overwhelming majority of history, human beings have developed skills needed to judge whether someone is honest or lying, but these skills are all geared towards face-to-face interaction. Journalists have been caught by hoaxes offline as well, but the skill required to pretend to be someone you are not in a live in-person interview is considerably greater than that needed to create an online presence. The more journalists move away from on-the-ground, face-to-face interaction, the easier it is to be fooled or hoaxed.

This chapter deals with the truth – finding it, verifying it and ensuring that you are reporting the truth, or as close to it as you can get. Various kinds of mistakes, hoaxes, and the practice of astroturfing are discussed in depth, as well as strategies for verifying user-generated content.

Hoaxes, mistakes and lies

In late April 2004, the editor of London’s Mirror newspaper was approached by people selling photographs of British soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners. This was at the height of the second Gulf War, and the Mirror was known for having remained staunchly opposed to the war, and for attracting considerable hostility for that. The pictures were profoundly damaging to the reputation of the British Army and, after they were published on 1 May, dominated the news in the UK for weeks. As the story unfolded, though, it turned from an exposé of abuse by soldiers to a tale of an editor brought down by either his own hubris and lack of diligence (Greenslade, 2005), or by a malicious hoax (Mirror, 2004), depending on whom you believe.

Hoax

A hoax is a deliberate attempt to mislead someone, either for financial gain (although this could more rightly be called a ‘con’), for attention, or as a prank. A hoax is more than a simple lie – it requires planning and the intent to mislead.

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The editor of the *Mirror* at the time, Piers Morgan, was fired for allowing the pictures to be published without first verifying them, and although the damage to his career was debatable (he never worked as a journalist again, but he has done extremely well in television), the fall-out of this story was dramatic.

Frustratingly, nobody involved in the production or publication of the pictures has ever fully confessed the details, so it is impossible to truly analyse the failures in the process that resulted in the pictures being published. Morgan, in his memoirs, claims that the pictures were shown to the *Mirror* before the publication of similar pictures showing abuse of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers. The *Mirror* published their pictures after the Abu Ghraib images had been released, and some imply that the images were faked in response to the Abu Ghraib pictures. Although Morgan remained unconvinced that the paper had been fooled at all (Morgan in Brown, 2005), it seems clear that the images were staged, and that the paper was either deliberately hoaxed, or made a blunder.

Within days of publication, critics began pointing out errors in the pictures – the wrong kind of vehicle, the wrong kind of shoelaces, simple things that most probably could, and should, have been checked. When the paper apologised, they claimed that they had been the victims of a ‘calculated

and malicious hoax’ (Trinity Mirror, in Tryhorn and O’Carroll, 2004), implying that the fault was not theirs. Whether the photos were, in fact, a calculated hoax aimed specifically at the *Mirror* (in revenge for its position on the Iraq War, as some have implied), a joke gone wrong (pictures posed by soldiers having an incredibly tasteless laugh, and passed off to the papers by someone who thought they were real), or even a money-making scam (the paper apparently paid for the pictures, although nobody has revealed how much), the fact remains that in the eyes of the public, responsibility for ensuring that everything in the newspaper is true lies with the journalists and the editor. Even the *Mirror* itself agreed, in retrospect, claiming that the responsibility lay with them to prove the photos’ authenticity: ‘the evidence against them (the people who supplied the pictures) is not strong enough to convict in a court but that is not the burden of proof the Daily Mirror demands of itself’ (Mirror, 2004).

But verifying each and every piece of information that comes into a newsroom can be difficult, expensive and extremely time-consuming. In the highly competitive and fast world of a daily newspaper and the even more rapid one of 24-hour rolling news, that time may not be easily available, and the list of embarrassed apologies grows.

Deliberate hoaxes are not the only pitfalls that news organisations fall prey to: it is far more likely that they will be caught by a joke, or a simple misunderstanding. After the Al Qaeda attacks on the USA

The Yes Men

The Yes Men are a pair of self-proclaimed ‘culture jammers’ who create fake websites, and impersonate people and companies in order to draw attention to social and political issues. Possibly their most famous stunt was the 2004 impersonation of Dow Chemical executives and their announcement of a \$12 billion settlement to pay compensation and fund the clean-up of the Bhopal gas disaster. Several news organisations, including the BBC, were taken in by the prank, and later apologised on air (Bichlbaum et al., 2009).

Verification

Verification for a journalist involves not only checking facts, but also ensuring that people are who they say they are, that they could reasonably be expected to know the things they claim to know, and that all images and video are genuine. It is not a small task, but it is this that preserves the public trust in journalists.

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in 2001, several images circulated online, including one of what appears to be a young man standing on the observation deck of one of the towers as a plane speeds towards him. The picture was fairly rapidly denounced as a fake. It was in fact, a joking photo-editing job, intended only for the subject's friends, but that didn't stop a few newsrooms and large numbers of people from being caught by it (Hickman, 2001).

Likewise, a startling series of images circulated after the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 of people running for their lives as giant waves crash over the shore, and then, a few days later, of bizarre sea creatures supposedly washed up by the wave. Both sets were false, cobbled together images from a range of places and circulated on discussion forums and on email. Many newspapers were caught by the pictures and published them: the drama of the event and the timing of the pictures (a few days after the initial wave, at a time when public interest was at its highest, but not much new material was coming through) meant that the temptation to run them won out over journalistic instinct.

All of these examples show the risks of acting too quickly, or being caught by too-tempting an image or fact. There is always a risk in competitive journalism. Editors are constantly balancing the risk of being wrong against the risk of being last, or left out. In the online environment, fact-checking and verification are simpler and faster, but so is hoaxing – the technology has changed, but the balancing act remains (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996).

“ Journalists should test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. (Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, 1996) ”

Verify, verify, verify

One of the first rules of journalism is to check and double-check everything someone tells you. This rule applies whether you are talking to people in your local neighbourhood, or collating user-generated images and video from the other side of the world. The online environment changes a lot, but it doesn't change fundamental rules of human nature and information. Sometimes a story can be so powerful, so explosive, so tempting that the thought that it might not be true is dismissed; these are the stories that can damage a news organisation irreparably.

Verification does not necessarily mean that you need to have two separate sources for exactly the same information, although that would be ideal. There are a few key strategies for examining information.

Know who you are talking to

There is no such thing as an anonymous source, only sources whose identities are not revealed to the public. No source should be anonymous to the journalist. If a source won't tell you his or her name and some identifying details, then the information that comes from them should not be trusted, and only used if it can be thoroughly independently verified. It may be acceptable to agree with a source that their name won't be published and in many countries this is legally protected information. But you will need to know who they are, and do some basic fact checking on that information. It's not just about their name. Do they genuinely work where they say they do? Are they someone who would have access to the information they claim to have access to? The internet can make this kind of verification simpler – staff lists on company websites or social-media pages. These things can make checking on a person's identity much easier. On the other hand, they can also make it much easier to

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create a hoax identity: fake Twitter and Facebook accounts abound. Be wary of any accounts that are recently created, or have limited connections and friends.

If at all possible, arrange to meet in person at some point. Failing that, arrange a phone or Skype conversation, preferably one that you initiate. Information that comes in purely written form is problematic, not only because it is much easier to pretend to be someone you are not when voice and accent are not part of the equation, but because a lot can be told by tone of voice.

Why is this person telling me this?

The truly altruistic whistleblower is extremely rare. Mark Felt, the famous ‘Deep Throat’ who revealed the Watergate scandal and brought down a president, all for no benefit and considerable risk to himself, is not, despite the popular mythology surrounding these events and the practice of investigative journalism, at all typical. Most people who approach journalists have an agenda: they are attempting to use the news media to get something. This is not to say that they are dishonest or bad people (although some sources can be blatantly and manipulatively dishonest), but that it is important to remember their situation, and to consider how it might be colouring the information you are getting. A whistleblower who comes to you with information about corruption in the local council might be genuinely concerned about the state of local democracy, or they might be a disgruntled ex-employee with an axe to grind. Most likely, they are somewhere in between perfectly altruistic and vengeful; it’s the journalist’s job to negotiate this line.

Triangulate

Does this piece of information fit in with other verified facts? This is not about whether it is likely that the council is corrupt – that is a judgement call – but whether the specific details you have been

Company registers

In most democratic countries, companies and their directors are publicly known through a central register of commercial interests. It should be a matter of course to check on this information for every company you make contact with, and any discrepancies between what is officially listed and what you are told should be thoroughly investigated. Likewise, charities should also be listed in a register.

given tally with what you already know. Can all the parties (people, companies, institutions) be verified to exist? Are their relationships in the public eye? If you are told that the council is giving road-repair contracts to the brother-in-law of the council leader, check on whether the council leader has a brother-in-law, do the contracts exist and does the council award these contracts. Check the facts around the information, not just the information itself. The overall picture should make sense, not just individual elements of it.

Trust your judgement

This is both the hardest and the best way to judge a story. Does it feel right? Experienced journalists will develop an instinct for a story that ‘feels right’, that follows from what they already know. Journalists will also develop the ability to tell the difference between a story that feels true, and one

Truth and Verification

they feel should be true: in other words, they can separate their own beliefs and desires from the actual information, and make a genuinely dispassionate judgement. If it feels wrong, don't trust it.

Ask another journalist. Competition is tough, and the temptation is great to sit on a story and break it yourself, but ask a journalist you trust, your editor, or a more experienced colleague to take a look at the information you have, and whether it makes sense to them. Sometimes the desire to have a story be true can blind you to the judgement of whether it actually is true.

Verification and social media

User-generated content is a huge boon to newsrooms desperate for material to fill the ever-increasing news hole. Pictures, stories, video and audio sent from the scene of a story to a news organisation can add much-needed material to the coverage. However, user-generated content can also present a huge risk, as the potential to be misled, either deliberately or accidentally, is huge. A number of organisations that use user-generated content mitigate this risk by keeping user-generated content separate from other material, and running disclaimers around it. This may work in terms of ensuring the organisation is not embarrassed by any mistakes, but this two-tier system of news is cumbersome and probably limits users' interest in the material. It may be more time-consuming to verify material coming in, but it can well be worth it in the long run.

The BBC's user-generated-content hub is probably the largest one in the world, has a staff of more than 20 and receives more than 10,000 contributions daily (Eltringham, 2011a). At the BBC, and at other organisations such as Storyful and National Public Radio, verification of material sent in to newsrooms hinges on verifying both the person who contributed the material, and the material itself (Murray, 2011; Browne, 2012; McAthy, 2012; Silverman, 2012).

User-generated content

This somewhat clunky term is used to describe raw material, especially visual material, photographs and video, which has been produced by 'the public' and submitted to news organisations to be used in their content. It is distinct from citizen journalism in that it does not usually constitute a discrete news item, but is simply an element of one. UGC is discussed extensively in Chapter Seven.

Verifying the person

- Do you have an existing relationship with the source? This is where record-keeping, or requiring users to register with you to submit material is extremely useful. If you can quickly bring up a list of material they have submitted, and whether you have used it before, you can quickly make a judgement as to how useful the material is likely to be. Citizenside's unique 'social gaming' approach works particularly well here – they award users points, or levels, depending on how much of their material is used, and how trusted it is. The number of points a user has then becomes

Accent verification

During the Arab Spring in 2011, staff working at the BBC user-generated-content hub relied on their colleagues in the Middle East to verify the accents of people in videos and those calling in to report events. Accents are not an absolute measure of someone's location, but a video purporting to have been shot in Bahrain, where the crowd are speaking in voices more typical of Syria, should raise concerns (Murray, 2011; McAthy, 2012).

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a simple rubric for how trustworthy the material is. As Philip Trippenbach puts it: ‘If we get a picture from a level 35 user, well, it takes a long time to get to level 35 or 45, and the Citizenside editorial team know that user has demonstrated commitment to our values’ (in Goodman, 2011).

- Are they working with other organisations? Some of the best sources of news and information are other networks of users, local citizen-journalism sites or groups – provided you know they are trustworthy. This can be especially useful when you are dealing with a story that is geographically remote from you: linking up with a local news organisation in that area, and collaborating with them and their users is a good way to ensure authenticity of the material.
- Do they have a persistent online identity? Be careful of new social-media accounts: yes, they may have been created to avoid punishment or retribution, or in response to a specific event, but they may also have been created to perpetrate a hoax.
- Does the user have a record of uploading material from one location, or do they aggregate material from a variety of sources. Can you make contact with the actual origin of the video?
- Can you verify where they live? Check geotagging on images and posts, ask for a phone number and check its location, look at time zones and other identifying information.
- Can you speak to them? Voice is always better than text; you can learn a lot from someone’s voice or accent, and someone who refuses to speak in person is someone to be cautious of.
- Do other people know them? Ask your network: can other people vouch for them? This is where maintaining your contributor base and networks within the community is important even when there is nothing happening right now.

Verifying the information

There are a large number of strategies for verifying material, especially visual material, which is sent through to the newsroom:

- Check the metadata.
 - Image files have information about when and how they were created stored in the file. In image files, this is called the Exif data, and it can be viewed in many image-editing programmes, on file-sharing sites such as Flickr and with standalone viewers. Exif data is not infallible – it can be edited or deleted, and the wrong time or date in a camera setting can cause problems as well, but if it does not tally with what else you know about the photographer or image, it can be a reason to be suspicious. The camera type, for example, should match what the photographer tells you about their camera. Exif data may also be able to tell you if the image has been edited, which should also raise some concerns.
 - Amateur videos are usually shot from a single location – if a video has been edited, or spliced together, that is not a reason to reject it, but you should ask to see the original files.
- Check that the view tallies with other sources of information about that location. This is where Google Maps and Street View can prove invaluable. Google can provide a detailed image of the location that the images come from, and you can check that this tallies with what you see in the image. In 2011, when the army began its repression of protests in Syria, news organisations were flooded with video sent in by users from remote towns and villages in Syria – places where no western journalist had been. Storyful used Google Maps to verify geographic and architectural features in the videos it received – noticing distinctive buildings and landscapes that were visible in the video and on Google satellite images, and verifying that the information was correct (Little, 2011).

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- Do elements in the video or image match what you already know about the location – are signs in the expected language (and if you don't read that language, you may need someone else who can verify what they say)? Can you see flags or car-licence plates that would show the country or location? Is the sun in the right position for the supposed time and place of the video? Does the weather match reports given?
- Do any voices in the video match what you know about it? Is the language what you would expect from that region? Is the accent right?
- Call an expert. Sometimes the fastest way is to get advice from trusted contacts, professional or academics.

Crowdsourcing verification

Another strategy for verifying the authenticity of user-generated content is crowdsourcing the process. Andy Carvin, of National Public Radio, used this strategy to great effect during the series of uprisings and protests known as the Arab Spring. Carvin was already in a position to act as a kind of clearing house of social media information, having already had contacts with a number of people in the region through his work as a digital divide activist and with Global Voices. His Twitter feed exploded with information from the ground, some of it genuine, some of it not, and @acarvin increasingly became the feed to follow for those who wanted to know what was going on in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and the whole region (Katz, 2011; Kiss, 2011).

Carvin faced a problem, though – how to verify the pictures and videos he was being sent. He went straight back to the community that was supplying the material – tweeting the images back to his followers, making clear he was not sure of its provenance, and asking for comments and advice. His network proved to be able to do what he (or any one journalist) could not – check everything: from experts on the manufacture of weapons who could identify the origin of a particular mortar shell, to people who can distinguish an Egyptian from a Libyan accent, to people who can provide eyewitness accounts and even identify individuals in the images and footage (Carvin, 2011).

Crowdsourcing verification is not the most efficient strategy, and given the need for a substantial and reliable (or majority reliable) network, not an option for everyone, but it can be an extremely useful method: both in terms of verifying information, but as a way of maintaining and using the network, and operating within an open, transparent system. This transparency is essential to the continued functioning of the network, and the maintenance of your place within that network (Hermida, 2012b).

Verifying information received through social media is as much an art as a science. There is no one technical test that can be used to ensure that the material is genuine, just as there is no one test to prove it is false. A final decision is based on an aggregate of information, a weighing of the pros and cons, and, in the final balance, going with experience and instinct.

If you run with something that you are not sure about, be open with your audience: tell them you aren't certain. If you get it wrong, retract and apologise, and make as sure as possible that your retraction will get as much attention as your initial information.

Astroturf and disinformation

Aside from simple errors and deliberate hoaxes, there is a third kind of fake information being circulated online: astroturfing. The name is a play on the word grassroots, signifying a social or political movement that is based in community support, and the brand name of a kind of artificial turf,

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Astroturfing

Astroturfing refers to the process of trying to create the appearance of public support through the manipulation of social-media content and the media. Astroturfing is unethical, but common, and journalists should be careful of being sucked in by it.

used especially in sporting arenas. In the media world, then, astroturf is a manufactured social movement.

Astroturfing is a strategy most commonly used by unethical public-relations firms to create the appearance of public support for a corporate campaign where there is limited interest or appeal, but it is not beyond political parties or even whole governments to create the appearance of support where none exists, or to undermine a popular campaign or movement.

When a government engages in these kinds of tactics, it may also be referred to as disinformation – a word that harks back to the KGB’s campaigns of ‘black propaganda’.

Astroturfing by PR firms is not common, and, when it occurs, tends not to focus on the news media

Disinformation

Disinformation is the deliberate spreading of false information both in and around the media in order to mislead the public or journalists.

(who are either too cynical to listen to anything coming from PR firms, or all-too-willing to publicise anything given to them by PR firms, with or without the appearance of a public campaign). Disinformation is more of a concern, especially when it comes to covering events in repressive regimes.

The Chinese government is particularly known for doing this: the so-called ‘50-Cent Party’

of bloggers and commenters that appears online to support any activity or decision by the ruling Communist Party is believed to consist of people who are paid by the party (at the rate of 5 jiao, or 50 cents RMB (around 5 pence), per comment) to ensure that the dominant discourse online is always in favour of the party (Bandurski, 2008; Morozov, 2011: 130).

During the protests that erupted after the 2009 Iranian elections the western media was increasingly reliant on social media for information both from the defeated opposition party and from the streets. The ruling party in Iran appears to have created or motivated its own support online: after a few days of protests both online and offline, accounts sprung up on social media denouncing the opposition candidate, Mousavi, and expressing support for the incumbent, Ahmedinejad. That is not to say that Ahmedinejad did not genuinely have support among Iran’s population, or even its online community, but the timing of the support, and the way in which it was expressed, raised concerns about its authenticity (Morozov, 2012: 135).

For journalists, spotting the online disinformation can be tricky – the best defence against being fooled is to be conscious of the environment, its issues and its players. The longer you are immersed in a place or issue, the easier it is to notice when the tone changes: this could be the result of a genuine change in opinion, or it could be part of an orchestrated campaign. The more familiar you are with the political or social landscape, the more likely you are to notice unfamiliar terrain when it appears overnight.

Consider the timing: movements and public opinion grow slowly and exponentially – one, a few, many, and then a cascade. A spontaneous outpouring of one point of view, at a speed too rapid to have spread naturally may not, in fact, be natural. As with verifying user-generated content, be careful of social media and internet accounts that have been too recently created, and that have little other information or connections.

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Consider the words and phrases: people being paid or coerced into expressing support for a particular issue rarely have the time or interest to develop their own perspective on things. They will have been given a set of phrases and points to repeat, and will most likely repeat them with little variation. Just as you can spot the mass-manufactured signs at a protest, you can usually tell the pre-written posts and tweets.

This is not to say that every sign of disagreement should be taken as an attempt to manipulate the social-media landscape. People engaged in contentious political campaigns sometimes seem all-too-willing to accuse their opponents of engaging in astroturfing or disinformation, but the fact is that it is rare. It is expensive and time-consuming to construct such a campaign and, in the absence of known political conflicts, it is unlikely. That said, journalists should always approach any outpouring of support for any position with a certain measure of cynicism: not believing it until you've verified it is just good practice.

Verifying Wikipedia

Wikipedia has become somewhat notorious as a source of disinformation and mistakes. The crowd-sourced encyclopaedia which anyone can edit has become something of a battleground for competing ideas, not to mention pranksters and hoaxers. Although Wikipedia should not be the primary source for a news story, it can be useful as a way to check facts and supplementary information quickly.

Wikipedia may be vulnerable to malicious disinformation, but the transparency with which Wikipedia is constructed, though, is invaluable to anyone wishing to use it as a source: all edits and changes to any site can be seen by any visitor to the site. By clicking on the 'View History' link on the top right of any page, you can see a list of changes that have been made to the article, when and by whom. It is easy to see older versions of the page, or even revert the whole article to a previous version. Most articles simply list a series of minor edits (grammar, style, etc.), additions of more information or citations, and occasional back-and-forth additions and deletions of minor points. Any page that has been substantially edited recently should be treated with caution, especially if the edits substantially change the gist of the material, or specific factual information. 'All Wikipedia articles should be fully cited as well, so a simple click to the original source should clarify any concerns' (Shaw, 2008).

Wikipedia

Experienced Wikipedia users know they have to be careful. 'which is what good reporting is supposed to be about anyway' (Wales, in Shaw, 2008: 45).

Conclusion

Journalists are trusted by the public to find out and report the truth. In traditional newsgathering this may well have involved access to people at the highest levels of government or industry, rare and closely guarded contacts who provided scarce information. In this new social-media environment, information abounds, and the journalist's role has gone from ferretting out tiny pieces of fact to sorting through mountains of information to find the truth.

The nature of the role may have changed, but the point of it has not, and the skills needed have not changed as much as we would think. Technical skills are useful, but this is not about your understanding of networking technology, imaging software or digital maps. This is still, fundamentally, about

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your understanding of the environment, your contacts, and how well they trust you (and you them), and your instinct for human nature.

The same rules apply: ask everything twice; ask as many people as possible; think carefully about what you have been told and weigh it against the bigger picture, the things you already know. If you smell smoke, there's probably some kind of a fire. If it's too good to be true, it may well be; in the final accounting: be honest. If you don't know, say so; if you were wrong, apologise and correct it. And ask more questions next time.

CASE STUDY

The kidnapping that wasn't

When a major story breaks in a country in which there is not a substantial foreign media presence, whether because of prior lack of interest, or active repression of the foreign media, it can be difficult to find sources for stories. This is where social media are particularly useful: it is a rare place in which there are not already bloggers, tweeters and activists who can be used as sources, stringers or contacts.

When the violence of the Arab Spring spread to Syria in early 2011 news organisations went straight online to find material that could add colour and human interest to the hard-news reports of protest and retaliation that were coming out of the country. One site they found was a blog, 'A Gay Girl in Damascus', which told the story of a young lesbian who had recently moved back to Syria from the USA, and launched her blog just months before the uprising began. The blog was in English, spoke about her personal life and her passionate interest in activist politics, and, in retrospect, seemed too perfectly tailor-made for the foreign media, which devoured it.

A post in which she described her father facing down the police, who had come to arrest her, had everything: drama, heroism and a little bit of titillation, as the policemen discussed in detail the things she supposedly did with her girlfriends, proved to be a hit, and was widely reported on and reposted. Then a cousin reported that she had been kidnapped by the state, and the news coverage kicked into high gear. Bloggers, journalists and activists who had made contact with her over the previous months began frantically trying to contact her, or her family, to find out what was happening, to help, to put pressure on the authorities.

And that's where the story began to fall apart. As the social networks began to scramble to find her, it became increasingly clear that nobody had ever met her, or had even heard her voice. A picture of her which had been circulating online gained even more traction in the wake of the kidnapping, and when the person in the picture, a woman from London, came forward and denied having any contact with the blog, it began to be clear that things might not be as they seem.

Andy Carvin was one of the people who began to ask questions, and, despite some hostility from other members of the social network, persisted. Nobody had met her in person, not even her girlfriend, who admitted in an interview with NPR that the relationship had been entirely virtual. Other gay activists in Damascus denied having met her in the very small gay community in that city. The Guardian's undercover journalist in Damascus admitted that she had not spoken to her in person or on the phone, but had conducted the interview on email.

As the questions grew, eventually, on 12 June, a confession was posted on the Gay Girl in Damascus blog: Amina was an American called Tom McMaster, living in Edinburgh (Henry, 2011; Mackey, 2011; Steger, 2011).

In the wake of the hoax, a number of questions have been asked. How did this happen? The blog was extremely well-constructed and written, by a man with a graduate degree in Arab studies and

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considerable familiarity with the parts of the world discussed on the blog. In retrospect, his unwillingness to speak on the phone, or on Skype, is something of a red flag, but other aspects of the blog ring true. In fact McMaster had been constructing this online persona for some five years, and it was not only the media who had been fooled, unfortunately. Whether McMaster intended to fool the news media is unclear – he claimed to have been working on a work of fiction, and when the attention got too much, decided to wind down the blog by having Amina disappear. If true, this displays considerable lack of insight on his part into how the news media functions (Polymuche, 2011).

Many of the guidelines discussed in this chapter have been codified and articulated as a result of this hoax: the importance of hearing someone's voice; the importance of examining metadata on images; the importance of fact-checking, especially when a story seems too good to be true, too perfect for the news hole. A journalist should always be sceptical, always double-check the facts, and the people, and social media make no difference to that.

Key reflections

- The need for verification hasn't changed, but the mechanisms of it have. The more remote your sources are, the harder they can be to verify.
- Use the network. Crowdsourcing verification can be an excellent strategy, and being transparent about your concerns from the start can help to mitigate damage.
- Everyone wants something: always ask yourself 'Why is this person telling me this?' and consider their information accordingly.
- How much obligation do news organisations have to verify every piece of information that comes in through user-generated content?
- Is it enough to simply mention that the information is unverified, or that the video has not been authenticated? Will users understand?
- Different organisations have different strategies: from full teams of fact-checkers at the New Yorker magazine, to publishing almost anything with disclaimers indicating it has not been checked. What are the advantages and disadvantages of these strategies?



Readings and resources

Craig Silverman runs the news blog www.regrettheerror.com in which he discusses corrections and correction policies. His other writing, including that on internet verification and social media, is at Craigsilverman.ca, and his columns for the Poynter Institute are archived at: www.poynter.org/author/craigsilverman/.

Andy Carvin is generally considered the pioneer of crowdsourced verification. He tweets (and retweets, prolifically) at [@acarvin](https://twitter.com/acarvin). His personal blog is at www.andycarvin.com/ and he maintains an archive of live blogs at <http://storify.com/acarvin/>.

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Storyful is a crowdsourced news operation that has a detailed discussion of its verification processes at <http://blog.storyful.com/category/social-journalism-2/verification/>.

BBC College of Journalism provides advice on verifying user-generated content at: www.bbc.co.uk/journalism/skills/citizen-journalism/bbc-ugc-hub/.

Poynter Institute gives training and advice on a number of areas for journalists. An archive of their material on verifying information and material can be found at: www.poynter.org/tag/verification/.

Alfred Hermida at the University of British Columbia researches and blogs about the impact of social media on journalism. His blog is at: www.reportr.net/ is an excellent resource of current thinking and research.

>>Chapter 10<<

JOURNALISM AND THE LAW

Overview

This chapter deals with the changes in law that have arisen in response to social-journalism techniques and new-media technologies. It sets out the attempts by the network community to respond both to the changes, and to the law's response. These frame the fundamental questions of what constitutes journalism, and who is a journalist, and what rights and obligations arise from those questions.

Key concepts

- Aggregation
- Codes of conduct
- Copyleft
- Copyright
- Creative Commons
- Curation
- Fair use
- Journalistic identity
- Legal codes
- Regulation

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Springboard

- *Privilege*: you have a particular privilege by virtue of being a journalist. Respect the people who grant you that privilege: the public.
- *Be fair*: if you use someone else's ideas or material, give credit and payment where applicable.
- *Honour requests*: if someone asks you to hold off on publishing something, or tells you something off the record, honour that. If you feel it is imperative that you publish, do so knowing you may never be able to use that source again.
- *The web is a public place*: assume that all communication will be made public; assume that everything you do online will remain online for ever.
- *Professional status*: what does it mean to be a 'professional journalist', and who decides whether you are?

What is a journalist?

For almost as long as there have been journalists, there has been struggle over journalistic identity. What, exactly, are we? As actors in society, newsmakers have laid claim to being culturally and socially more significant than other industries, trades and professions. The role of finding out what is going on and reporting it to others is usually deemed socially significant, and important to the function of government, especially in democratic societies, where the news industry is often characterised as a 'fourth estate', a watchdog on the other estates of government, religion and the judiciary.

This claim to importance has resulted in considerable privileges for the news industry and its practitioners – the right to observe the process of government, specific kinds of access to the apparatus

of state and to societal elites, rights to free comment, and the power to confer specific rights of anonymity on sources. These rights are not universal, and are granted, abused and taken away in different ways in different countries, but the principle that journalists, because of their important function in society, are somehow different from other people remains in place, and 'journalistic privilege' remains a constant, albeit one under considerable pressure, and open to interpretation.

One of the ways in which that privilege has been created is through specific skills that are believed to be the special domain of journalists: shorthand and objectivity/balance are usually considered key (Allan, 2010: 23). Shorthand is rarely taught these days (except in journalism schools in the UK, where the standing rule against the use of recording devices in courtrooms makes it a necessity), which leaves the

Journalistic privilege

The privilege accorded to journalists allows them access to information and people in order to carry out the journalistic function of reportage.

Objectivity

Objectivity is the supposed completely neutral and balanced perspective that only a trained journalist has. Although the term is heavily contested, and many academics and journalists deny its relevance, it remains a key part of the ideology of journalism in the public discourse.

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ability to present information from multiple sources as an objective and balanced ‘truth’ as the main skill which journalists have that makes them different from society.

Journalistic identity, then, traditionally arises from three areas: the process of journalistic production (interviewing, access to sources, aggregation of information); the forms of journalistic output (the traditional pyramid – or inverted pyramid, depending on which side of the Atlantic you are – story form, the neutral stance, the absence of the subjective voice); and identity, which derives from access to the formal and industrialised news industry.

New technologies changed all of this: regulation, and the prohibitive cost of distribution, were the first to go. These effectively removed the formal news sector’s monopoly on the distribution of news. The next barriers to fall were the formal voice and structure of news stories: new voices arose in the form of bloggers and forum posters. It can be argued that the process of sourcing was the last to go: it was not until large amounts of public information began to coalesce online that the possibility existed for people not attached to the news industry to aggregate information and create news.

This is not to say, of course, that traditional news outlets, forms and processes do not still exist (they do), and do not still dominate public discourse in many ways, but that the definition of what a journalist is, and what they do, is under increasing tension, and is beginning to crack and fragment as a result of that tension.

Journalistic privilege

In the Anglo-Saxon world, at least, the notion of journalistic privilege remains enshrined in law to some extent. This privilege essentially allows a journalist to offer a source confidentiality – that is, the journalist cannot be compelled to reveal the identity of the source, even by a court of law. This privilege is unique to a handful of professions: lawyers, religious confessors and journalists, and, although it is something most journalists will never need to test, remains an important part of the protections accorded to journalists.

There is no clear consensus within the legal frameworks of any of the Anglo-Saxon countries as to whether journalistic privilege extends to bloggers, social-media commentators or informal news organisations. A number of early rulings in various courts seemed to indicate that bloggers and informal journalists do have journalistic privilege, but, recently, that has changed.

Bloggers vs journalists

The debate around who is a journalist is most often framed as the conflict between ‘bloggers’ and ‘journalists’. Although this is a somewhat dated dichotomy, it remains a useful benchmark of the debate, since to some extent it clarified the distinctions between formal and informal journalism.

The waters became muddier, however, as social media greatly expanded the range of opportunities for amateur journalists to publish information, and as news organisations began to move into this new, unregulated space. Increasingly, the distinction between who is or is not a journalist is feeling irrelevant, at least to large parts of the population, but, given that there remain substantial privileges and obligations that accrue to journalists, it remains an unresolved tension.

The tension revolves around a number of areas – the legal rights of journalists, access and obligations.

Bloggers

Blog is an abbreviation of ‘weblog’, originally a log of daily life, information and material collected online, usually by an amateur. The word and practice have changed considerably, but ‘blogger’ is still used to refer to a casual or unprofessional online content producer, and contrasted with the ‘professional’ journalist.

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Access

Access to sources is traditionally one of the ways by which a journalist's credibility and experience can be measured. Access can mean both the trust built up between a journalist and the elites within their beat, or patch (such as a long-trusted political reporter to whom no governmental doors are closed), or to the expertise and experience which gives the journalist the understanding of an issue or event which is needed to make sense of it for the audience.

Access can be a result of years of experience, but it can also be the result of a formal process of credentialing and verification. Despite the decreasing formality of the news sector, the erosion of the power and influence of formal news institutions, and the rise of informal and amateur news outlets and creators,

elite structures within society often still rely on formal credentials from journalists before access is granted.

Courts, police officers, political and sporting events, and press conferences may all be off-limits to people deemed to be 'non-journalists', with the onus increasingly on the journalists to prove they are such (Niles, 2011). Having formal access can make it easier to be first with the news, but whether that matters is a separate question.

Embargo

An embargo is a formal request from an organisation to a news outlet to 'hold' a piece of information until a specific date or time. They are not legally binding, but breaking an embargo may damage your chances of further access to information.

Chatham House rule

The Chatham House rule says that any information discussed in a specific meeting or event may be used, provided no identification is given as to its provenance. Although it was devised by the Chatham House think-tank in London for its own meetings, the phrase and the rule are still widely used in any public discussion that should be considered 'off the record'.

Obligations

Official journalistic status does not only confer privileges, it carries obligations, ones with sometimes harsh penalties for breaking.

Embargoes

An embargo is a formal request from an organisation to a news outlet to 'hold' a piece of information until a specific date or time. Information may be provided early to news organisations in order to give them time to prepare reports in advance; the

agreement is that they will not publish anything until after the embargo has passed. Information may be embargoed for a variety of reasons: companies wanting to wait until the stock exchange is closed, for example. An embargo is not legally binding, but it is a traditional mark of respect within the news industry that they are not broken.

Social media have damaged the embargo, to the point that public-relations experts advise clients not to request them, but to expect that information will be released to the public as soon as it has been released from the company (Kennedy, 2012). As one expert puts it: 'asking for a public embargo in the world of social media is like taking Kate Middleton into a room full of photographers and saying "don't shoot"' (Oakes-Ash, 2011: 1).

For a journalist with privileged access, though, breaking an embargo can prove threatening to your access: you may find yourself cut off from further material from that source. Private-company

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embargoes are simply a matter of respect and trust – there is unlikely to be any legal ramification for breaking one. There are other forms of restrictions that journalists are expected, and sometimes compelled, to honour.

Elections

In Canada and France, among other countries, election results are released slowly, as the time for the closure of polling stations is different across time zones. It has always been the case in Canada that news organisations are forbidden from publishing the results of polls in the east of the country until the polling stations in the west are closed, so that rumours of preliminary results do not skew the voting that has not yet taken place. Before the advent of social media and the internet, the only organisations that were capable of breaking this restriction were broadcasters, and the threat of financial and legal sanctions on them was enough to have them keep the rule. However, the rule was never clearly articulated as one that prevented private citizens from discussing events. As the boundaries between private discussion and public journalism began to be eroded, these restrictions came under pressure. In the 2011 elections, social-media users were discussing results hours before polling stations closed in the west, using the hashtag #tweettheresults and fruit and flower-based coded language (Talaga and Fong, 2011).

In the French presidential election in 2012, the announcement of the winner was embargoed until 8 p.m., but users on Twitter and other social-media sites used coded language ('Netherlands' for eventual winner François Hollande) and the hashtag #radiolondres (a reference to the government in exile of Charles de Gaulle) to discuss the results before they were officially allowed to (Bounea, 2012).

Court reporting

Tweeting and other forms of reporting from court is another area where the law is having to rapidly confront the realities of technological change. In most democratic countries, access to the proceedings of court cases is the public's right, and courts are a prime source of stories for news organisations, especially local ones. In a high-profile case, interest can be international, and often courtrooms are packed with journalists giving play-by-play for their audiences (Morris, 2011). Again, traditionally, news organisations and their representatives are given special privileges to report on proceedings: although there is an assumption that they are aware of the requirements of contempt of court, and therefore can be trusted not to prejudice the outcome of the trial. The changing technology of journalism, as well as the changing definition of who is a journalist, has resulted in the legal systems having to revisit assumptions that go back more than 100 years.

In recent guidance issued by the Chief Justice of England and Wales, the right to tweet or use live, text-based communications was given to all 'representatives of the media', but not to the general public, since those representatives do 'not pose a danger of interference to the proper administration of justice in the individual case' (Lord Judge, 2011). The Chief Justice does not identify

Contempt of court

In the UK (and other countries with similar legal systems), contempt of court is an offence which carries stiff penalties. Contempt of court can be triggered by either disobeying a specific instruction from the court, or publishing information likely to prejudice a trial's outcome.

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who constitutes a ‘representative of the media’, or what ‘the media’ is, which leaves the judgement open to interpretation by individual judges, and possibly to their own legal proceedings (Rozenberg, 2011).

In Canada, the legal system has swung the other way, and at least one trial has been closed to the general public because of the fear that unscrupulous journalists may publish material that will prejudice the trial. Accredited journalists were permitted to attend the Calgary trial of Dr Aubrey Levin, but only Canadian ones, who could be bound by Canadian law to honour restrictions on the publication of evidence. The issue in this case was that Levin is South African (and has a considerable history and notoriety in that country), and there would have been possibly more interest in the trial there than in Canada, but South African journalists could not in the view of Judge Bob Wilkins be trusted not to prejudice the trial, through publication of material on social media and the internet which could be accessible to the Canadian public and jury (Martin, 2011).

Aggregation, quoting, fair use and copyright

As the profession of journalism changes, the specific process of turning raw information into a news product has come under scrutiny, and the question of when data becomes journalism remains fundamental to the debate.

On a continuum in which raw information exists on the top, and formally presented packaged news exists on the bottom (analogous to the vertical axis of the matrix presented in Chapter 1), the question that arises is, at what point does the raw information become journalism, and therefore subject to the rights and restrictions that accrue to the news industry?

This continuum is sometimes expressed as the transition from raw data to curation, through aggregation and then to journalism. The technicalities of these processes are discussed in considerable detail in Part 1 of this book; the issue under question here is, when does information go from being information in its own right (and therefore something that can be claimed and owned), to being the source for another kind of information? This is more than simply an abstract question – it raises considerable concerns that touch on copyright, fair use and quoting.

Fair use

Under copyright law, fair use allows for the quoting or excerpting of content for the purposes of commentary and critique. A book critic may quote a section of a book in order to illustrate a discussion; a review of an art show may reproduce an image from the show. How much can be used, and what, exactly, constitutes ‘discussion’ is open to interpretation.

Journalists have always made stories out of other people’s words and information – from interviews to press conferences, to material published elsewhere, news is made up of second-hand material brought together in a formal structure (some news contains original, first-hand observation, but any perusal of a news product will show how rare that actually is). People are used to being quoted in the news – interviews, comments made in a public place, formal speeches and publications are all acceptable sources, and it is extremely rare for a quoted source to object to having their words used in the service of a news product. For most sources, the benefit of

being quoted in the news is worth the negligible cost of making the material available: sources either have no particular financial attachment to the information given or, if they do, the publicity (or other rewards) afforded by the news machine is enough. In addition, conventional news practices and technological

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limitations also ensure that it was extremely rare (and usually unethical) for someone to appear in the news without being aware of being recorded or listened to.

As with everything else, technology has changed this in two ways – the possible financial benefits, and the potential invasion of privacy. New forms of news, aggregation and curation, especially, take content and words from publicly available material (from blogs, social media and other online material) and re-purpose it for their own benefit. Although the convention of the medium (the ethos of share and share alike runs pretty strongly through social networks) is that this is to be expected (and even encouraged), it can be a risk to re-use material in this way, especially if you represent a formal or commercial news organisation.

Users who object to having their material re-used by news organisations usually do so for one of two reasons: privacy or copyright. Privacy is extensively discussed in Chapter 8, so the focus will now be on copyright.

The Huffington Post is widely praised for its innovative news model – combining original reporting with blogs and comment (often from celebrities) and aggregated news content from other organisations. This is either a brilliant and innovative business model, or theft (or both) depending on who you are speaking to.

This is only part of what can only be called a ‘spat’ that erupted between the New York Times and the Huffington Post in early 2012, but the fervour with which people leapt into the fray indicates that this is a contentious issue for people across the spectrum of journalistic practice.

Copyright law does not clarify what is fair use in terms of curation, and the ideal of only using material that is available through Creative Commons is unrealistic; there need to be guidelines on what fair use of other news organisations’ content entails. A number of possibilities exist as to what would warrant fair curation, many of them built on the ideals of the copyleft movement.

“ But too often it [aggregation] amounts to taking words written by other people, packaging them on your own Web site and harvesting revenue that might otherwise be directed to the originators of the material. In Somalia this would be called piracy. In the mediasphere, it is a respected business model. Bill Keller, New York Times (Keller, 2011) ”

Copyright and copyleft: theft and fair use

At its basis, the issue under discussion is the definition of copyright, and of journalism. Whether material posted on a social network belongs to the poster, the network proprietors or is in the public domain is a complex question, and although most people’s eyes glaze over at the thought of having to read all those end-user licensing agreements, copyright is the primary mechanism protecting news organisations’ content from theft, and is essential to understand.

Copyright law differs from country to country, but almost every country in the world is a signatory to the various international conventions on

Intellectual property

There are a range of intellectual-property rights that exist but the most applicable to technology and innovation are patents, copyright and design rights. They all refer to ownership rights of original creative thought. The problem with intellectual property is enforcement and proof. This is also discussed in Chapter 12.

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copyright and intellectual property, and the basic principles remain the same. Copyright attaches to intellectual artefacts in two forms: moral rights and legal rights. The moral right of copyright is that which gives a person the right to be identified as the author or creator of a work, and is usually non-transferable. The legal right is the right to sell the work, copies of it, or derivative products, and that is transferable, or saleable. When a media product is created, the journalist usually sells that on to the publisher or broadcaster (explicitly in the case of a freelancer, implicitly for a staff reporter), and legal right is transferred to the new owner. Further rights, to syndication, to compilation, to translation and to the creation of new forms of the product may or may not be transferred with the legal right – read your contracts carefully.

Copyright

D.M. Berry's *Copy, Rip, Burn* (2008) is an excellent introduction to the politics of copyright and the copyleft movement. Every journalist needs an understanding of copyright law within their local context – a good local 'law for journalists' book should be on your shelf at all times.

Free and open source

The open-source software movement arose in response to the increasing commercialisation of software development in the 1970s and 1980s. There are two main aspects of the Free Software Movement – one is the creation of software that is free to use, the other is the creation of software that is 'open source', i.e. that can be edited and recompiled by users. Technically, open source refers only to software that is editable, that can be recompiled, but, in practice the phrase now tends to refer to anything that can be freely shared.

Copyright is a legal construct, and the law is not prescient: it can take a while for the law to catch up with technological advances. There is a fairly common belief within online communities that everything on the internet is fair game – given how long it has taken the law to catch up with the technology, people might be forgiven for believing that this is the case. The fact is, though, that copyright attaches to all created objects, whether it has been explicitly stated or not – the lack of a copyright declaration on a photograph does not mean it is in the public domain, and can be freely used. When in doubt as to the copyright status of an image, don't use it.

This is not to say that things aren't used, and abused, routinely, on the internet. It might have been common practice to take without credit, and reuse images, text and even whole stories on blogs and news sites, but, thanks to greater vigilance on the part of producers, and a greater awareness of the legal (and social) ramifications of using content without permission, this is changing.

As a formally constructed content-creating organisation or individual, whether you are the BBC or an independent blogger, copyright is important to observe: one lawsuit can destroy your business or career. More important, though, is the fact that if you create media content for a living, you need people to

respect your copyright in order to pay the bills, and you can't expect your rights to be respected if you disrespect others'.

Creative Commons and copyleft

The copyleft movement was created in 2001 as an alternative to copyright. Building on the Gnu Public Licensing system of open-source and open-copyright software development, a set

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of licences and conventions were created by which users could share and limit the uses of their content without resorting to the proscribed mechanisms of copyright ownership. Creative Commons licences can be used by anyone, and allow creators to specify how their content can be used. By creating a standardised set of licences and restrictions, Creative Commons makes it easy for creators to control the ways in which their content is used while still making it available (Creative Commons, 2011).

Creative Commons is not a single licence, but a series of licences that can be applied, giving and keeping certain rights. Users can select from the options to customise exactly which rights they retain, and which they are making available. As of version 3.0 of the CC licence (2011), the rights are:

- Attribution (BY): the requirement that the creator be credited;
- ShareAlike (SA): the requirement that any works incorporating the original work be licensed under the same terms;
- NoDerivs (ND): no derivative works may be created, the work cannot be edited or altered in any way;
- Non-Commercial (NC): the work may not be used for commercial purposes;
- Public Domain (Ø): the work is fully in the public domain, and may be used, altered and redistributed without any restrictions.

To license a work under Creative Commons, users simply add the letters CC (or the Creative Commons logo), and the letters signifying the specific rights they wish to claim. A work such as a photograph with the letters CC BY–NC indicates that anyone may use the photograph provided attribution is given, and that the work is non-commercial (if you wish to use the photograph in a commercial product, you will need to negotiate directly with the photographer). The letters CC SA–ND indicate that the photograph can be used by anyone, provided the work is not altered in any way, and that the new work also be licensed under the same agreements. A full guide to using Creative Commons in your own work can be seen at: <http://creativecommons.org/>.

Creative Commons and the copyleft movement have succeeded not just because the idea is good, but because the licences have been adopted across the World Wide Web and social media, and have the power of the crowd behind them. Many social-media sites, including Flickr, Wikipedia and YouTube, embed Creative Commons licences directly within their systems, allowing users to easily mark their work with the licences, and others to find them.

Creative Commons can be an extremely useful way for media creators to find content they can use: Google offers the option to search for Creative Commons licensed material under its Advanced Search options, available at the bottom of the search page. By limiting your image or video search to files that are free to use, share, or alter, it is easy to find images or videos that can be used on your site.

Creative Commons, and its adoption by the social-media community, is another example of the ways in which the social-media landscape is changing the traditional producer/consumer relationship.

Copyleft

At its simplest, the copyleft movement is a non-legalistic approach to the fair sharing and use of information and creative artefacts. The best-known example of copyleft is the Creative Commons organisation which creates a community of people sharing content under clear guidelines.

Creative Commons

The Creative Commons is a co-operative organisation that allows anyone to use their guidelines and licences for their material. By creating a standard set of definitions and codes, Creative Commons makes it easy to find material you can use, and to protect it.

The new rules of engagement

Even large commercial news organisations have adopted Creative Commons: in 2009 Al Jazeera began making some of their video footage available under the CC licence. Users could use, edit, redistribute and pass on to others, provided credit was given. Footage of the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 and 2012, as well as of the blockade of Gaza, were made available to other broadcasters and the general public. In the view of Mohamad Nanabhey of Al Jazeera English, what they have lost in potential revenue, they have gained in increased audience and profile across the world: ‘A large part of embracing free culture is accepting the fact that you are forsaking control in exchange for something greater – the empowerment of the creative community’ (Creative Commons, 2011).

It is this empowerment that is so important in the modern world of media and social networks – the rigid requirements of the hierarchical relationships between producer and consumer have been replaced by the more fluid social relationships of the collaborative network. In this space, maintaining one’s relationships is important, because one’s status within the network, and one’s ability to utilise it, depend on the respect with which one is viewed by the rest of the network. You cannot expect to gain from the sharing ethos of the network if you do not also contribute to it.

Fair curation

This brings us back to the question of curation. The Creative Commons licences don’t fully encompass curation, and journalistic practice and fair use have always allowed for the quoting of content, which leaves the practices of curation and aggregation remaining somewhat unresolved. A number of people and organisations have been working on developing guidelines for fair curation, and although there is no clear consensus, they all have a few key ideas as their basis, and they all make the journalistic process more transparent than it currently is.

Curator’s Code

The Curator’s Code is a proposed set of rules governing the use of ideas, links and content from other sources in the process of curation and aggregation. The site is at www.curatorscode.org/.

One of the proposed sets of guidelines is the Curator’s Code (www.curatorscode.org/), which has as its main argument the importance of honouring and attributing ‘discovery’, the information or idea that led to a story, not just the information used in the process of creating the story. Interviewed by the New York Times, the creator of the code, Maria Popova, focused on the work that has gone into creating information, and

the importance of respecting that work: ‘Discovery of information is a form of intellectual labor,’ she said. ‘When we don’t honor discovery, we are robbing somebody’s time and labor. The Curator’s Code is an attempt to solve some of that’ (in Carr, 2012).

The Curator’s Code has not been universally adopted or even universally accepted, as the response has been mixed, to say the least. Despite this, it raises some interesting questions about the obligations of journalists to those people whose information and ideas they use. For some, it is as simple as behaving yourself and treating others as you would be treated (Nolan, 2012); for others, the code’s guidelines on full attribution are an unobtainable ideal, always coming up against the reluctance of commercial organisations to send traffic away from their sites (Arment, 2012).

It is hard at this point to judge whether the Curator’s Code (or the even more newly proposed Council on Ethical Blogging and Aggregation) will have any staying power. In the world of the internet, sites, ideas, conventions and codes come and go like the tide. In the long term, though, sites

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are as likely to need others to link to them and source them as they are to need others to link to and source from, which takes us back to the basic rule of playground behaviour: treat others the way you would want to be treated yourself.

Conclusion

It would be impossible to write a chapter that permanently codifies exactly how journalists and media producers should behave, for all places and all time. What this chapter has done is to lay out some guidelines and considerations to keep in mind.

First and foremost: know the law for where you are, and what you are doing. Ignorance of the law is no excuse, and ignorance of any kind is inexcusable for a journalist.

Guard your copyright closely, and take care to guard that of others. Be respectful of people's property, and be aware that the crowd is all-knowing, and very powerful. You are only one node in this network, one person in the crowd, and everyone else deserves the same respect and consideration you would want for yourself.

CASE STUDY

Cooks Source

Navigating the legal minefield of copyright, public domain, aggregation and curation can be difficult, and the temptation to simply ignore all of the rules and do what you want under the pressure of deadlines can be great. However, as one editor learned, the repercussions, and the revenge of the crowd, can be fatal. Cooks Source was a print (and Facebook) magazine containing recipes and cooking advice with limited distribution, primarily in the eastern United States.

In the 'Pumpkin Fest' issue in October 2010, the magazine reprinted an entire five-year-old blog post from cookery writer Monica Gaudio. Gaudio writes primarily about medieval cookery, and the post in question was a discussion of the evolution of apple pie, with two period recipes transcribed and updated. When Gaudio discovered that her article had been reprinted without her permission, she contacted the editor of the magazine, Judith Griggs, requesting an apology and a small donation to the Columbia School of Journalism in compensation. Briggs responded in almost textbook 'internet don't' fashion: 'But honestly Monica, the web is considered 'public domain' and you should be happy we just didn't 'lift' your whole article and put someone else's name on it! It happens a lot, clearly more than you are aware of, especially on college campuses, and the workplace.' (Griggs, in Mamatas, 2010).

Griggs then went on to critique Gaudio's writing, and suggest that Gaudio should pay Griggs for the editing and publicity gained by the reprinting of her article in the magazine. Gaudio responded by blogging about the incident, reprinting Griggs's email in full, and asking advice from her community on what to do. The outcry was massive, the campaign moved to Cooks Source's Facebook page, and the story was picked up by Salon.com, CNN, the Wall Street Journal and countless other media outlets. The Facebook page became 'the virtual stockade' (Williams, 2010) – lambasting Griggs and Cooks Source for stealing content, and for the aggressiveness of the response to Gaudio's request. The Facebook campaign soon coalesced around contacting Griggs's advertisers (her source of income), and collecting

The new rules of engagement

evidence of other instances of lifted material. Several other publishers and individuals contacted Cooks Source demanding compensation and apologies for the use of their material, and several advertising clients dropped their ads. By the middle of November, the magazine had closed (Gill, 2010).

The entire incident had taken two weeks: from Gaudio discovering the use of her material, to the closure of the magazine. The crowd works fast.

There are two issues here: one is the theft of copyrighted material, a practice which is prevalent online and offline, and the other is the aggressive ‘you and what army’ response from the editor. Plagiarism and theft are unethical, and can result in legal sanction; however, the cost of pursuing a legal resolution has often deterred victims, and it has been possible for unethical publications to proceed with impunity. It’s clear that Cooks Source’s business model was predicated at least in part on the use of unpaid-for material, under the supposition that nobody would know, care, or be able to respond to the theft of their words. The internet makes plagiarism easy – a quick Google and you can find anything you need – but it also makes finding out that you have been plagiarised easy, and social media make ‘naming and shaming’ the response of choice for injured parties.

What made this story so compelling, and predicated its international publicity, was Griggs’s response. The bluntness of the email Griggs sent, the audacity of requesting compensation for her editing service, and the general rudeness meant that Griggs herself became an internet meme, her words reprinted, her identity spoofed and her magazine ridiculed around the internet. Griggs may have felt she was in the right (and she is at least correct in that plagiarism and theft are rife across the internet), but she did not understand the dynamics of the social space she worked within. Violating community values can destroy a publication; you can’t expect the community to support you if you don’t support the community in return.

Key reflections

- The social web is a public place, and it never forgets. It may be tempting to bend the rules, just this once, because you’re under pressure, but the risk is massive – you may get away with it now, but it may come back to bite you.
- Your relationships within the web are important – the web is your source, your audience and your peer group. Treat everyone within it fairly, as you would want to be treated yourself.
- The law is slow, and may not have caught up with what is happening online. Obey the law, but be aware of new developments in social norms and expectations online.
- How do you protect your information from theft? How important is it to do so?
- As a start-up media company, how do you balance the need to be public with the need to protect your copyright?

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Readings and resources

Creative Commons: (<http://creativecommons.org/>) holds a wealth of information about the copyleft movement, as well as links to resources of material that can be used under the CC licensing system.

Copy, Rip, Burn (2008): D.M. Berry's is an excellent introduction to the politics and philosophy of copyright and the copyleft movement.

David Carr of the New York Times: is active in questions of copyright and online codes of conduct. The *New York Times* maintains an archive of his work at: http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/david_carr/index.html and he tweets at @carr2n.

The Curator's Code: is available at www.curatorscode.org/ and the website also contains links to discussions and ideas in the area of attribution and copyright.

The BBC College of Journalism: maintains an archive of advice and ideas at www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofjournalism/. The BBC's guidelines on copyright and fair dealing are available at: www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofjournalism/how-to/how-to-use-social-media/social-media-copyright-and-fair-dealing.



>>Chapter 14<<

CONCLUSION: NEWS IN A NEW MEDIA ECOLOGY

Overview

This book has laid out a comprehensive guide to the practice and principles of journalism in the age of social media. The practice has changed in many ways, but the fundamentals of journalism remain. Be honest, be open, listen to everyone and report fairly - those things haven't changed, but almost everything else has. This book has discussed the production, ethics and economics of journalism in the context of the more open, equal, and collaborative age of the internet. This final chapter will lay out a typology for understanding this new environment, and the new practices within it: the collaboration, the immediacy, the engagement with the audience. We hope in this chapter to re-orient thinking from the new media landscape's boundaries and features to a new media ecology, where platform is less important than relationships.

Key concepts

- Citizen journalism
- Freelance
- Intent
- Media landscape
- Network relationships
- Output
- Social media
- Sourcing
- Traditional media
- Voice

Conclusion

Introduction

Every year we stand in front of the new intake of journalism students and explain the landscape of the news environment as we see it. 'Here are the mainstream newspapers, grouped according to their political identity and their physical size. Here are the broadcast news outlets, and who owns what.' This is how we understood the media world, by physical output and ownership. The lecture gets more and more confusing each year, and the students more and more baffled – why do we call them 'broad-sheets' when half of them are the same size as the 'tabloids'? Why does it matter what size it is when it's all the same on a tablet screen? Why is the New York Times a newspaper and CNN a broadcaster when online they have the same mix of video, audio, pictures and text?

It becomes clear when speaking to students who were born after the World Wide Web that we need a new way of thinking about the media landscape – one that goes beyond the technological determinism of 'newspaper' and 'television channel' and simple ideas of left and right politics, or target audiences divided by economic class and geography. The technological limitations on the media – the mechanism and scope of distribution – are no longer important. What remains important is what you are saying, and who you are saying it to.

The new media landscape: a matrix model

The macro level

The traditional way of defining news outlets was based on technological determinism – the medium was both the message and the mechanism of distribution. Organisations like the New York Times were the physical product: the 'Old Gray Lady' was a tangible grey and white collection of paper, or a building on Times Square. The measure of the organisation was its physical presence in the world.

In the new social and networked environment, output technology is no longer the determining factor of a news organisation, since it is a rare (and probably endangered) news organisation that is limited to one technological means of distribution. Traditional organisations are converging, using the same input to produce multiple outputs; new organisations are being created that do multiple things for multiple audiences. We can't identify these organisations by their physical product any more. Instead, we propose the measurement and determination of a news organisation or an individual journalist is based on three factors: the voice with which they communicate, their intent in communicating and their relative weight, or clout, within the news media landscape.

These three factors are plotted onto a two-dimensional matrix, with voice as the vertical axis, intent as the horizontal and influence or clout reflected by the size of the marker. This matrix is based on a subjective analysis of news organisations undertaken by the authors, but it is not intended as a definitive map of the landscape and all the players within it; rather, it is constructed as a challenge to existing models of the news media environment, and old ways of thinking about the news that make it difficult for researchers and theorists to grapple with the specific issues that this radically changed landscape has created.

Conclusion

Vertical axis: Voice

Traditionally, newsmaking is a process that takes events and turns them into recognisable news packages, using the ‘third-person objective’ voice of authority that we have come to associate with news. This voice is at the top of this axis. At the bottom of the axis is the loose, unedited, stream-of-consciousness voice of the personal blogger or tweeter, or the chaotic and unedited video footage taken by a participant in a protest. The amount of shaping, formatting and editing that goes into a story increases as you go up the axis, while the immediacy and rawness of the information decreases. Audience participation and inclusion also increases as you move down the axis, and traditional gatekeeping decreases.

At the top of this axis is the fully researched and written front-page story detailing exactly what had happened in Tahrir Square in Cairo, with comments and interviews with experts and bystanders carefully woven into a cohesive narrative.

Moving down this axis are the hourly bulletin updates from a reporter standing in the square, still formatted and structured in a predictable way – the journalist standing in front of the camera holding a microphone: ‘I’m standing in Tahrir Square while all around me protesters shout slogans at the army. Earlier today the ministry of defence said ...’ – the journalist is still acting as interpreter of events for the public, still working within defined formats and expected forms of address, although the material is live and unedited (albeit often rehearsed and prepared), and lacks the formal structure of the news package.

Even further down, you have the live blog feed of a news website, bringing inside information, comment from readers, twitter feeds and video uploads from people on the scene, and information

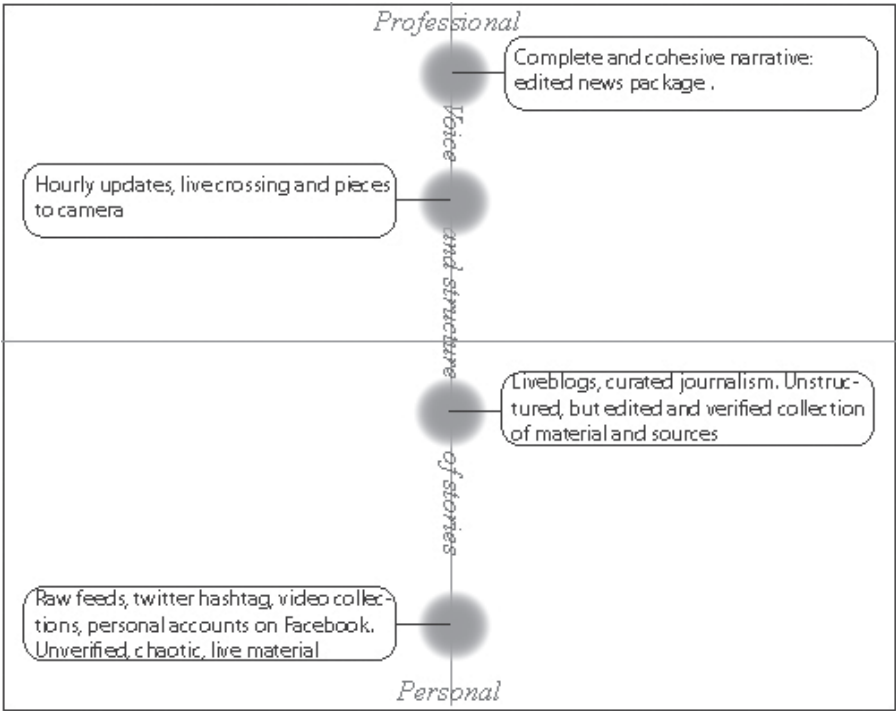


FIGURE 14.1 shows the vertical axis which measures the voice of the news outlet.

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from other news sources together in a chaotic stream of information which no longer functions as a cohesive narrative or story, but which still retains some of the elements of journalistic practice: verification, mixing of sources and some consistency of expression.

At the very bottom of this axis you have the raw feed of events that appears when you search #tahrir on Twitter, or watch the raw uploaded videos on YouTube and pictures on Twitpic, Facebook or Flickr. At this level, the news is simply the outpouring of data and material of events, unedited, unverified and utterly raw.

Linked to this is the level of personal voice and opinion – as you move down the axis the news content becomes more personal, the traditional authoritative first-person voice is subsumed by the personal, subjective voice of the participant. This links it to Jay Rosen's call for journalists to move 'beyond objectivity', and into the personal in order to re-engage with the public (1993).

News products at the top of the axis have the traditionally closed gatekeeping approach, where professional journalists in the traditional sense construct the news product based only on their sources and research, and present a sealed and finite news product to a passive audience. As you move down the axis, the gates open, and the public are given more access to the news production process, more opportunities to participate and guide the news agenda. At the bottom of the axis, the distinction between journalist and audience has vanished completely: the gates have crumbled away.

The vertical axis also measures completeness and insularity of the news product. Traditional news products at the top of the axis strive to provide all the information and news one person could need. They were conceived as a single discrete product for each consumer, obviating the need for multiple sources of information. As you move down the axis, the news products become more divergent, incorporating multiple voices and channels, and creating an environment where, at the very bottom, one user would need to access hundreds of sources to provide an understanding of events.

From our perspective, the news landscape is moving down this axis, with a sinking centre of gravity currently located just above the middle line. Even the most traditional news organisations are including live blogs of events on their websites, incorporating amateur video into their feeds, and incorporating user comments and feedback in formal and informal ways.

Horizontal axis: Intent

On the far right of this axis are the purely journalistic institutions – the BBC, CNN, the New York Times – that cover the events in Tahrir Square because they fulfil a traditional idea of what news is, and claim to do so in an 'objective' way: organisations that refer to 'President Mubarak' and 'protestors' in the most neutral way possible.

As one moves to the left along the axis, the news organisations that have stated social or political goals appear. A newspaper like the Guardian, with a clearly stated belief in social justice, sits more to the left. Their coverage of the same events would refer to Mubarak as a 'dictator' or 'despot', and the protestors as campaigners or activists. One's place on the axis is not a function of simple left-right politics, however: Egyptian state television, which holds an opposite belief to the Guardian, and would refer to the protesters in Tahrir Square as 'terrorists' or 'traitors', also sits to the left: it is the expression of bias or an underlying social or political goal that moves a news organisation from the right to the left. Highly commercialised media – such as Fox News and the British tabloids – are also here, because their journalistic goals are in tension with their commercial goals, and sometimes secondary to them.

Conclusion

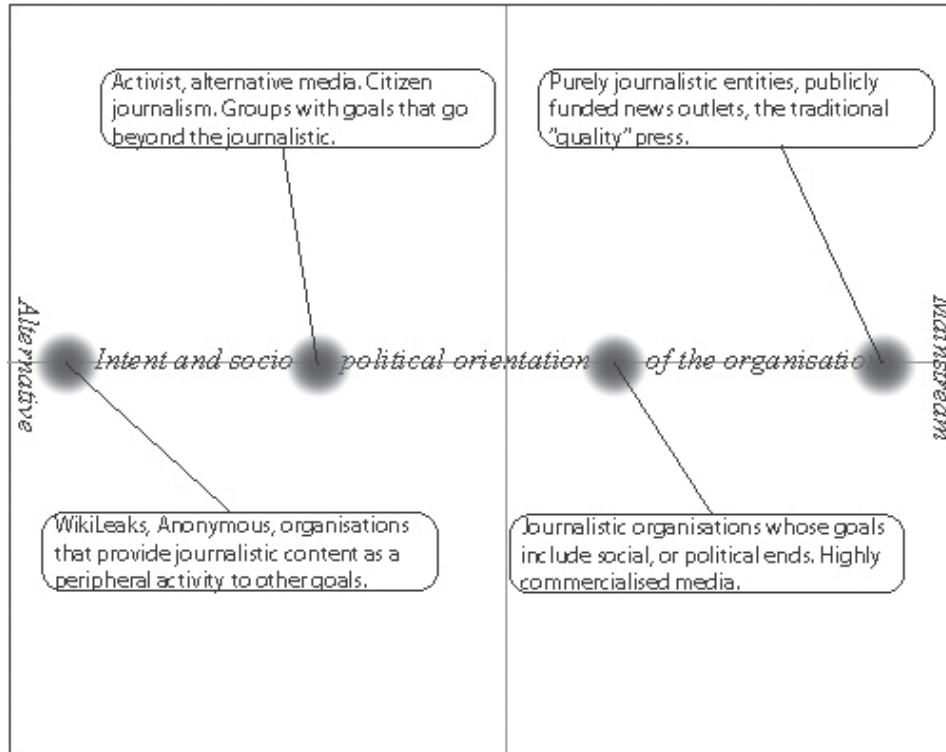


FIGURE 14.2 shows the horizontal axis which measures the intent of the news organisation, with the traditional, mainstream, commercial and industrial 'mass media' on the far right of the matrix. Moving towards the left, organisations' focus on news decreases, and other concerns – commercial gain, social change and political activism – creep in. On the far left are the organisations (and individuals) whose production of 'news' is entirely secondary, or even accidental, to their main goals. This is inherently a subjective measure, and we have placed the purely altruistic public news outlets (such as the BBC or NPR) on the right, representing the 'purest' form of news, and the commercial and industrial media to the left of that.

To the left of the centre line are organisations in which the journalistic goals are less important than the political or social goals. Groups like Indymedia, and related blogs such as Reportsfromtheegyptianuprising which describes itself as providing reports from Cairo 'in solidarity with the direct action of the people of Egypt against state repression' (Reportsfromtheegyptianuprising 2011) are here.

On the very far left are organisations whose journalistic outputs are incidental to other goals. WikiLeaks's release of diplomatic cables relating to Egypt, and other documents are here: the goals are not simply journalistic, but include 'bring[ing] down administrations that rely on concealing reality from their own citizens' and 'the improvement of our common historical record and the support of the rights of all people to create new history'.

In this new media landscape news outlets can find themselves competing with other forms of news, both from outlets that are setting up to directly compete with the news but have no traditional roots

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in the pre-internet news age, such as Global Voices online, or from people and organisations that have other goals than becoming a formal, commercial news organisation, such as 'zines, radical news outlets, activist groups online, and entities like Anonymous (and its parent 4chan) and WikiLeaks. News organisations to the right of the matrix may make use of information and content provided to organisations and entities to the left – bringing new ideas and audiences to their products.

Intent is measured from the formal news outlets that function within the expected and defined fourth estate role on the right, to the radical and activist organisations on the left.

News organisations on the right are those that are registered and subjected to what formal oversight is necessary within their specific national contexts; that exist in order to spread the news within defined parameters of the expected behaviour of news outlets. These are the organisations that have access to the parliamentary press gallery (or its equivalent), that have the protection of the courts to prevent the disclosure of sources, but may likewise be subject to regulations on content that would not necessarily apply to individuals. These are those outlets that are traditionally referred to as the 'mainstream' news, as well as those that have been specifically set up to compete with them.

Publicly funded news outlets (such as the BBC and the newer organisations like ProPublica) are on the farthest end of this axis, having goals that are primarily civic. State-supported media outlets move left along this axis, depending on the extent to which the preservation of the state overrides journalistic and civic goals. Commercial news outlets are slightly left of them, having their civic journalistic goals diluted by their commercial goals – highly commercialised media, those whose primary goal is financial, move even further left.

On the far left of this axis are the groups whose goals are not journalistic in nature, but which nevertheless participate in the same landscape as the news media by providing the same kinds of information in the same ways. WikiLeaks exists to the far left of this axis – an organisation that probably provided more raw news information than any other in 2010, but which nonetheless is not strictly journalistic in its goals or outputs (this runs counter to WikiLeaks's sometimes expressed intention of being a news organisation: however, since they do not in any way vet, edit, construct or package the information they have, it is our contention that they are not journalistic in nature). Also on the left of this axis are the news outlets produced by activist organisations or political parties, and the activities of informal groups such as Kuro5hin or Slashdot.org.

The complete matrix

Locations on the matrix are also represented by markers of differing size, representing the relative weight of the organisation within the field. Clout can be measured in a number of ways: the size of the enterprise, the size of the audience, the respect with which the organisation is viewed, the relative ranking of the organisation's website in Google, the multinational reach of its output, the size of its audience or the amount of money it generates. We have not attempted to measure the weight of organisations mathematically, or to represent them as scalable, but, as with the other aspects of the matrix, we have worked to create an admittedly subjective illustration of the environment.

This matrix is not intended as a comprehensive quantitative or mathematical model of the news environment: what we are proposing here is a fundamental shift in thinking as to what is important in the news media environment. By mapping news organisations on to this matrix we are making a statement about what we consider is important – the voice, and the intent of news organisations, and

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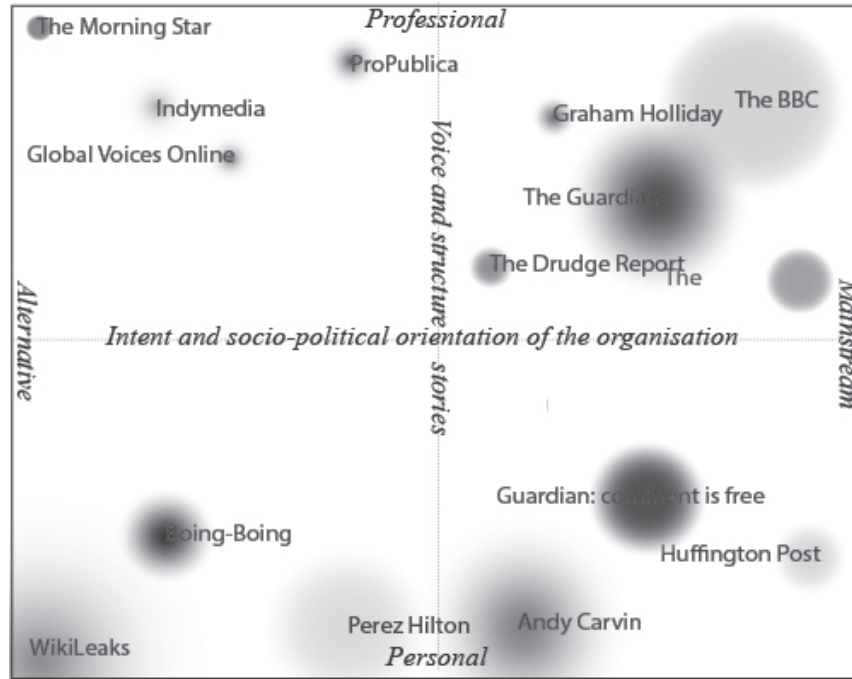


FIGURE 14.3 shows the completed matrix, with sample organisations mapped to it. Organisations are located on the matrix according to their intent and the dominant voice of their output. As news organisations grow and fragment, incorporating more convergent media, some organisations find themselves occupying multiple locations on the matrix – the *Guardian's* location is not the same as the *Guardian-run Comment is Free* site, the latter being further down the vertical axis, reflecting its greater volume of personal and subjective voice. Some applications and services, like Indymedia, or a microblogging site, rather than having a single dot on the matrix, would have a collection of very small interconnected dots.

to reopen debate about what constitutes a news organisation. The matrix is not so much a representation of the landscape as we see it, as a model for rethinking our perception of the landscape.

From landscape to ecosystem

A map shows location, but not connections. The matrices discussed above are an attempt to bring relationships into the picture. On the macro matrix, organisations are still identified as discrete entities, but the size of their marker, and the fuzziness of its boundary, indicate the impact of the organisation on its environment, and the extent to which it operates with open gates and collaborates with users.

This aspect of the matrix indicates the level of engagement and collaboration among organisations and individuals, and the extent to which they relate to each other. One of the fundamental arguments of this book is that news organisations (and individuals) can no longer work in isolation from their community and environment. The traditional uni-directional linear arrangement of information passing from source, to the journalist, to the audience can no longer work. Journalists

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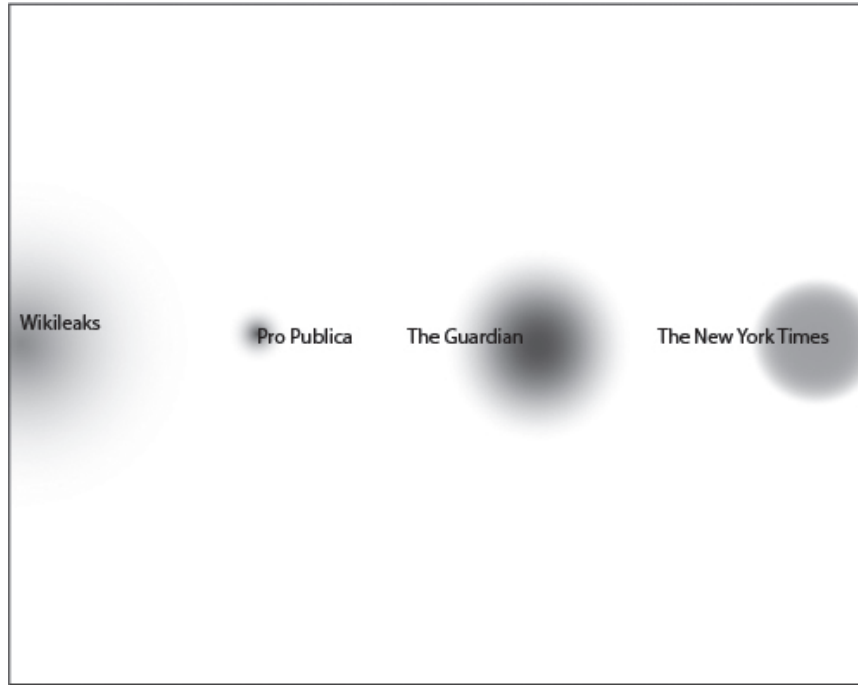


FIGURE 14.4 shows a sample of organisations, giving an indication of the level of engagement and openness the organisation adheres to. The *New York Times* has the least fuzzy boundary – as a traditional news organisation it limits access to trusted and vetted sources, and as a firewalled website and paid product it limits its access to audiences. Nonetheless, it has a large impact because of its reputation as a ‘paper of record’. The *Guardian* has a much more diffuse boundary as it embraces collaborative and open journalism. It has a large impact because of its reputation and its open access online. ProPublica has a less fuzzy boundary again: despite its status as a non-profit, it relies on traditional news practices and makes little or no use of user-generated content or collaboration (except with other news organisations). WikiLeaks has the fuzziest boundary – it accepts (or did until 2011) almost any content and republishes it, making little to no editorial or journalistic impact on the content. It has a large impact because of the material it releases and it is widely used by other news organisations.

and news organisations must re-orient themselves towards the community – which contains sources, audiences and peers in a living ecosystem.

The micro level

As the traditional media landscape explodes and fragments, there is an additional factor that becomes more important: the individual journalist. In the traditional, technologically determined landscape, individual journalists were subsumed by their institutions, and their output was constrained by the conventions and technology of the organisation within which they worked. There was little or no need to discuss, or analyse the influence or role of individual players in this environment, except on the

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rare occasions when an individual journalist gained celebrity status or had a reputation strong enough to attract attention back to the institute, such as Kate Adie or Christiane Amanpour. Even freelancers were largely attached to mainstream news organisations by way of payment or assignment briefs, albeit on a more ad hoc basis. Journalist was a simple descriptor, encapsulating the role and responsibilities of the job in one word, and needing only the clarification of ‘print’, ‘radio’ or ‘television’.

In a social-media landscape, the voice of the individual becomes clearer. As we have seen, journalists working within (and outside) media organisations find themselves in direct contact with audiences, and with more options than ever as to where they source or output their work. They are increasingly unable to define what they do in a single sentence, although they know what they are doing, and doing it well. They exist in an evolving web of connectivity, across sources and outputs. Neither the products journalists produce nor the resources on which they draw are fixed. As a result, the meaning of the word ‘journalist’ dissipates (Sivek, 2010). There are lots of people operating as journalists, but they may be bloggers, freelancers, tweeters, YouTube commentators or mainstream reporters – or any combination.

One way to frame a clearer understanding of a journalist’s work is to compare the relationship between sources and output. How do you source the story, and how do you distribute it back to users? Do you produce a broadcast for a main channel news or do you produce blog posts and curated news feeds? We have attempted to visualise these relationships with a micro matrix. Again this matrix is not presented as a quantitative fixed analysis of the role or relationships of individual journalists. Rather, it is a visualisation of the considerations now presenting themselves to journalists on the social and networked news stage.

Sources and outputs

The micro matrix depicts the range of sources and outputs open to journalists now that social networks and traditional methods are both good resources on which to draw. The sources a journalist use are depicted on the bottom half of the matrix, the outputs on the top. Each journalist will decide on a relationship with sources and outputs for themselves – the rules have changed, and it is equally possible to succeed with a complex network of social media sources and outputs as with a paper contact book of senior politicians and a slot on the newsdesk of a quality daily paper.

Your identity as a journalist is determined not by your employer, but by how you navigate this space, and your relationships with the other people and organisations within the system. The bottom half of the micro matrix depicts the sourcing practices open to journalists, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

The horizontal line represents the social and public media landscape, and social-media sources and outputs both sit very close to, or on, the line. A journalist who works primarily within social networks, who sources material from the cloud and from the crowd, would occupy a wide shallow space along and just below this line. Reputation and identity for a journalist in this space comes from links, from followers and from name recognition within the network and the ecosystem. Figure 14.5 shows an example of this.

The bottom of the matrix, as far away from the horizontal line as possible, shows the deep, exclusive contacts that only an experienced journalist would have (and used to be accessible only to journalists with the big, mainstream, news outlets). Down here are the contacts with world leaders, best-selling musicians and heads of companies. Figure 14.6 demonstrates this.

These two extremes also incorporate a range of sources in between – as a journalist becomes better known and more experienced, more exclusive contacts and information will become known to them, and their sources will expand below the line.

Conclusion

The range of outputs (or the primary outputs – many journalists having multiple channels with which to communicate with their audience) are on the upper half of the matrix. The possibilities are near endless and changing all the time: it could be a mainstream broadcast, podcast bulletins, forum posts, one-off magazine features, microblogs, live blogs, curated feeds, or a blog post. The space directly above the horizontal line represents outputs that are largely informal, raw and unedited. Moving up the line, the outputs become more structured and packaged: more formal.

The space directly above the horizontal line represents outputs to the crowd which have mass penetration in large areas which are largely informal, raw and unedited. This space is dominated by instant activity in social networks. Moving up the vertical includes live tools and semi-edited production. Live reports and drafted updates occupy the middle space. As these products become more recognisably ‘journalistic’, more polished and packaged, they move up the line. At the very top are the most polished, curated and immersive packages. These different stages of content production are discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

Networked journalism: Andy Carvin

Someone like Andy Carvin may not just produce output for mainstream channels. As they act within the network, they increasingly follow the rules of the cloud, sharing and collaborating – treating journalism as a process rather than a product. Here there will be more than one ‘end point’ (if any at

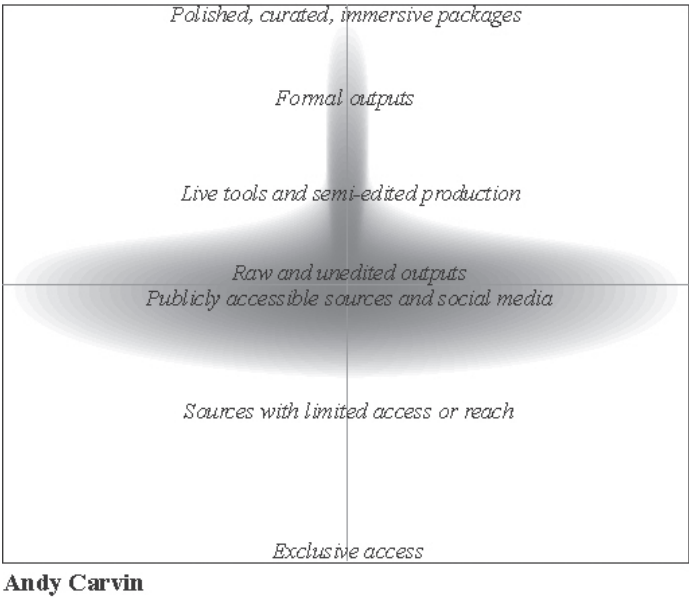


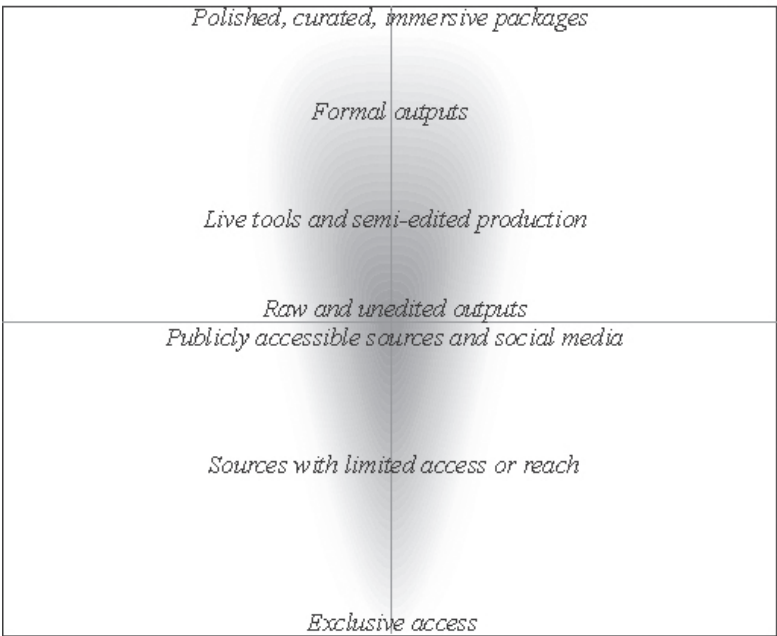
FIGURE 14.5 shows networked journalist Andy Carvin, with his hundreds of linked, public sources. A reporter with a traditional working practice, relying on a subset of trusted contacts and traditional notions of expertise, draws his identity as a journalist from title and authority, training and qualifications, standing within a recognised organisation or demonstrable media business acumen. A networked journalist, however, draws his authority and identity from that bestowed on him from the crowd as a continually shifting phenomenon. Stories are sourced from a wide range of contacts often on digital platforms. Carvin finds and connects key people across social media in a way to add value in the journalistic storytelling process.

Conclusion

all) and the journalist uses informal or unedited outputs, which exist closer to the central horizontal, to connect and drive traffic. The widest and lowest sphere of outputs, along the horizontal, rests with social networks that have mass penetration in large areas such as Orkut, Facebook, Twitter and RenRen. Microblogs, socially disseminated photographs and unedited videos form part of output packages as much as formal content. His outputs may be to niche edited news products and streams which are accessed by large crowds and networks in a way to have made them seem ‘normalised’ such as @breakingnews, aggregated sites like the Drudge Report, or to heavily resourced but less traditional, alternate news outlets such as Al Jazeera.

Traditional journalism: Robert Fisk

Someone like Robert Fisk, who interviewed Osama bin Laden three times, is away from the horizontal line with a narrow source curve because he has exclusive access to otherwise elusive officials, contacts which have taken along time to nurture and for whom the level of risk in them contacting a journalist – such as whistleblowers – is high. A major tip-off from an exclusive contact would be at the bottom of the vertical, symbolising the notion of journalist as gatekeeper (Shoemaker et al., 2001).



Robert Fisk - The Independent

FIGURE 14.6 shows that the *Independent's* award-winning Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk has the contacts and clout to open doors. He embodies all the values of traditional journalism, with exclusive access and mainstream outputs. When Fisk speaks, government officials listen. The depth of penetration away from the horizontal line below the line reflects how exclusive the contacts are and how specialist the working journalist's knowledge is.

Conclusion

The depth of the space below the line measures the accessibility of the sources to the general public – at the bottom are heads of state, corporate directors, film stars, pop musicians, people to whom the general public have limited access. Journalists who have access to these people trade on those sources as their unique selling point – this is the traditional measure of the success of a journalist's career, how good their contact book is. Robert Fisk has this access when he reports from Cairo, and he can get information that others can't via his contacts. Specialist journalists dedicate years cultivating contacts which can open doors and prove to be avenues of trusted communication, especially in times of crisis or when speed and accuracy are of the essence. The space he commands below the line is deep, but fairly narrow. He has few sources, but they are far below the surface which the public can access.

Fisk's outputs are represented by a tall curve above the line as the outputs are mainly polished, highly edited packages to mainstream news outlets. The depth of the space above the line measures output and the range of dissemination platforms to the general public. At the top, furthest away from the horizontal, are edited packages recognisable for branded mainstream media outlets that reach wide audiences. Here the notions of 'prime time' and 'front page news' still hold weight – very much the space in which Fisk operates. A journalist producing for mainstream prime-time broadcast is not only polished and well produced 'journalistic' content but it is also well trusted, verified and edited. These are increasingly interactive and immersive storytelling experiences. It remains to be a prime source of news for mass audiences. He produces trusted brand content and has a reputation for quality. His output presence on social-networking sites is rare, limited and sporadic hence a narrow occupancy of the space directly above the line.

The matrix graphic allows for a clearer representation of how individual journalists can occupy more than one space within this fragmented media ecology. It also frames our thinking in the book as a whole. Journalists need different skills as they move around the spaces depicted on the matrix. For sourcing stories, it is important for a journalist to understand the rules of engagement when sourcing content from the crowd, just as they need to know when trusted contacts may be the better way to source a story and how to go about finding them. Similarly, there's a vast scope of considerations in how best to tell and produce stories. There is a core toolkit of skills but also a range of unique and different production techniques for varying outputs. The fluidity across these spaces may also spark legal and ethical considerations – if the law or the state recognises 'journalist' as a specific class of person, with differing privileges and obligations to those of the general public, then who can be a journalist becomes a legal, as well as a personal, question. In terms of commercial interests, issues over professional and private brands, or prompt business opportunities as well as the need to understand media economics more fully rise to the surface.

Conclusion

This new understanding of the media landscape as an ecosystem – the new media ecology underpins the whole of this book. That is not to say that the book has been an extended explication of the diagrams and examples in this chapter, or even a more detailed attempt to describe and analyse the matrices discussed here, but that the perspective on this new social, networked, collaborative community that this chapter illuminates is fundamental to everything we do as journalists and journalism trainers. This is the ecology of the new media environment.

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Data journalism in the UK: a preliminary analysis of form and content

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Data journalism in the UK: a preliminary analysis of form and content

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More than two years ago Sir Tim Berners-Lee made the pronouncement that ‘Journalists need to be data-savvy ... but now it’s also going to be about poring over data and equipping yourself with the tools to analyse it and picking out what’s interesting’. This new form of data-driven journalism appears to have been enthusiastically adopted – at least in the rhetoric of news discourse, according to which it is ‘rapidly becoming part of the establishment’. This analysis is a preliminary survey of data-based stories being presented in the national news in the UK, and lays the groundwork for an analysis and typology of the forms and formats of data journalism as a media practice. The analysis shows that while superficial data journalism is being practiced, it is limited in scope and format. No evidence was found of a commitment to data projects among the news outlets examined, and only one instance of recourse to the Freedom of Information Act was seen. Most data presented were superficial, and sourced from traditional outlets. Data journalism is practiced as much for its visual appeal as for its investigative qualities, and the overall impact, especially in the tabloid format is as much decorative as informative.

Introduction

Data journalism has become something of a buzzword in the last few years. Rather like citizen journalism and social media journalism before it, we have seen more and more reports that data journalism is the future, that journalists who cannot find and analyse complex data sets will find themselves the dinosaurs, left behind by this brave new world of media practice. As Sir Tim Berners-Lee said in 2010 ‘Data-driven journalism is the future’ (Arthur 2010, para. 18). This claim, like others before it, needs examination. It is clear that there is more and more access to data for journalists: as the world becomes more digitised, more information is stored in data formats, and as freedom of information takes hold, at least in the developed world, more and more of that stored data will become accessible to the public and to journalists in one form or another.

History and development

‘Data journalism’ as a phrase seems to have appeared some time in 2008, in the *Guardian* newspaper. In December of that year Simon Rogers posted to the *Guardian Insider Blog* that:

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As of yesterday, our development team has come up with an application which takes the raw data and turns it into an editable map. Which meant that we could produce a fantastic interactive graphic based on these figures. It's data journalism – editorial and developers producing something technically interesting and that changes how we work and how we see data. (Rogers 2008, para. 7)

It is clear from this that although the specific software mentioned is new, the process of working with data is not a new one for Rogers, the *Guardian*, or the industry as a whole. Data Journalism appears to be the inheritor of two older news practices: infographics and computer-assisted reporting (CAR). News infographics – the production of graphs, charts, maps and other factual illustrations dates to at least the late nineteenth century. Simon Rogers claims that the *Guardian* staff have been doing data journalism since the newspaper's founding in 1821 (History of Data Journalism at the Guardian 2013). That table of information that had been leaked to the editor of the paper showed the costs of local schools, 70 years before compulsory education. Whether data journalism is something invented by the *Guardian* newspaper (as Rogers seems to be claiming, both in this video and elsewhere), it is probably uncontroversial to say that they are currently among the best known for doing data journalism. It is important to remember that the financial pages of newspapers have been publishing graphs, charts and tables of data for decades, and maps and other illustrations have been a feature of reporting for as long. *USA Today*, launched in 1982, revolutionised the newspaper graphic, bringing full colour, maps and boldness to the pages. *USA Today* has been criticised for dumbing down the news, reducing information to diagrams and pictures, but the use of graphics as an integral part of storytelling, not just in financial and weather reporting, did change the image of the newspaper and what it could look like (Barnhurst and Nerone 2001, 22; Friendly and Denis 2001; Gladney 1993).

CAR dates at least the 1980s, and the growth of personal computers, the Internet and of expertise in computing has contributed to this. In 1986, *Time Magazine* published a report on how 'in the computer age, newsmen are enlisting the machine with dramatic results' (Bowen 1986) which highlighted examples of computer analysis of data being used in investigative reports into riots, financial reports and fraud. In 1989 the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting was founded in Missouri (Cox 2000). Philip Meyer is widely credited as one of the founders of CAR, and one of its earliest practitioners. In 1991 he published *The New Precision Journalism*, a book which located this new practice of computerised journalistic analysis firmly alongside the goals of objectivity, accuracy and the betterment of the journalistic profession (Meyer 1991). Although the book sets out a clear goal and meaning for this supposedly new form of journalism, its main goal is instructive: teaching students and journalists alike how to do it. This pattern remains true for much of the material published on CAR (and later on data journalism): the focus has been largely on the how, and far less on the why (or even the when). Meyer's book was followed by Brant Houston's (1999) *Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide* and Matthew Reavy's (2001) *Introduction to Computer-Assisted Reporting*. These are textbooks, intended to provide instruction on how to do CAR. These books served to bring the idea of CAR into the mainstream of journalism, or at least of journalism education, and during the 1990s and early part of the first decade of the twenty-first century, considerable research was done into introducing CAR into

the journalism curriculum (Davenport, Fico, and DeFleur 2002; Lee and Fleming 1995; Miller 1998; Quinn 1997; Williams 1997) but less into the actual use of CAR in newsrooms.

A handful of researchers have looked at the use of CAR by working journalists, usually linking it explicitly to other technological changes: the adoption of computers in production and archiving (the digital morgue), and access to a wider range of electronic resources such as bulletin boards systems, the world wide web and government repositories of electronic information. Garrison's (2000a, 2000b) studies of the diffusion of electronic communication methods into newsrooms looked specifically at attitudes and training of staff, and the ways in which early adopters influenced the use of technology. An earlier study by him focused on the reasons why newsrooms had, or had not, adopted CAR: looking at organisation size (Garrison 1998) as a factor. Davenport, Fico, and Detwiler (2000) and Davenport, Fico, and Weinstock (1996) likewise looked at newsroom practices and structures, examining the prevalence of CAR in newsrooms with reference to circulation and infrastructure and followed it up four years later.

This line of research into the use of CAR appears to have been limited to the USA, and even to the areas of the USA in close proximity to the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting in Missouri (and all published articles were produced for the American Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication or its journal). The studies, while useful, tend to be uncritical of the impact or desirability of CAR as a journalistic method, and focus instead on simple measurement of its use. What little discussion of the value of CAR is limited to unreferenced and unsubstantiated comments asserting its importance to the profession: 'Reporters using online databases and analyzing government data consistently won Pulitzers for their in-depth reporting' (Davenport, Fico, and Detwiler 2000, 3).

There are two articles that attempt to assess the value of CAR. Mayo and Leshner conducted an audience analysis of the credibility of newspapers using CAR, construction three versions of each a series of stories: one using CAR, one using anecdotal narrative and one using authoritative evidence. The subjects were then asked to rate the stories according to their credibility, newsworthiness, liking, quality and understanding. The readers did not rate the CAR stories any more or less credible or newsworthy than the others, but found them less likeable and readable, as well as being lower in quality. This study has not been repeated, but it raises interesting questions regarding the ways in which journalists perceive the impact or importance of a new technology to their profession, and the ways in which the audience perceive those changes (Mayo and Leshner 2000).

Maier's research into the use of mathematics in newspaper reporting is likewise a rather sobering read. In a study of the use of mathematical calculation in news stories he found that 48% of stories made mention of numerical information, and that fully one-third of those stories contained simple calculation errors, or 'errors of interpretation', including incongruence between charts and text, meaningless precision and 'naked numbers' (Maier 2010).

These two strands of the development of news production: increased use of graphics, and the availability of data and access to the means to analyse it continued through the first decade of the twenty-first century, but somewhat overshadowed by other technological developments in the field. In 2010 it was revived, though, apparently single-handedly by Simon Rogers and the team at the *Guardian*

newspaper, with help from Bradley Manning and Julian Assange. In July of that year, Wikileaks released the Afghan War Logs, followed by the Iraq War Logs in October to a number of news outlets, and then to the public. These massive data dumps contained hundreds of thousands of records of the activities of coalition troops in the two countries, and while damming, were frustratingly complex and detailed, and required a whole new level of analytical tools to make sense of them. The development of a custom data browser allowed the reporters to ‘search stories for key words or events. Suddenly the dataset became accessible and generating stories became easier’ (Rogers 2011, para. 261). The size of the data set was daunting, and making sense of it was a challenge – not just in terms of the management of the files, but also in terms of making the individual data points meaningful to readers. The *Guardian* used maps and charts to great effect with this data, and the apparently simple Iraq War Logs map of every death, made using Google Maps, remains one of the best examples of interactive data journalism around.

Rogers’ book on the *Guardian*’s data journalism projects is one of the few published works on data journalism, or data-driven journalism. Like the others, it is written largely for practitioners, and remains somewhat uncritical of the impact of data journalism, or even aware of its actual use. Rogers is inevitably something of an evangelist for data journalism:

So we are not alone in this: every day brings newer and more innovative journalists, developers and entrepreneurs into the field, and with them new skills and techniques. Not only is data journalism changing in itself, it’s changing journalism too. And the world. (Rogers 2011, para. 40)

Other books on data journalism take a similar instructive line: focusing on the how, not the why or even the whether. *The Data Journalism Handbook* (Gray, Chambers, and Bounegru 2012) and Paul Bradshaw’s (2010, 2011) work is likewise aimed at teaching people how to do it, and arguing for its inevitability in the newsrooms of the future. As with CAR, the focus is entirely on how to do it, and how amazingly revolutionary it is, but there is little critique of what data journalism actually is, who is actually doing it and why we should do it. This technological evangelism is not uncommon in journalistic research, and in journalism itself, but it needs more critical analysis.

This paper is a preliminary overview of the use of data journalism which will lay out the groundwork for a broader and more critical analysis of the prevalence, impact and value of data journalism as media practice.

A note on terminology

As with many other innovations in news production, there is considerable disagreement on what ‘data journalism’ actually is, or what the term encompasses. Data journalism and data-driven journalism are also routinely used as synonyms, while the older term, CAR has all but vanished (since it was coined at a time when ‘computer’ meant a mainframe beast occupying a whole room of the building, and now it is something we all have multiple examples of at our fingertips, this is unsurprising). Data journalism is defined by Simon Rogers (2011) as ‘a field combining spreadsheets, graphics data analysis and the biggest news stories’ (para.

110), while Mirko Lorenz (2010) refers to it as a process that goes from analysing, filtering and visualising data in a form that links to a narrative and is useful to the public. The emphasis on graphics and visualisation is common, and for some observers, data journalism is fundamentally the production of news graphics, and fits within that framework of practice, with elements of design and interactivity taking precedence (Bradshaw 2010; Lorenz 2010; Rogers 2011). For others, the focus on large data sources, often acquired through leaks or freedom of information requests, and the extended and complex analysis of this data is important, linking data journalism to the practice of investigative journalism, as Meyer (1991) did with CAR. For the purpose of this study, I have taken the broadest possible definition of data journalism: a story whose primary source or ‘peg’ is numeric (rather than anecdotal), or a story which contains a substantial element of data or visualisation. This broad definition allows for the widest possible net, catching as many examples as possible of journalism that incorporate data, in order to create an understanding of the field.

Methodology

The study is a content analysis of the use of data journalism in UK national daily and Sunday newspapers. The national papers were chosen because they are the best resourced, and prior work has shown that the size and resources of a newsroom are directly correlated to the extent to which those newsrooms make use of new technologies (Garrison 1998, 2000a; Machill and Beiler 2009; Quandt 2008). The newspapers are the *Guardian*, the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Independent*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Express*, the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Observer*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Sun on Sunday*, the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Independent on Sunday*, the *Mail on Sunday* and the *Sunday Express*.

The print publications were used, because visualisations are not available in archive form, and online sites are either inaccessible to trawling software (as with News Corporation’s publications), or contain little more than the print publication. The one exception to the latter is the *Guardian*, which is ‘digital first’, but although it remains in itself a fascinating study, the goal of the research is to examine the whole field, not its most extreme outlier. However, the print *Guardian* is included in the corpus, because to exclude it would skew the results. For the purposes of some of the analyses, the papers were combined into their respective ownership groupings, matching each daily with its sister Sunday title.

The newspapers were collected from 11 to 24 March inclusive, resulting in 112 newspapers. Each paper’s main news section, lifestyle and entertainment sections were examined. The sports and finance/business sections were excluded from the study because their use and presentation of data are both historically much more entrenched, and because they follow substantially different processes and development of stories and narrative. Sports and financial stories that were covered within the main news section of the newspaper were included. Weather forecasts, and in the case of one newspaper, statistical analysis of the lottery numbers, were excluded on the grounds that their content is not journalistic, and the goal of this information is not the same as for journalism.

During the period of analysis the government’s annual budget was announced (on 20th March), and coverage of the budget was included in the corpus, since it

always appeared within the main news section of the papers. Many of the papers had supplements for the budget, which were included, but specific coverage within the business sections were not.

The selection of these papers resulted in a corpus of more than 3000 stories, which were examined for the evidence of data journalism. Of the stories examined, only 106 had any element of data used within them. At this stage in the analysis, any story containing multiple elements or pieces, was counted as a single story: budget coverage was treated this way, which reduces the number considerably. The impetus for this first pass analysis was the origin of the story, or its peg, not the actual size of the content itself (Figure 1).

Three of the 'quality' newspaper groups, the *Guardian*, the *Times* and the *Independent*, account for 68 of the stories, 64% of the total, with the last of the qualities, the *Telegraph*, making up another 9 stories. The 'popular' papers had a far lower number of data-driven stories, reasonably evenly split among the members of that group. On average, the quality papers had slightly fewer than one data-driven

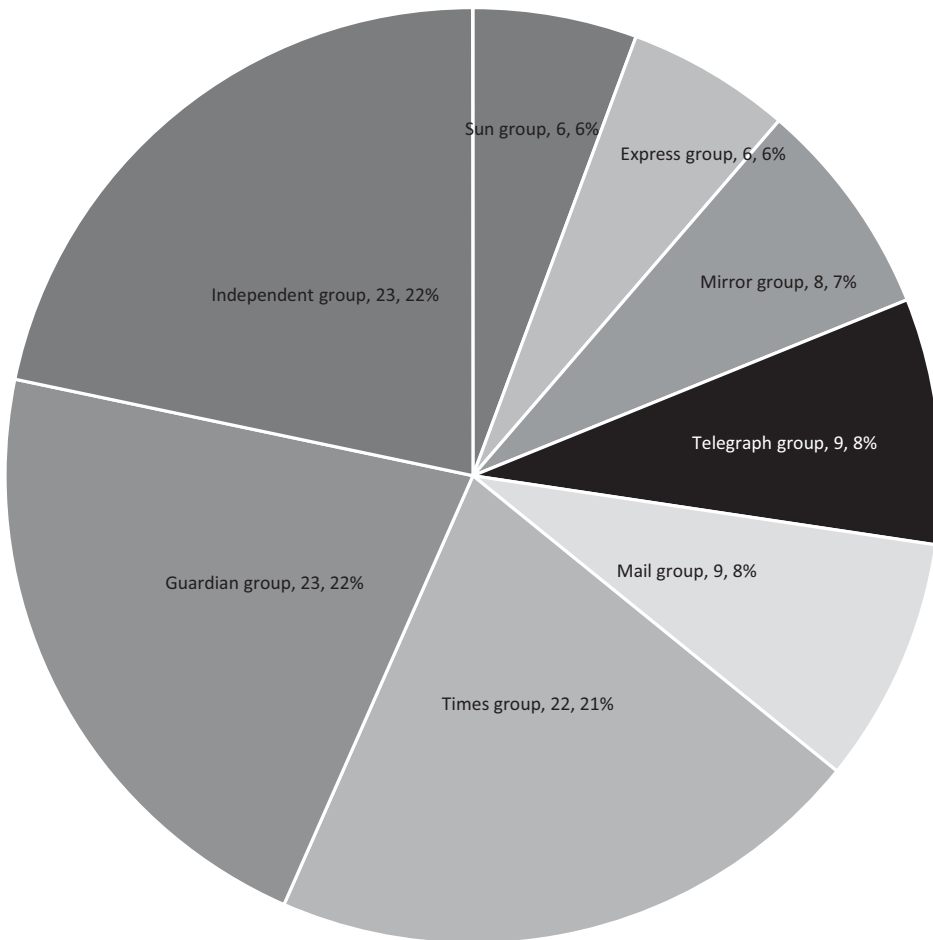


Figure 1. Data-driven stories in all publications, grouped by ownership.

story per day, but that was not evenly split across the two weeks. Leaving aside the budget coverage (which all appeared on the 21st of March), the breakdown of stories across the weeks was uneven, with more stories appearing on Friday and Sunday than other days.

Findings

Stories were categorised by their main subject (not into their identified section within the newspaper). Stories covering social issues (poverty, the environment, education and housing) were disproportionately likely to contain data elements (for reasons discussed below), followed by world and news stories. There were relatively few science stories, but data elements represent a substantial proportion of the science stories covered (Figure 2).

Each story was then analysed as to the data components, or elements that each contained. Many stories contained multiple data elements, so this analysis allowed a clearer idea of the extent of data reporting within the corpus. There were 172 data elements presented within the 106 stories, but once the budget stories were excluded, there were 111 data elements in 98 stories. Examination of the individual data elements resulted in the development of the following categories, or types, of data element: a textual analysis, where the numbers are discussed within the text, but not otherwise represented; timeline, which shows events listed by date, whether continuous or not; static map, showing the location of an event; dynamic map, showing both location and other data such as amount or date; graph, showing relationships between numbers (these were initially broken down by graph type, but this resulted in too fine a division of data); infographic, a combination of pictures and numerical information; a table of figures, a list of numbers and a numerical pullquote (Figure 3).¹

Overall, infographics, graphs, chart, static maps and pullquotes were the most common form of data information presented, with little variation among them. The less accessible, and graphically interesting, forms of data, lists, tables and textual analysis were less common. There is a strong prevalence for the visual impact in the

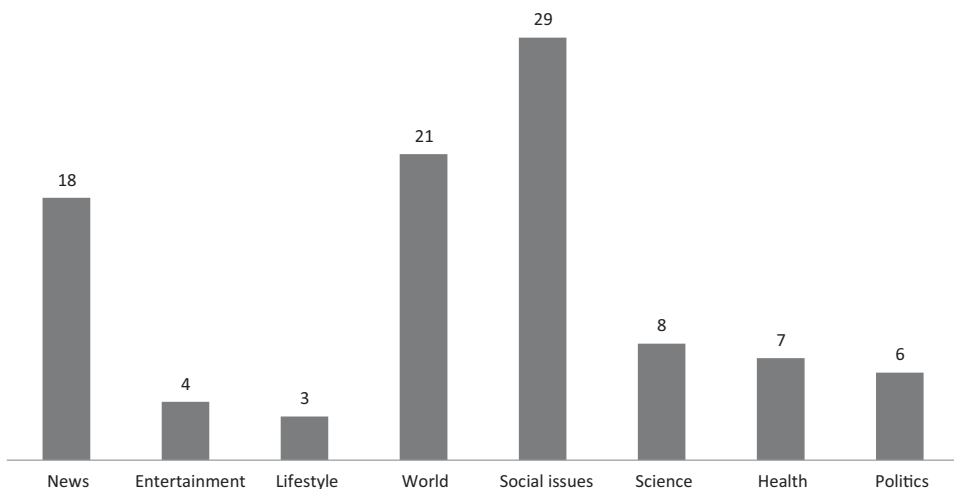


Figure 2. Subjects covered by data-based stories.

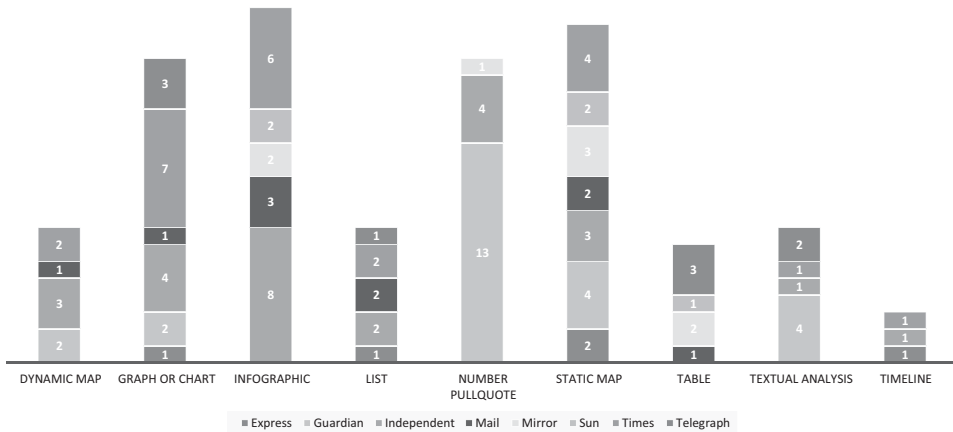


Figure 3. Data-driven types in all publications, grouped by ownership.

data elements presented: especially among the popular titles. The least visual elements, the number pullquote and textual analysis appear only in the quality papers. The number pullquote is almost entirely the preserve of the two left-of-centre quality titles: the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, with only one appearing in the *Mail*.

Static maps were the most evenly spread across the titles – all outlets had at least one map element, although the more complex dynamic maps only appeared in the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Times* and the *Mail* (Figure 4).

Infographics were used in all subjects, except health. As expected, maps were used most in world stories, followed by news (and then by science – but there were four stories on the building of a new telescope array in Chile, all contained maps of the location, which is a somewhat anomalous usage); pullquotes (a quote or piece of information from the story displayed as a visual element on the page – in this case this refers to a pullquote containing key numeric information) were commonly used in health reporting, but given that pullquotes were used only by two titles, the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, and that health stories were disproportionately covered by those two titles, it appears that this is not a function of the nature of the stories. The remainder of the types was fairly evenly distributed among the subject matter.

Budget coverage

The budget coverage across all eight titles contained more graphs and charts than any other type of element, as would be expected, as well as half of the total tables presented in the corpus. As with other subjects, number pullquotes are extensively used, primarily by the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* (the only time the *Telegraph* used pullquotes was in budget coverage). As expected maps and lists were hardly used, and timelines not at all (Figure 5).

The quality papers had far more extensive and far more numeric budget coverage than the popular titles. All of the quality titles had budget supplements as well as coverage in the main body: total coverage in each of the quality titles averaged 23 pages (the *Telegraph*, being the last surviving broadsheet daily, was calculated at the equivalent of two tabloid pages per page). The popular titles averaged 7.5 pages of

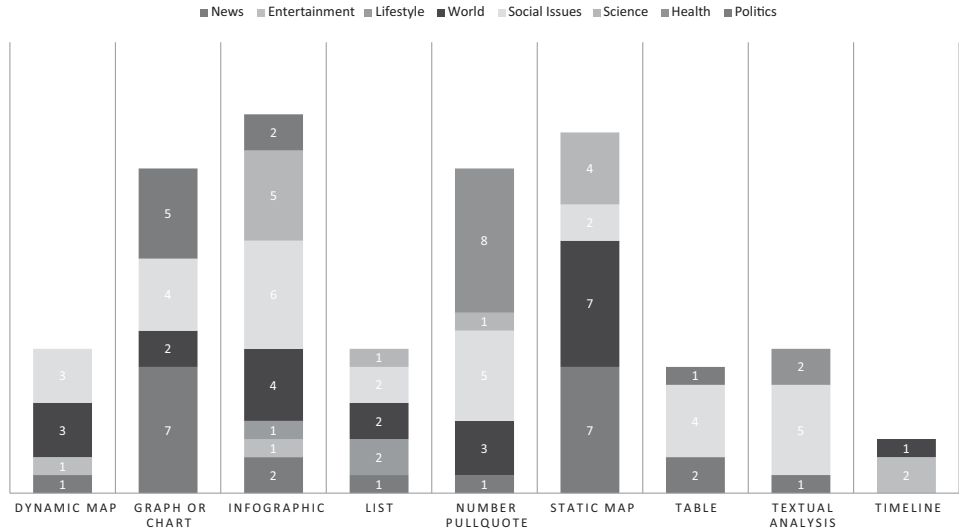


Figure 4. Types of data elements used in each subject area.

coverage, and none of them included separate supplements. A ratio of data elements per page of coverage was calculated, with the following results (Figure 6).

The *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* had the highest ratios, even with number pullquotes removed from the analysis, the *Guardian* had a ratio of 0.6 elements per page of coverage. The relatively low ratio within the overall corpus is somewhat surprising, given the numeric nature of the subject. Most of the coverage, however, was given to narrative discussion of the impact of the budget on the public, on business and on the various political parties. All supplements did contain large graphic elements, but the actual data within them were somewhat limited (most supplements contained some variation on a pie chart covering two pages, showing income and expenditure: dramatic, but that single element contained only 25 or so data points within it).

Sources of data

The sourcing of data is widely considered to be a key part of data journalism, and certainly the best known data journalism investigations are remarkable for the nature of the data, and how the news organisations came by it. The increasing power of freedom of information acts in the developed world has resulted in more data being released to news organisations in that way, this, along with the now reasonably common dumps of leaked data have led to something of a perception that data journalism is all about massive data sets, acquired through acts of journalistic bravery and derring-do (Bradshaw 2010; Leigh and Harding 2011). Data journalism is also explicitly linked to investigative journalism (and has been since Meyer), and to the importance of quality, original journalism and journalism which seeks to 'speak truth to power'. At the very least, 'data journalism is all about diverse sources', according to Simon Rogers (2011, para. 53).

The origin of the data used in each data element within the corpus was examined. Several generic data sources were identified, including government, corporate entities, research institutes (including non-profit groups and academic institutions),

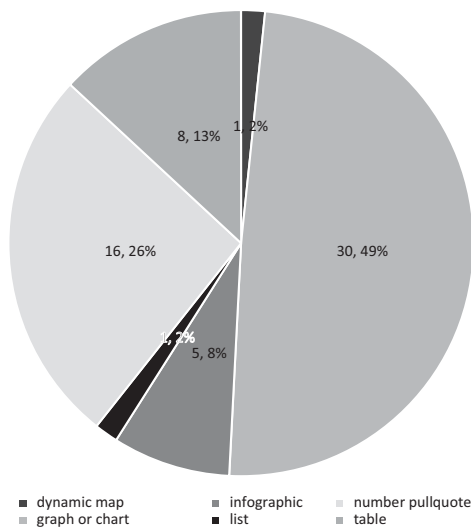


Figure 5. Types of data elements used in budget coverage.

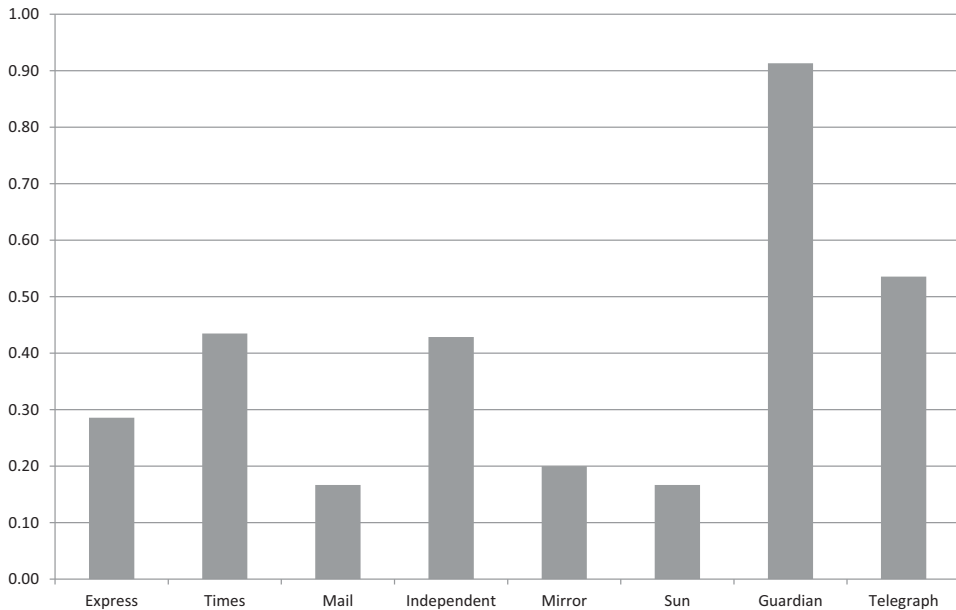


Figure 6. Ratio of data elements per page of coverage.

Pan-national organisations (such as the various agencies of the United Nations), Polls and self-generated (i.e., data gathered by the news organisation itself). This is of necessity a rough measure, but it fits in line with examining the claim that data journalism is a way to break away from the dominance of official sources and press releases.

Since all the data presented in the budget coverage were sourced via government, this was excluded from the analysis, of the remaining elements, 40% were unsourced, 28% from a research institution, 11% from a government department, 7% each from polls and self-generated by the organisation, and only two tranches of data, from more than 100, were gained through either a freedom of information request or a leak.

Of the data elements for which no source was identified, almost half (19 of 41) were static maps, which would require no specific source be identified. A further nine were infographics, and the remainder a range of data. In some cases, the data were uncontroversial (such as the size of various atomic elements), and thus required no specific source, or clearly sourced via another news organisation (the decline of the convention that all wire service stories be clearly identified has made the work of academic research considerably harder).

The corpus showed a heavy reliance on data sourced through research institutions, especially in stories covering health and social issues. All of the health stories and a third of those covering social issues sourced their data through research institutions, and in half of those instances, the data were clearly included in a press release issued by the research institution and represented without comment or challenge by the journalist.

The self-generated data comprised information collated from consumer products (prices, calorie counts, etc.) or data acquired during traditional interview techniques

(how a celebrity spends their money, for example). The one large story that relied on self-generated data was an ‘investigation’ in the *Sun* on 11 March, called ‘Psychic Britain’, spread across two pages, with a large infographic covering more than a page of area. The investigation was in fact a poll of *Sun* readers conducted by the newspaper (no polling organisation is identified). The text discusses psychics, giving a brief history, and profiling four psychic practitioners. No numeric data are included in the text. The infographic shows the results of 11 questions, 3 shown as pie charts and 8 yes/no questions such as ‘Do you believe there are buildings which are haunted?’ No historical or comparative data are given, and no details of how the poll was conducted are provided.

The two stories based on freedom of information requests appeared in tabloid newspapers.

A feature in the *Mirror* on 22 March, headlined ‘Teen Sex Plague’ covered two full pages, with an infographic showing rates of diagnosis of sexually transmitted diseases in under 16s and under 13s, in some cases split by gender, in 2003, 2007 and 2011, alongside a table of rates of specific diseases, and three key figures pulled out as subheadings. The design of the infographic has clearly sacrificed clarity for impact – the key figures are rendered as pie charts, superimposed on condoms and in a bar chart rendered as test tubes. Although the clarity and effectiveness of data visualisations are not the intent of this article, it must be pointed out that using a pie chart to show changes in figures over time is not at all effective, and renders the numbers essentially meaningless. The text accompanying the feature contains approximately one-quarter numerical data, but at the end of main story, and not at all in either of the two accompanying pieces.

The other large original story was in the *Mail on Sunday* on 17 March, headlined: ‘The Great Green Con’, and concerned figures ‘leaked’ by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), although the paper does not make the route clear, and other sources refer to the data as having been released. The only data discussed in the story are in the form of a complex graph, taking up more than a third of the two-page spread, and showing predicted global temperatures according to the IPCC, mapped to actual recorded temperatures. The point at which the recorded temperatures appear to dip below predicted temperatures is highlighted. The text contains almost no data itself, focusing on the politics of the claims. The story is big, and is given a lot of space, but it must be said that the newspaper’s interpretation of the data has been heavily criticised in other media, and by several reputable organisations.

Analysis

A simple content analysis of the findings above shows a variety of data elements used, in a variety of subjects. The more subtle questions of the value added by the use of data journalism require a more complex understanding of two aspects of data journalism: interpretation and visualisation.

Interpretation of the data is often identified as a requirement of data journalism, although this is not uniformly supported within the field. Bradshaw (2010) and Rogers (2011), certainly, identify the interpretation of complex data sets as one of the skills of a data journalist, as does Lorenz (2010), but they also both suggest that the presentation of raw data sets is also data journalism.

Complexity

Ranking the data element types by the level of interpretation and analysis required to produce them (based on a reading of the text, of the amount of information included in the element, and the proportion of the story given over to the data itself), we get the following hierarchy of value added to the story by the process of data journalism, from least to most complex, with a numerical value attached:

- (1) Number pullquote – a single numerical fact, presented out of context and without comment
- (1) Static map – a location identifier, a graphical dateline, with one or more locations identified
- (2) List and timelines – a one dimensional ranking of a series of data points
- (3) Table – a two-dimensional presentation of data in a grid format. This is arguably more complex than a graph or chart, but it requires less analysis or interpretation on the part of the journalist.
- (3) and (4) Graphs and charts – a visual representation of two-dimensional information. These were further divided into simple, and complex data sets.
- (4) Dynamic map – a map showing locations in relationship to time or other values
- (5) Textual analysis – a complex discussion of numerical information in the text
- (5) Infographic

This ranking allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of data journalism present in the corpus, and analysing the elements by this measure, gives us mean complexity scores for each newspaper title (Figure 7).

Although the *Telegraph* and the *Mail* had relatively few data elements within the corpus, those they had were more complex and nuanced. The *Guardian's* reliance on number pullquotes has brought its complexity score down considerably, without them included in the analysis, its mean complexity score is among the highest, at 3.6.

The *Mail* and the *Sun* newspapers score surprisingly high on complexity, this is accounted for by their use of infographics.

Visual appeal

Data journalism is inextricably bound up with the visualisation of data, and in the corpus it is clear that some data choices have been made to increase the visual appeal of the material, at the expense of clarity of data. Newspapers are both visual and textual, and the importance of design and images to the newspaper industry should not be minimised, but some data elements were clearly designed to be primarily eye-catching, with little concern for the intelligibility of the finished product. The types of data element were ranked according to their visual appeal, in the following hierarchy:

- (0) Textual analysis
- (1) Number pullquote or table
- (2) Timeline or list (although a list is arguably less visual than a table, examination of the elements shows that lists were almost always combined with images)
- (3) Static map, chart or graph
- (4) Dynamic map
- (5) Infographic

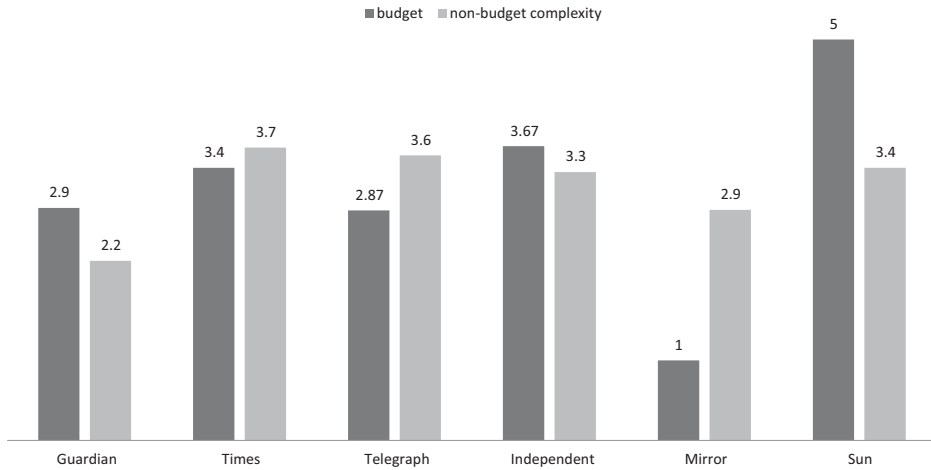


Figure 7. Complexity rating for each news outlet's data journalism.

A mean visual appeal score is calculated for all titles, budget and non-budget coverage, with results as follows (Figure 8).

As with the mean complexity score, the *Guardian*'s result is somewhat skewed by its heavy reliance on number pullquotes: removing those, however, only raises its mean visual appeal to 1.7, still the lowest of the newspapers. The *Telegraph* is in second place, but the remaining two quality papers, the *Independent* and the *Times* are ranked comparatively with the popular titles, with a mean visual appeal of between two and three. The *Times*' reliance on infographics accounts at least in part for this.

For the budget coverage all papers displayed slightly less visual appeal than for non-budget stories, with the exception of the *Sun*, again, as a result of their use of infographics (the only data element in their budget coverage was a large infographic). When calculated against the overall ratio of data journalism to coverage, the

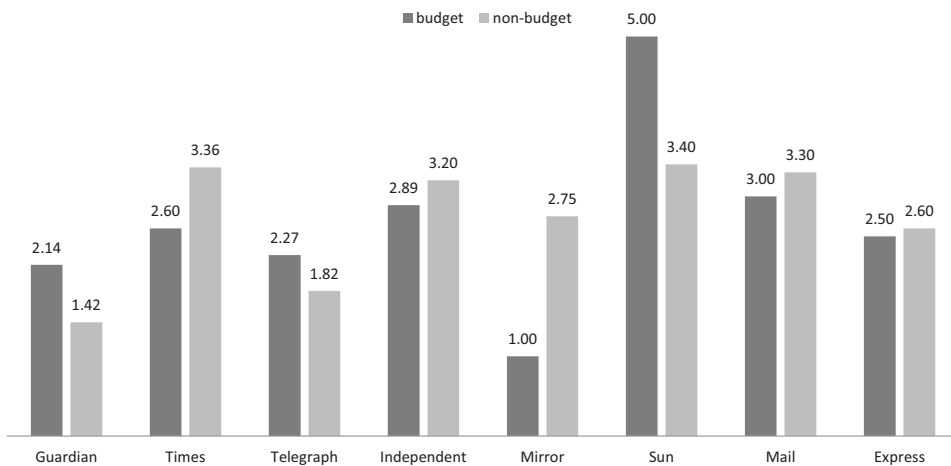


Figure 8. Visual appeal rating for each news outlet's data journalism.

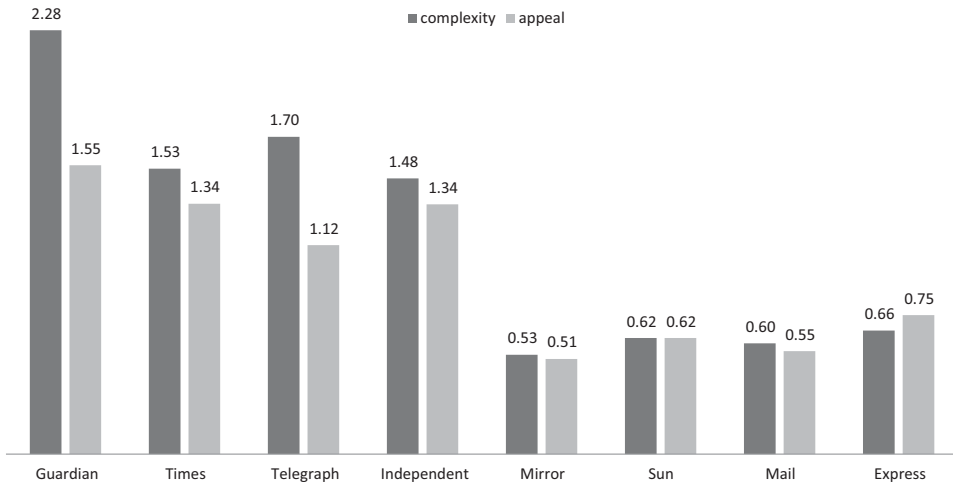


Figure 9. Visual appeal and complexity of the data journalism presented, as in index of the ratio of data journalism.

complexity and visual appeals scores are reduced. This final calculation, of the complexity of the data journalism presented, as a function of the proportion of data journalism overall, shows the following (Figure 9).

Overall, the corpus displays only slight differences in either complexity or visual appeal between the various titles, or between budget and non-budget coverage. The substantial difference is in the use of data journalism at all, which is far more evident in the quality papers' coverage than that of the popular press.

Conclusions

The study examines and highlights some of the claims made by data journalism evangelists against the reality. The aim is not to demolish the claims of data journalism, but to examine its level of penetration into (mainstream news) media practice. To that end, the findings do not show overwhelming evidence of comprehensive use of data journalism by national UK titles, although all titles did make some use of data journalism throughout the period studied. As expected, the *Guardian* newspaper shows more commitment to data journalism, and to more complex data journalism than other titles, with the remaining quality titles in similar rankings. The popular newspapers show a lower commitment overall to data journalism, but appear to value visual appeal and complexity equally.

The data journalism presented relied heavily on institutional sources, especially government agencies. In addition, there is evidence of the rise of data-based press releases: a substantial proportion of the stories showed evidence of a body of data being released wholesale by research institutes and other vested bodies. Particularly in social issues and health, most of the data presented were acquired in this way.

Freedom of Information actions and leaks were not widely represented in the data presented, although there was some small evidence. Large dumps of data acquired through investigative journalism are rare, and a much longer study is needed in order to capture them. What is more concerning, though, is the appropriation of the

language of investigative data journalism for somewhat less rigorous material. The *Mail on Sunday*'s controversial analysis of IPCC data it claims had been leaked to it, and the *Sun*'s presentation of a poll that amounts to asking its readers whether they believe in ghosts were both presented as 'special investigations' purporting to uncover hidden evidence. This shows that although the methods espoused by the evangelists of data journalism are not being widely followed, the form has its own appeal, and that the presentation of information in data form can have its own weight, regardless of the actual value of the information or its impact on society. The extent to which commercial newspapers actually engage with investigative journalism, as opposed to the extent to which they claim they do is a subject for another study, but an important consideration in the analysis of news reporting.

Overall, though, the data journalism found in this study is largely superficial, institutionally sourced and non-remarkable. Rather than becoming the new frontier of investigative journalism, this very limited study has shown that in the daily newsroom grind, crunching data have become no more remarkable, or important, than any other form of journalism.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Note

1. A pullquote is an excerpt from the body of the text repeated and highlighted on the page to draw the eye. A numerical pullquote is extract of one piece of data treated in this manner.

Notes on contributor

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December 21 2015

STATEMENT OF CO-AUTHORS of JOINT PUBLICATIONS

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Title of publication: Knight, M., Cook, C., 2011. Beyond technological determinism: a model for understanding the new participatory networked news environment. Presented at the Mindrek, ACM Digital Library, Tampere, Finland.

Name of candidate: Megan Knight

Title of research thesis: The impact of changing media technology on the practice of journalism.

Name of first supervisor: Dr Richard Sharpley

I, the undersigned, co-authors of the above publication, confirm that the above publication has not been submitted as evidence for which a degree or other qualification has already been awarded.

I, the undersigned, further indicate the candidate's contribution to the publication in our joint statement below.

Signature:



Clare Cook



Megan Knight

Statement indicating the candidate's contribution to the publication

This paper was based around the development of a linked pair of models describing the new media landscape. We worked jointly to develop the models, with Megan Knight contributing to the macro model and Clare Cook to the micro model. The paper was jointly authored and submitted, and Clare Cook presented the work at the conference.

December 21 2015

STATEMENT OF CO-AUTHORS of JOINT PUBLICATIONS

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Title of publication: Knight, M., Cook, C., 2013. Social Media for Journalists: Principles and Practice. Sage, London. Chapters four, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten.

Name of candidate: Megan Knight

Title of research thesis: The impact of changing media technology on the practice of journalism.

Name of first supervisor: Dr Richard Sharpley

I, the undersigned, co-authors of the above publication, confirm that the above publication has not been submitted as evidence for which a degree or other qualification has already been awarded.

I, the undersigned, further indicate the candidate's contribution to the publication in our joint statement below.

Signature:



Clare Cook

Megan Knight

Statement indicating the candidate's contribution to the publication

Chapters one and fourteen were jointly authored, with Megan Knight focusing on the Macro model and the theoretical constructs, and Clare Cook focusing on the Micro model and the practical aspects of the work. Chapters four, six, seven, eight, nine and ten were wholly authored by Megan Knight, with feedback and advice from Clare Cook.