

The SAGE Handbook of Social Media



Edited by
Jean Burgess,
Alice Marwick and
Thomas Poell

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Social Media and Journalism

Alfred Hermida

INTRODUCTION

When Apollo 11 landed on the Moon on the night of July 20, 1968, 125 million Americans were glued to their TV sets to watch astronaut Neil Armstrong set foot on the grey landscape. By the time of the live broadcast of the Moon landings, television had become the dominant form of media for news, information and entertainment in the US. The TV set was a fixture in nine out of 10 American homes. Television was the defining medium for the Baby Boomer generation in the US. Now in their fifties and sixties, this generation continues to turn to television for political news (Mitchell, Gottfried and Matsa, 2015).

Television has proved to be remarkably resilient as a source for news. In their analysis of four years of cross-national data on news habits, Newman, Levy and Nielsen (2015) found that significant audiences continue to tune in to the news on TV. The overall figures mask generational differences that point to the emergence of social media as spaces

for news and information. People born in the 1980s and early 1990s have grown up with the internet. For this millennial generation, research suggests that social media are what TV was for the Baby Boomers. Six out of 10 online millennials in the US cite Facebook as their source for political news (Mitchell et al., 2015).

The social practices that have developed alongside social media have led to shifts in how publics discover and consume the news. First is the rise of social media platforms as spaces for the circulation of news and information. While TV and online remain as key sources for news, audiences for print newspapers dropped off as the importance of social media as gateways to the news has risen (Newman et al., 2015). In particular, Facebook, with 1.71 billion monthly active users by June 2016, has emerged as the significant force in news discovery. In 2010, a third of internet users in the US were distributing or discussing news on networks like Facebook (Purcell et al., 2010). By 2015,

two-thirds of Facebook users across 12 countries cited the social network as a place where they find, read, discuss or share news, indicating ‘a quickening of the pace towards social media and mobile news’ (Newman et al., 2015: 7).

If the Moon landing were taking place today, millions would, no doubt, be tuned into the live broadcast on television. Alongside, though, people would be checking live updates and feeds on the web, on mobile devices and on social platforms. They would be recommending and commenting on links, photos and video on Facebook and Twitter. They would be distributing, discussing and dissecting news tidbits about the landings on social platforms, from Facebook to Twitter and from WhatsApp to WeChat.

These platforms, created as networks for people to connect, communicate and create, have taken on some of the functions of the traditional news media, from newsgathering to publication. This chapter examines the interplay between social platforms, journalistic norms and routines and media institutions. It examines how the development and growth of social media platforms have impacted news flows, before going on to consider how journalists and media institutions have responded to the changing dynamics around the discovery, selection, publication and distribution of news and information.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE NEWS

Social media tools, platforms and services may be a relatively new phenomenon but it is important to note that media have always had a social element. People were discussing, commenting on and sharing news long before Facebook, using the communication systems available at the time, from talking on the doorstep with neighbours to sending newspaper cuttings in the mail. In 1961, playwright Arthur C. Miller was quoted in *The Observer* newspaper as saying that ‘a good newspaper,

I suppose, is a nation talking to itself’. Donath (2004) notes that the roots of sociable media can be tracked back to the advent of letter writing on clay tablets 4,000 years ago. Her definition of sociable media as media that kindle communication and the formation of social ties can be overlaid to digital platforms such as Facebook or Twitter.

The growth of social media and concurrently social practices of sharing have led to increased interest in the concept of ‘sharing’ in communication and media studies (Brake, 2014; Hermida, 2014; John and Sützl, 2015; Stalder and Sützl, 2011; Sützl et al., 2012). In the context of social media, sharing is inextricably related to communication. The sharing of news serves as a form of social currency, with publics taking advantage of the communication tools and spaces available at the time to filter, manage and exchange information, and in the process form and foster relationships. On social platforms, the act of posting information about a matter of public interest or sharing a link to a news story is an exchange of cultural and symbolic capital that strengthens social relationships (*New York Times*, n.d.; Robinson, 2011). The context for these exchanges is shaped by what Rainie and Wellman call the triple revolution: the prevalence of ‘social networks, the personalized internet and always-available mobile connectivity’ (2012: ix).

As a result, news has become a pervasive, persistent and perpetual commodity, never more than a click away through a social media app on a smartphone. The impact on journalism goes beyond the enhanced and expanded social discovery of the news. These spaces enable citizens to reinterpret and contextualize messages from institutional media organizations by adding their own comments on a Facebook post or a specific hashtag to frame an issue (Hinsley and Lee, 2015; Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013). Moreover, citizens are able to craft, circulate and consume their own media messages (Callison and Hermida, 2015; Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2012), taking on some of the institutional

practices of journalists. The most dramatic and visible example is the capacity of people to share their experiences of a breaking news event. Twitter, alone, has emerged as a major channel for the dissemination of first-hand reports on major events from the 2008 Chinese earthquake to the Arab Spring in 2011 (Bruno, 2011; Hermida, 2014). As Marwick and boyd note, on social media, ‘the networked audience has a clear way to communicate with the speaker through the network’ (2011: 129).

Social media, then, are a fundamental element of the digital media environment that has been conceptualized as a hybrid space, where ‘the personnel, practices, genres, technologies, and temporalities of supposedly “new” online media are hybridized with those of supposedly “old” broadcast and press media’ (Chadwick, 2011: 7). On social media, and particularly on Twitter, news and views from journalists, institutions and publics are intermingled in incessantly updated and refreshed social awareness streams, in what Hermida (2010) describes as ambient journalism. Journalism has become literally ambient as a backing track to daily life, with news intermingled in streams of content generated by professionals and the public. For Papacharissi, these are affective news streams, with the news ‘collaboratively constructed out of subjective experience, opinion, and emotion, all sustained by and sustaining ambient news environments’ (2015: 34). Journalists and media organizations contend with operating in what Callison and Hermida (2015) describe as a contested middle ground, when the weight in institutional elites such as reporters and news outlets is challenged and counteracted by the networked actions of a diverse public.

The proliferation of social media and the development of social practices around the use of these technologies have combined to affect the context for journalism. Not only are they having multifaceted consequences for journalistic norms and practices, they have also unsettled established relationships

and hierarchies in the newsroom and in the traditional producer–consumer relationship between the journalist and the audience. The result has been both opportunities and challenges as traditional and novel norms, practices and contexts blend in a hybrid media environment. As with earlier media technologies, such as the telegraph and television, the digital technologies of social media have had a significant impact on what journalists do, how they do it and why they do it, as well as on the institutional frameworks in which they have traditionally operated.

THE PROFESSIONAL ADOPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Since the rapid growth of Facebook and Twitter, social media have increasingly become part of the toolkit of journalists. Industry reports have tracked the growth in the number of journalists on social media (Cision, 2010, 2015). A survey from the UK suggested it has become an everyday professional tool for virtually all journalists (Cision, 2013). A study of journalists in four European countries, including the UK, shows similar results (Gulyas, 2013). News organizations have created new positions for social media editors as well as setting up training programmes and developing guidelines for journalists operating in this area (Newman, Dutton and Blank, 2012).

Moreover, media organizations have sought to capitalize on the network effort by encouraging readers to share news stories with their social circles. Social discovery and recommendation has increasingly become a significant way to reach audiences, especially those with only a passing interest in the news (Newman et al., 2015). Tools encouraging users to like, share or recommend a story have become commonplace (Ju, Jeong and Chyi, 2014; Singer, 2014).

While top-level figures suggest that social media have become everyday in the

newsroom, it is important to acknowledge that these figures can mask differences over the degree of use. For example, Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013) found that 85 per cent of Swedish journalists say they use social media, but went on to highlight that only one in 10 journalists posted to Twitter on a daily basis.

Digging into the numbers reveals how Twitter developed as the social media platform of choice for journalists, despite its relatively small user base compared to Facebook. A 2009 headline on the *American Journalism Review* decreed 'The Twitter Explosion' in the profession (Farhi, 2009), while a report published at the same time noted that 'the last few years have seen Twitter sweep through newsrooms on the back of its convenience, utility and immediacy' (Newman, 2009: 47). Media organizations have encouraged their journalists to be active on Twitter, with the guide to social media produced by Swedish Radio noting that the platform was 'a strategic choice for spreading our material', adding that 'with the help of Twitter you can quickly reach the "right" people' (quoted in Hedman, 2016).

The appeal of Twitter to journalists lies in its stream of news, comments and analysis, mixed in with professional and personal updates, snippets of little consequence and self-promotional activities. For Bruns and Burgess, it is 'both a social networking site and an ambient information stream' (2012: 803). This conceptualization builds on Hermida's suggestion of Twitter as 'an awareness system that offers diverse means to collect, communicate, share and display news and information, serving diverse purposes' (2010: 301).

Since its launch in 2006, Twitter has moved away from its initial prompt of 'What are you doing?' to privilege event-based and event-driven content, becoming increasingly influential as a platform for news. In 2011, it launched an official Twitter for Newsrooms guide, followed by best practice guidelines for journalists. By 2015, its 'About' page

featured a stream of events happening at the moment, with the service describing itself as 'your window to the world,' that provides 'real-time updates about what matters to you' (Twitter, n.d.). In tracking the development of Twitter, van Dijck found how the 'subtle but meaningful change in Twitter's interface indicates a strategy that emphasizes (global, public) news and information over (personal, private) conversation in restricted circles' (2012: 340–341).

Much as journalists have tended to gravitate towards Twitter, so have scholars. By 2011, there were at least 14 academic texts dedicated to the platform (Pérez-Latre, Portilla and Sánchez Blanco, 2011). Most of the studies into how journalists and media organizations are responding to social media have focused on Twitter (see Hermida, 2013, for an overview). Yet, such studies may not be representative of the practices of the majority of journalists. Research has tended to look at strategic samples based on the most active, prominent or influential media professionals on Twitter (Artwick, 2013; Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton, 2012; Noguera-Vivo, 2013; Vis, 2013) or have relied on self-selected, non-representative samples (Gulyas, 2013; Jordaan, 2013). While most journalists talk about using social media in their work, only a minority share, like or tweet constantly throughout their workday (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre, 2013). As a result, there is a lack of broad, representative studies that reflect the nuances of professional practices in diverse contexts across the full range of social media platforms.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISM PRACTICES

The picture that emerges from the existing body of literature on social media and journalism reveals simultaneous and contradictory processes of resistance and renewal taking place. In line with previous changes in

journalism, much of the response from the profession has been to resist change and instead adapt new ways of working on social media to fit within long-held, established practices. Such processes of normalization have been evident in the development of online news (for an overview, see Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009). Similarly, journalists held on to their traditional gatekeeping role during the emergence of participatory media technologies such as blogs or comments on stories (Hermida and Thurman, 2008; Singer, 2005; Singer et al., 2011).

With the arrival of social media, a similar pattern has emerged. Newsgathering and sourcing routines have been adapted to take advantage of the visibility and reach of social media to find story tips, eyewitness material or sources, above all at times of breaking news. By and large, news organizations have adopted what Bruno describes as an 'opportunistic' model (2011: 66). It has become commonplace for journalists and news organizations to scour social media and then publish what they evaluate as newsworthy material based on long-standing news values. First-hand accounts, photos and videos shared on social media by people caught up in major events such as a natural disaster or terror attack are the most valued by news organizations (Williams, Wardle and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011). Such material fills the news vacuum that can follow a major event until professional journalists are on the ground.

In what Bruno dubbed as the 'Twitter effect', newsrooms are able 'to provide live coverage without any reporters on the ground, by simply newsgathering user-generated content available online' (2011: 8). For example, *The Guardian*, the BBC and CNN used extensive social media from the audience in the immediate aftermath of the 2010 Haiti earthquake but stopped once their own journalists had arrived at the scene (Bruno, 2011). In their study of the BBC, Williams, Wardle and Wahl-Jorgensen concluded that the public service broadcaster had

been 'harnessing audience material in order to fit within existing long-established processes of journalistic production' (2011: 94). The notion of using social media to engage with audiences in the co-construction and co-creation of the news is a minority activity (Cozma and Chen, 2013; Noguera-Vivo, 2013). One study on two South African newspapers epitomized that general trend in journalism with editors largely ignoring discourse on social media in their daily news decisions (Jordaan, 2013). By and large, it is journalism as usual, with journalists firmly in charge of deciding the news.

Sourcing practices have followed the same trajectory. Traditionally, journalists have turned to people in power as sources for information, privileging elites with institutional authority and credibility, such as government officials, police officers or business leaders (Gans, 1979; McNair, 1998; Tuchman, 1972). Moreover, journalists face operational impediments, such as proximity of sources, the acceleration of news cycles and reduced newsroom resources (Boczkowski, 2010), that tend to reinforce traditional sourcing practices. A growing body of research on social media and activism shows how these platforms can serve as channels for non-traditional sources to rise to prominence (Callison and Hermida, 2015; Lotan et al., 2011; Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). Such studies point to the potential of social media to expand the range of actors involved in the construction of the news.

However, research into journalistic sourcing practices on social media indicates little change in established approaches. In their study, Lariscy, Avery, Sweetser and Howes (2009) found that business journalists did not use social media as a way to find sources for stories. As for reaching out to members of the public, journalists have tended to replicate existing practices, except instead of interviewing people on the street, they are taking comments off Twitter. Tweets by members of the public are used to capture and represent the *vox populi* (Broersma and Graham, 2012;

Knight, 2012). The notion of engaging with audiences via social media is the exception, rather than the rule. For example, in her study of Swedish journalists on Twitter, Hedman (2016) found that only 1 per cent made explicit appeals to audiences.

Once the business of gathering and producing the news is complete, news organizations have gravitated towards social platforms as distribution mechanisms. They approached social platforms as tools to promote published content, reach a greater audience and potentially build brand loyalty. Research in this area found that the overwhelming approach of news organizations was to post a headline with a link back to the online story (Herrera-Damas and Hermida, 2014; Messner, Linke and Eford, 2012). As Revers notes in his study of Twitter adoption at a US newspaper, 'news corporations viewed Twitter as a way to promote consumer loyalty, which can be monetized' (2014: 822).

As with the early days of online, when much of the content was print 'shovelware', news organizations have shifted away from automated tweets to crafting posts for the range of social platforms available. At times, the process was automated so that a headline was posted on Twitter when a story was published online, even if some words were cut off due to the 140-character limit on tweets (Blasingame, 2011). Overall, though, the approach remains a one-way flow of information from the journalist to the audience. While the use of social media is framed as engaging and connecting with audiences, there is little in the way of an exchange of information, responding to comments or discussing issues. As Bullard concluded, 'to take full advantage of social media's potential, news outlets must interact with audiences beyond simply posting links to stories' (2015: 180).

At an individual level, journalists have by and large adopted similar approaches, taking advantage of social media as channels to promote their work or the work of their organization (see, for example, Lasorsa et al., 2012). However, there are studies that

point to differences in approaches based on news beats. Cozma and Chen (2013) found that foreign correspondents shared mostly news stories, approaching platforms such as Twitter as an ersatz wire service. Sports reporters, on the other hand, seemed far more at ease with going beyond headlines, placing greater emphasis on sharing bits of opinion and commentary rather than breaking news (Sheffer and Schultz, 2010).

Such studies suggest that the norms and practices within specific domains of journalism are a factor in shaping how social media is integrated into daily routines. Against the backdrop of normalization of new communication technologies, with journalists shaping social media to fit within established ways of working, there are indications of how the platforms are shaping journalistic practices. As the environment in which journalism takes place changes, so do approaches to journalism. The rise of social media as a source for breaking news, and the speed at which information is disseminated has contributed to a compression of the news cycle (Bruno, 2011; Newman, 2009). It has become common for journalists to share snippets of information on an event as it unfolds, at times providing the first reports via social media.

Such minute-by-minute reporting online pre-dates social media – for example, the *Guardian* newspaper offered live reports on soccer matches on its website as early as 1999 (Thurman and Walters, 2013). Since then, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have emerged as ready-made spaces for the transmission of brief chunks of text, photos or video to the audience. By 2009, trade publications were noting that 'reporters now routinely tweet from all kinds of events – speeches, meetings and conferences, sports events' (Farhi, 2009: n.p.). In the same year, Newman suggested 'a new grammar is emerging of real-time news coverage' (2009: 34).

Twitter, in particular, emerged as the key channel for journalists to distribute blow-by-blow accounts of the news. Sharing morsels of information in 140 characters, photos

or video as events such as political rallies, courtroom cases or sporting occasions has become part of news routines (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre, 2013; Lasorsa et al., 2012). For example, journalist Brian Stelter described how he was 'trying to tweet everything I saw' when despatched in May 2011 by *The New York Times* to the town of Joplin, Missouri, in order to portray the aftermath of a devastating tornado (Stelter, 2011: n.p.). Stelter is an example of how journalists have taken to Twitter as a means to provide immersive, immediate and impressionistic reporting direct to the public. In her exploratory study of the use of Twitter by two journalists during the London riots of 2011, Vis found that the platform functioned as an effective reporting tool, as well as a 'rich source for story leads and material' (2013: 43). Other studies suggest that journalists see the ability to offer real-time updates via social media and other platforms in a positive light, saying it allows them to be more responsive to audience interests (Thurman and Walters, 2013; Zeller and Hermida, 2015).

The disaggregation of the news has given rise to new digital formats that curate the fragments of information into a more coherent whole, designed to tame the deluge of content on social media. Constantly updated live blogs or live pages have been adopted by leading news organizations such as the BBC and *The New York Times* in response to breaking news events. Live pages present information in text and audio-visual formats in reverse chronological order, with latest updates first. The format 'combines conventional reporting with curation, where journalists sift and prioritize information from secondary sources and present it to the audience in close to real time, often incorporating their feedback' (Thurman and Walters, 2013: 83).

Live pages mark a shift away from journalism as a finished product towards journalism as process, capturing the confusion and uncertainty that often surrounds breaking news. They echo the type of breaking news

coverage of 24-hour TV news channels where a story is reported as it unfolds. In contrast to TV news, readers are able to go back and track the twists and turns of a story. As *Guardian* journalist Matthew Weaver suggests, 'on a live blog you are letting the reader in on what's up there, and say: look, we're letting you in on the process of newsgathering. There's a more fluid sense of what's happening' (quoted in Bruno, 2011: 44). Journalism as a practice becomes less about manufacturing a definitive rendering of events and instead a tentative and iterative process where audiences can follow how information is considered, challenged and corrected in near real-time (Hermida, 2012).

The live pages format points to a greater co-construction of the news by journalists and audiences than in legacy media formats, as public material is routinely integrated into the stream of updates. Live pages take news that is happening on social media, outside the structures of institutional news structures, and reintegrate it into spaces governed by professional norms and practices. The traditional gatekeeping function becomes one of gatewatching (Bruns, 2005), with journalists monitoring social media to select and amplify content considered newsworthy and relevant.

How far journalists open up the editorial process and involve the public in decisions on what is newsworthy is an emerging area of research. To date, the most high-profile example of a journalist actively involving the public in the co-construction of the news is Andy Carvin, a former social media strategist at NPR (Hermida, Lewis and Zamith, 2014). While at the public service broadcaster, he covered the 2011 uprising in the Middle East through social media platforms. For him, Twitter served as both newswire and newsroom. On it, he shared updates, photos and video, facilitated discussions, appealed for information, and collaborated with others to verify reports floating on social media. Hermida, Lewis and Zamith argue that Carvin functioned as a central hub in a networked

media environment, working in a ‘distributed and networked newsroom where knowledge and expertise are fluid, dynamic, and hybrid’ (2014: 495).

Research to date suggests that processes of continuity and change are taking place alongside each other, with differences emerging depending on the group of journalists under scrutiny. There is little doubt that journalists are normalizing social media platforms to fit within traditional practices, similar to the adoption of blogs in journalism (Hermida, 2009; Singer, 2005). But, as with blogging there is evidence of shifting practices shaped by the logics of the new platforms. What is still open to question is how far media professionals who are changing the way they work are a sign of things to come, or whether they represent outliers. As Hedman posits, perhaps the most engaged journalists active on Twitter ‘act as *journalism’s avant-garde*, pointing in the direction of what journalism may become’ (2016: 294, emphasis in original). To address this question, the next section of this chapter will consider how far fundamental norms of the profession are being impacted by social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND JOURNALISM NORMS

Social media platforms exist as spaces beyond the institutional constraints of journalistic enterprises. Journalists are representing their host news organization yet publishing their material on third-party platforms, leading to tensions over what have been comparatively constant norms in journalism in Western liberal democracies (Singer et al., 2011; Tuchman, 1972; Weaver, 1996). For Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton, this means that they ‘do not face the same level of oversight nor the same necessity to stay on-topic journalistically’ (2012: 24). Professional norms of objectivity, impartiality and accuracy are being bent, and to some extent subverted, in

social media spaces. Singer’s observations that blogging challenges the notion of the journalist ‘as a nonpartisan gatekeeper of information important to the public’ (2005: 74) could have easily been said about social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Moreover, as she adds, a new format ‘also offers journalists the potential for expanded transparency and accountability’ (Singer, 2005: 74).

One area where these tensions have arisen is objectivity. Admittedly, objectivity is a contested idea in journalism research. And professional objectivity need not necessarily exclude public displays of subjectivity by journalists, such as emotional reactions to traumatic news events. Yet the notion of objectivity has long been held as one of the central tenets in journalism (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007; Schudson, 2001). Trust in journalists draws on the assumption that they have kept their own point of view out of their reporting and are instead offering an impartial and neutral assessment of events. Professional publications go to great lengths to distinguish the spaces for commentary and opinion from those for the news. Social media platforms break down such boundaries, with facts and fiction, and observations and opinions, in the mix.

News organizations have sought to reinforce norms around objectivity and impartiality through training and social media guidelines. For example, *The Washington Post* urged its journalists that ‘nothing we do must call into question the impartiality of our news judgment’ (quoted in Hohmann, 2011: 4). Another leading US newspaper, *The Los Angeles Times*, warned against expressions of partisanship, ‘just as political bumper stickers and lawn signs are to be avoided in the offline world, so too are partisan expressions online’ (quoted in Currie, Bruser and van Wageningen, 2011: 2). Despite the boundaries delineated by organizational guidelines, individual journalists are going beyond just the facts on social media. A growing body of research into what journalists do on Twitter

suggests the line between the professional and the personal is being blurred (Hedman, 2016; Molyneux, 2014; Vis, 2013). One analysis of US journalists' tweets from March 2010 showed that nearly 43 per cent of the tweets contained some degree of opinion, while nearly 16 per cent were primarily opinions (Lasorsa et al., 2012). The study also found that 20 per cent of tweets were unrelated to work and instead discussed personal life. The factors related to more personal disclosure on social media are a growing area of research. For example, female journalists appear to be more willing to share personal details (Hedman, 2016; Lasorsa, 2012).

Such research highlights the dilemma for journalists operating in a space where the norms of behaviour are different from the institutional spaces for the news. On social media, there is an expectation to move away from the traditional voice of authority that has marked much of journalism for the last century. As a space, it privileges personal expression so much so that crafting a personality on social media is predicated on being 'human' (Marwick and boyd, 2011). Herrera and Requejo (2012) go as far as recommending that journalists and news outlets use a personal and human tone. The reward for journalists is that audiences prefer individual to institutional accounts (Hermida et al., 2012). Those who keep their accounts strictly professional tend to have fewer followers (Hedman, 2016).

Being more open has significant implications for journalism. Traditionally, journalists would have expected the public to trust them, drawing on the contested idea of objectivity. Just saying, 'trust me, I'm a journalist', is ill-suited to a media space where audiences can check, criticize and condemn the media, particularly, if as Robinson (2011) posits, journalism is increasingly about relationships with audiences. Transparency, rather than objectivity, then emerges as an important way of connecting with audiences and gaining their trust (Hayes, Singer and Ceppos, 2007; Plaisance, 2007). Mapping how transparency

unfolds on social media is an underdeveloped area of research. One study found a quarter of journalists practised some form of transparency on Twitter, mostly engaging in disclosure transparency by talking about their work and in personal transparency by sharing morsels about their lives (Hedman, 2016). Key questions going forward concern how journalists navigate the personal and professional as transparency, rather than objectivity, emerges as a way to engender trust and accountability.

Related to the notion of objectivity is verification. Both norms have traditionally been associated with a journalist's claim to a special kind of authority and status, forming part of the professional ideology of journalism in Western liberal democracies. For Kovach and Rosenstiel, verification is 'the essence of journalism' (2007: 71). For its part, the Society of Professional Journalists' code of conduct urges journalists to 'test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error' (1996). While speed has been an issue in journalism since the invention of the telegram, the visibility, volume and velocity of information facilitated by social media platforms have magnified the tensions over verification. Moreover, social media weaken the gatekeeping role of the media, as information can rapidly circulate beyond the realms of professional publications, especially during breaking news events. When details are changeable, confused and contradictory, reliable information is at a premium. It is at these times that prominent news organizations have been caught out publishing incorrect information.

Some studies suggest that news organizations are relaxing the rules on verification (Bruno, 2011; Thurman and Walters, 2013). Arguably, though, verification was never an absolute, even before social media. Rather, the discipline of verification has been uneven and inconsistent, adapted to suit the story and circumstances (Shapiro et al., 2013). Getting the story right remains an ideological imperative in journalism and the cost of

getting it wrong has a reputational impact on news organizations. Verification is being reconfigured, rather than abandoned, through ‘processes of reinforcement, rearticulation, and reinvention’ (Hermida, 2015: 41). Approaches to reinforce verification range from the institutional frameworks to elicit and vet material from social media, to outsourcing the process, to the development of automated tools.

At the same time, the concept is being rearticulated through guidelines that urge journalists not to share information that hasn’t been verified or confirmed. In practice, holding off publication may not be a viable strategy, as audiences may already be aware of details being circulated on social media. The reputational cost of appearing ignorant about tweets, photos or videos surfacing on Twitter or Facebook is weighed against the cost of publish then verify. An emerging approach to resolve these tensions is the use of attribution to separate unconfirmed details from material that has been professionally verified (Hermida, 2015). Labels such as ‘unverified’ or ‘unconfirmed’ signal to audiences that the material has not undergone a rigorous vetting process, yet are a signifier that a news organization attaches to it some degree of significance. Such disclaimers allow news organizations to expand the range of material they publish while maintaining a professional line of defence.

There are indications that verification is being reinvented into what Lewis describes as a willingness ‘to find normative purpose in transparency and participation’ (2012: 851). Journalism has traditionally been based on providing an accurate, authenticated and authoritative rendering of events, with facts checked before publication. On social media and emerging formats such as live pages, the process of filtering and checking information is more open, collaborative and iterative (Hermida et al., 2014; Thurman and Walters, 2013). News accounts are based on the synthesis of reports, commentary and perspectives from journalists and the public in near

real-time, where verification takes place in public through a constantly updated stream of news. Trust and authority are derived from being transparent about the veracity or otherwise of information, and from involving the public in sourcing, filtering and confirming facts (Hermida et al., 2014).

LOOKING AHEAD

Journalism norms and practices are continuously impacted by the societal shifts that accompany the emergence of new communication technologies. Social media platforms have not only affected time-honoured news routines, but also elicited ambiguities over professional values and the nature of journalistic identity. Most of the research into these tensions has focused on Twitter, as it has developed as the leading platform for news organizations and journalists (Hermida, 2013). Yet the news activities of journalists and audiences are not limited to Twitter, which is relatively easy to study. Looking ahead, there is scope for more research into other social media platforms, such as Snapchat and WhatsApp, even though the characteristics of some platforms present considerable questions for scholars. In these proprietary, closed networks, shared content may be designed to be ephemeral or be visible only to a distinct set of connections. Journalist Alexis Madrigal (2012) used the term ‘dark social’ to describe such social media sharing that is difficult to track. In a sense, these spaces recreate the fleeting exchanges of news and information that have long taken place in physical social spaces such as cafés, bars and parks, without a permanent record for analysis.

For now, much of the research on journalism and social media points to processes of normalization at play, in line with previous technologies such as blogs. But they also highlight that the introduction and use of social media have been a contested and

uneven process, with examples of novel and hybrid forms of news making that depart from traditional narrative structures and diverge from established norms. The interplay between emerging forms of storytelling that deviate from print-based narrative forms and established norms and practices offers a rich area for study.

Such research would look beyond individual works of journalism and instead take into account storytelling as a distributed service consumed across social media platforms at different times in different contexts. First is investigating how journalists and news organizations intervene across distributed social media services, raising questions over how such activity is recorded, studied and analyzed. Second is examining how audiences appreciate and react to novel forms of journalism distributed across diverse social media spaces which may have their own media logic. For example, there are opportunities to define, measure and analyze what is considered in-depth, impactful journalism in social media contexts where the work may be spread across different platforms and consumed over a period of time. Such research would shed light on whether audiences can acquire depth over time through coming across a wide range of content on a topic over the course of a day or week on distributed platforms, rather than more established notions of in-depth journalism related to the length of a single story.

Social media operate as a space outside the institutional and hierarchical structures of publication of journalism. Given the widespread popularity of these platforms, they are the land of opportunity for both news organizations and journalists. They present new avenues to expand their reach, engage with new audiences, build profile and foster brand loyalty at both an individual and institutional level. But the research also highlights the tensions for both journalists and news organizations in operating outside the framework of institutional journalism.

Social media generate 'a contested middle ground for relevance, meaning and

interpretation' (Callison and Hermida, 2015: 713) where journalism as an institution is one element in a shared and hybrid media environment. Not only are journalistic norms and practices strained, but the framing and representation of the news are challenged in processes 'characterized by conflict, competition, partisanship, and mutual dependency, in the pursuit of new information that will propel a news story forward and increase its newsworthiness' (Chadwick, 2011: 19).

In these contested environments, the interactions on social media can propel a crowdsourced elite to prominence, together with the articulation of a counter-narrative at odds with mainstream media reporting (Callison and Hermida, 2015; Papacharissi and Meraz, 2012). As Papacharissi (2015) suggests, 'claims to agency are discursive, crowdsourced to prominence, networked, and sometimes ephemeral, enabling a variety of actors to tell stories'. There are significant questions over long-standing journalistic sourcing practices in such circumstances where authority and influence are open to negotiation. How sourcing practices evolve is an area for further study, as journalists go beyond the standard approach of quote tweets as ersatz for the *vox populi*.

At an institutional level, news organizations face a loss of control over the news. The rise of social discovery and recommendation weakens the agenda-setting function of the media, as audiences take on the role of secondary gatekeeping (Singer, 2014). Social media platforms have themselves emerged as gatekeepers, fast becoming the intermediaries between a news organization and its potential audience. Their value to news organizations as novel distribution channels is balanced by uncertainties over loss of revenue and of brand awareness.

Above all, there are questions over the power of platforms in the filtering, selection and promotion of news and information, with some disquiet over how far the public service ideals of journalism mesh with the values of commercial companies such as Facebook or

Google (Ananny and Crawford, 2015). Of particular concern are automated processes of news selection through proprietary algorithms, with calls for further research into the impact of algorithmic manipulation on the news diet of audiences (Anderson, 2011; Gillespie, 2014; Tufekci, 2014). Research into the response of an industry built on control of the means of production and distribution of news is underdeveloped. The disaggregation and fragmentation of the news product from its original publication opens avenues for study over the traditional relationship between readers and a news outlet, with significant implications for the institutional power of the media in the future.

Despite these tensions, news organizations and journalists have incorporated social media into what they do. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are complementary to legacy media platforms. But they are also in competition with legacy media. And they both need each other. News organizations need the audiences and social platforms need content. But it is debatable how far this is a partnership of equals, particularly given the growth of technology giants such as Facebook at a time of cutbacks in the mainstream media. There is a similar trade-off for individual professionals. The opportunities for greater audiences and a higher profile are offset by the simple fact that they are essentially providing free content for social media platforms.

While news is everywhere on social media, that is not the primary function of these networks. News is incidental to the daily use of these platforms to communicate and connect. It is important to note that legacy media still outweigh social media as sources for news (Nielsen and Schröder, 2014). As social platforms become embedded in everyday communicative practices, so too may everyday news consumption. With it come implications not only for the practice of journalism, but for the financial models that have sustained it in the past and for its assumed function in society in the future.

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