Spring 2012

Operation Digital Elitism: The Combatants and Victims of Information Warfare

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Twitter's Role as the New Newswire
Why journalists should break news online

**An honors thesis in journalism submitted
to the University Archives of the University of New Hampshire
by Eliza Mackintosh
on May 17, 2012**

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INTRODUCTION•••

Truth in Satire: Twitter as the New Newswire

In 2009, The Guardian announced that it would become the first newspaper in the world to publish solely on Twitter, the popular social networking site that has transformed dissemination of information online.

Rio Palof, who reported on the change in "Twitter switch for Guardian, after 188 years of ink," explained that in consolidating to a Twitter-only publication the news organization would reaffirm its place at the forefront of new media technology. The newspaper believed that any story could be told effectively in 140 characters, which is the limit for each tweet. Palof Twitter's real-time coverage of the emergency landing of US Airways Flight 1549 on New York's Hudson River as a testament to the service's role as an "unprecedented newsgathering power." Palof added that Twitter had "radically democratized news publishing enabling anyone with an Internet connection to tell the world when they are feeling sad, or thinking about having a cup of tea" (Palof, 2009).

The Guardian ran this story on April Fools' Day; "Palof" was a fictitious pen name to carry off the spoof. But the satirical article reflected a reality that is far from a joke to newspapers and media companies. Palof hit on a very real anxiety about the future role of Twitter in breaking news. Many in the realm of journalism have praised the service, but fears still exist about the implications Twitter has on the gatekeepers of news – particularly on traditional newswire services such as the Associated Press and Reuters.

According to a USA Today reporter, "Twitter for me has replaced watching the wires... It's 360 degrees. No one is filtering the news for you. It's not just what the AP thought the lead was" (Enda, 2011). Journalists have found Twitter so alluring in particular because of its basic principle: the power of the written word. The essence of the system is something like the perfect lead, in a 140 character long tweet (although many are more like 120 characters plus a link).

Twitter is a relatively simple short messaging service (SMS) based on the premise of tweets, 140-character messages posted by users and disseminated to followers who subscribe to their feeds. The "microblogging" service is a social networking service that users must subscribe to by creating a "Twitter Handle," or username (ex. Eliza Mackintosh, @elizamackintosh). A common way to discuss breaking news, or other subjects, on Twitter is through hashtags (#), which denote keywords or "trending topics" within a tweet. Twitter users can "retweet" (RT) messages posted by other users on their feeds as well, by forwarding them to their followers. This is a popular way of spreading news or information, which prompts the natural comparison of Twitter to a "newswire," a service that transmits timely breaking news to the media and public.

Mark Scott, managing director of the Australian Broadcasting Company said of the social media site that, "I think Twitter may emerge as the outstanding way of disseminating surprising breaking news. In my experience in newsrooms, the biggest stories always arrived in 140 characters or less: 'Princess of Wales dead,' 'Plane hits World Trade Center'" (Crawford, 119). The idea that breaking news can

be communicated in a tweet was exactly what the Guardian was making fun of. Which, at the very least, points to the fact that there is a grain of truth in every joke.

Twitter was born in 2006, created by Jack Dorsey, and by January 2009 a Twitter user broke the news story about the "Miracle on the Hudson." In November 2009 Twitter's tagline shifted from 'What are you doing now?' to 'What's happening?' Twitter co-founder Biz Stone explained the shift: Twitter has "long outgrown the concept of personal updates," because people are "witnessing accidents, organizing events, sharing links, breaking news, reporting stuff their dad says, and so much more" (Stone, 2009). Twitter's role as a horizontal system of communicating information where anyone can 'break news,' so to speak, set the stage for Janis Krums "@jkrums" to tweet this on January 15, 2009: "There's a plane in the Hudson. I'm on the ferry going to pick up the people. Crazy." Krums' tweet about the US Airways plane landing safely in the Hudson River was just the tip of the iceberg.

Twitter has become one of the first places that people go to share news in a flurry of trending topics from #CNNfail to #OWS. It has been an unintentional site of news confirmation, such as when Sohaib Athar "@Really Virtual," an IT consultant based in Abbottabad, Pakistan, "liveblogged the Osama raid without knowing it" on May 2, 2011.

Sohaib Athar
@ReallyVirtual
Following

Uh oh, now I'm the guy who liveblogged the Osama raid without knowing it.

↩ Reply   🔁 Retweet   ⭐ Favorite

50+ RETWEETS   50+ FAVORITES

12:41 AM - 2 May 11 via TweetDeck · Embed this Tweet

Twitter has also served as an explosive element in digital revolutions during the Arab Spring uprisings. Twitter users aggregate news and redistribute it through retweeting, something that prominent Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells considers 'mass self-communication' (Crawford, 116). News comes from everywhere, not just official media.

However, the news media cannot be ruled out of this equation. Twitter is used by media organizations today as a platform for news briefs, which closely resemble wires in terms of news distribution. News agencies are working to find a fluid system in which they can work alongside the many other voices in the Twittersphere. It would be impossible to try to compete with Twitter's volume; as of its sixth birthday, on March 21, 2012, Twitter had 140 million active users and over 340 million tweets per day. In documents from a key strategy meeting in February 2009, Twitter noted that if the service had a billion users then it would become "the pulse of the planet" (Schonfeld, 2009). With more than 1 billion tweets every three days, Twitter is a live newswire, but to an even greater degree it has become the *new* newswire of our digital age.

THEN: The Wire••

Shock of the new

"*Friends they never meet; Acquaintances made by the telegraph key. Confidences exchanged between men who have never seen each other – their peculiar conversational abbreviations*," (*New York Times,* 1890).

This headline ran in the *New York Times* on November 30, 1890. The newspaper was detailing telegraphy, a system of codes created by Samuel F.B. Morse, which allowed operators to transmit messages using electrical current in combinations of signals over a wire (Huntzicker, 94). The article highlights the strange relationship that operators had formed thousands of miles apart from each other. At a distance they would communicate "their hopes and fears and ambitions and impart very confidential information to men whom they have never seen" (New York Times, 1890). In addition to this removed contact between wire users, the article also described an abbreviated language that allowed operators to send shorter messages containing more information; for example, "Hw r u ts mng?" To which one might reply, "I'm pty wl; hw r u?" (The New York Times, 1890).

Telegraphy and its truncated form of distant communication gained the same sort of attention as Twitter in its early stages. In an article "Many Tweets, One Loud Voice on the Internet," a piece on Twitter published in the Times on April 22, 2007, Jason Pontin reflected that after using Twitter for the first time he had reservations. "I wasn't sure that it was good for my intimate circle to know so much about my

daily rounds, or healthy for me to tell them. A little secretiveness is, perhaps, a necessary lubricant in our social relations. I wonder whether twittering could ever have broad appeal" (Pontin, 2007). Both the newswire and Twitter were greeted with the skepticism surrounding their use for mass communication on a national and global scale. But, despite concerns, both new technologies took off in widespread use.

The first "wire" telegraph was sent from Baltimore to Washington on May 27, 1844. Enclosed was a message of only four words: "What hath God wrought." With the elimination of time and space that the telegraph afforded, transportation was no longer attached to communication (Carey). As a result, the new technology had lasting ramifications on how information spread and Morse's telegraph became a key tool in the race for news. With this change came a speed of information dissemination previously unimaginable. As the demand for timely news continued to increase, newspapers began to form news associations to share the costs of using the wires in order to send messages. These cooperative efforts to transmit news over the wires resulted in the creation of the Associated Press (AP). In June 1848, managers of five New York newspapers – the Journal of Commerce, the Courier and Enquirer, the Sun, the Herald, and the Express – formed the Harbor News Association in order to aggregate European news from arriving ships (Huntzicker, 95). In the same year, this alliance led to the formation of the AP, which was run by Gerard Hallock of the Journal of Commerce. In 1851, the New York Times joined the AP network.

Editors greeted this new means of sharing and transmitting news with anxiety. They feared that if readers could get news instantly from a wire, then they wouldn't wait for a newspaper. The new paradigm of the wire service increased the speed, created greater access, and shifted the news from the power of individual newspapers.

According to James Gordon Bennett, who founded the New York Herald in 1835, speed increases interest. News distribution was once contingent upon the speed of the mail, but with the telegraph information was immediate (Crouthamel). "The public mind will be stimulated to greater activity by the rapid circulation of news," Bennett said. "Thus the intellectual, philosophic, and original journalist will have a greater, a more excited, and more thoughtful audience than ever" (Huntzicker, 96). Bennett recognized that although the speed of the wire would impact how news was circulated and reported, it also had the potential to create a more active readership. By flattening differences in geographical space, the telegraph placed a new premium on the speed of information and speculation about the future, which helped to make journalistic analysis the focus of attention. Despite the fact that "citizen journalists" breaking news on Twitter has raised questions about the longevity of professional journalism, one could argue that verification and analysis from the media is now more important than ever.

Today, the horizontal sphere of Twitter operates at an even greater speed, magnifying the lens on the rapidity at which journalists must operate. The speed of the telegraph, like that of Twitter, would also work to unite people across great distances, something that French political thinker and author of *Democracy in*

America, Alexis de Tocqueville, commented upon when he visited the states (Huntzicker, 96). Tocqueville noted that the telegraph and its implications on high-speed news would cultivate an increased sense of community and interest in public affairs. In enabling the spread of news nationally and globally, both Bennett and Tocqueville theorized that developments to improve government, trade and society would progress. With the multiplicity of options that the speed of the telegraph allowed for society, Bennett deduced that, "the newspaper would not remain the same" (Huntzicker, 96).

As Bennett predicted, the newspaper industry would change significantly. The telegraph served to level the playing field for papers that would have been otherwise unable to report on international, or even larger national news stories. Its use by papers permitted a greater access to information than ever before. According to Samuel Bowles, American journalist and former editor of The Republican (Springfield), "the telegraph has placed all journals substantially on an equality as to the great material element of newspaper life – that is, the news" (Huntzicker, 96). Many penny papers of the time used the telegraph to add timeliness to news beats from the economy to politics (Huntzicker, 96). Editors of New York's most popular penny papers set aside their earlier doubts about the telegraph in order to keep up with breaking news. On the whole, smaller papers benefited from the ability to print timely stories. In the same way, Twitter has allowed smaller newsrooms to tweet breaking news from crime reports to natural disasters – immediately informing the regions that they cover, rather than waiting for the next day's front page. This has

allowed local papers to compete with broadcast news in a way that was previously impossible.

With the new paradigm that the wire presented, a shift in power away from the traditional model of breaking news occurred. With the advent of the AP, the power of breaking news was taken away from just newspapers, and because of this, editors became concerned that instantaneous telegraphy could ruin the industry. Even more than that, some editors believed that the new system would give "dangerous power directly to the people" (Huntzicker, 96). In their novel, *The Story of the Telegraph and a History of the Great Atlantic Cable*, Charles F. Briggs and Augustus Maverick suggested that by eliminating "the old system of exclusion and isolation," the telegraph had the potential to "effect a revolution in political and social life, by establishing a more intimate connexion between nation and nation, with race and race" (Briggs & Maverick, 11). Although Briggs and Maverick's dreams for the wire were lofty, what they pinpointed in this appraisal was momentous: *revolution*. The idea that widespread social and political change could become possible because of the increased ability to spread news reflects how drastic a shift of power the wire service afforded. Wire telegraphy's ability to connect people and places in a way that was fast and accessible put a premium on journalistic analysis of breaking news.

NOW: Twitter••

The tension between old and new journalism

"Twitter has all the classic hallmarks of a disruptive technology, and it brings up questions for traditional news organizations," said Dominic Casciani, BBC News Home Affairs correspondent.

But, does it have to?

Too many journalists and gatekeepers of the news treat new technology as if it is threatening the pillars of the craft, when evolution should be something inherent to the system. The unfortunately described 'micro-journalism' of Twitter is just another example of this, that when viewed objectively can add more to news organizations than it subtracts.

Award-winning sports columnist Bob Ryan, who has been with the *Boston Globe* since 1969, announced on February 14, 2012, that he would retire following the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. His reasoning was a reflection of the tension between the old and new journalism. On ESPN's "B.S. Report" podcast, Ryan said, "I really and truly believe that my time has come and gone, that the dynamics of the business, of what it takes to be involved in the business with all the tweeting and the blogging and that stuff, with an audience with a different taste ... I'm not comfortable — it's not me any more" (*ESPN*, 2012).

This discomfort extends from journalists of the old guard to the news media itself. The reaction has a lot to do with the accelerated speed of the news cycle, which started long before Twitter.

"Speed has always been an issue in journalism," said Alfred Hermida. Hermida is a BBC veteran, a founding news editor of the BBC News website and current associate professor at the Graduate School of Journalism of the University of British Columbia. He explained that rapid-fire transmission has been a factor in breaking news since the advent of the wire telegraph.

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**The fight against speed: Breaking news guidelines for journalists on Twitter**

Two key issues news organizations wrestle with are verification and sourcing. Media companies such as the Associated Press, Sky News, BBC, and NPR released social media guidelines in 2011 and 2012, revising the ways in which they encourage (or discourage) their journalists to use Twitter.

Tom Kent, the AP's deputy managing editor for standards and production, wrote in a memo to staff that, "Just as social media and its uses continue to evolve, so will our policies related to this topic" (Myers, 13 July 2011). Although the AP might seem like the antithesis of the new newswire, the company suggests to reporters that they embrace Twitter as a tool to gather and share news. However, this only goes so far. The regulations state that journalists can't "break news that we haven't published, no matter the format." Additionally the report requires that, "If you have a piece of information, a photo or a video that is compelling, exclusive and/or urgent enough to be considered breaking news, you should file it to the wire, and photo and video points before you consider putting it out on social media" (Myers, 13 July 2011). These attempts at control speak to the tension of retaining

the wire as a business model. The two sides inside the organization, the journalism

and the media's effort to monetize the commodity, are in conflict.

This tension came to a head in November 2011 during the Occupy Wall

Street protests, when AP journalists tweeted that they had been arrested. The AP

subsequently scolded the reporters for breaking the news before the wire: "In

relation to AP staff being taken into custody at the Occupy Wall Street story, we've

had a breakdown in staff sticking to policies around social media and everyone

needs to get with their folks now to tell them to knock it off," read an e-mail

obtained by Daily Intel (Coscarelli, 2011). The wire later reported that an AP

journalist and photographer were arrested at Zuccotti Park on November 15, along

with at least six other journalists.

In response to the AP's reprimand, Brian Stelter, a journalist for the New

York Times, asked in a tweet, "Shouldn't the wire speed up?" (Myers, 16 Nov. 2011).

Stelter's point here is that the wire shouldn't hold up a reporter on breaking

accurate and timely news on Twitter. The restrictions that the AP enforces are

something of an ultimatum: You can't have a personal brand as a journalist and also

represent your employer. In an exchange with Stelter, a person tweeting as

@NYTFridge posed the question of whether journalists should have more of an

allegiance to their personal brands or that of their institutions. Stelter, and the New

York Times, reflect a perspective that these two things are complementary. Stelter

replied to @NYTFridge accordingly: "@NYTFridge many of us have it both ways

every day. You're creating an either/or; it's actually both."
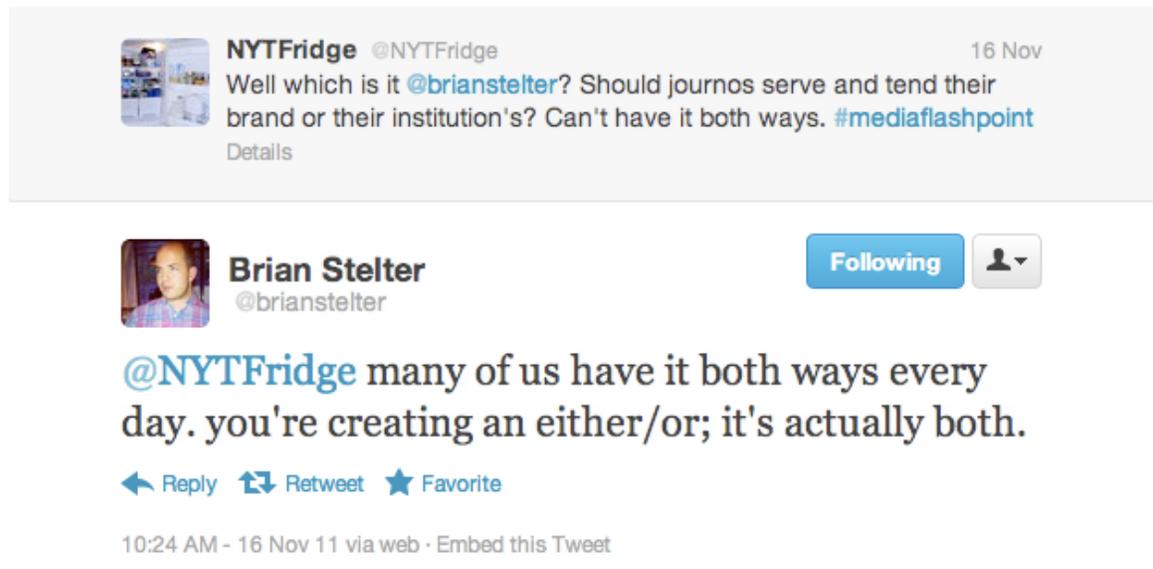
The AP is not alone in their hard and fast rules. Broadcasting company Sky News introduced their new social media regulations in February 2012, to the dismay of many journalists and media elites who considered them extreme.

Kevin Bakhurst, BBC News Channel and Deputy Head, tweeted on February 7, 2012, in disbelief after hearing that Sky News was stopping their journalists from retweeting information and tweets from users not employed by Sky. Bakhurst questioned how Sky journalists would be able to engage in Twitter effectively under these regulations. Josh Halliday, reporter on media and technology for the Guardian, picked up the story in the piece, "Sky News clamps down on Twitter use," where he outlined the guidelines.

Halliday reported that Sky News said in an email that reporters were banned from retweeting rival "journalists or people on Twitter" (Halliday, 27 Apr. 2012). In addition, journalists were told to "stick to your own beat," by not tweeting when it's related to someone else's assignment and refraining from tweeting about non-work topics. According to Bakhurst, the email that circulated around Sky staff also

dictated that journalists must: "Always pass breaking news lines to the news desk before posting them on social media networks," a guideline that was very much in keeping with the AP's regulations.

Sky's social media rules received a lot of flack in the Twittersphere. From journalists to other members of the media the overwhelming question was: Why? Money was undoubtedly a factor for the major broadcasting company owned by Rupert Murdoch. More, explains Hermida: "What you're seeing is a hierarchical system that's trying to figure out how it can operate in a system that is much flatter."

In a sense, Twitter is a flat system. It has put everyone on the same plane. Mass media is faced with realigning themselves in a world of media that is much more horizontal, where information may come from an individual reporter, an institutional media outlet, or a member of the public. A hierarchical media system operates with a command and control structure. In moving to a more open media you lose some of that control.

"When Sky News brought out its new guidelines, it was trying to reassert control as a media organization," Hermida said. "It's trying to recreate a vertical hierarchical structure in a horizontal media world, and that's why you saw such a backlash against it, because they were trying to apply one set of rules to one media ecosystem from another."

The conclusion from many in the media was that Sky was misjudging a key element to Twitter: dialogue. Journalists and their institutions have an ability to engage with their audience in a way never before possible, and Sky shut this down in favor of maintaining an old school practice of media as one-way communication.

Neal Mann "@fieldproducer," the digital media editor for Sky News, has been

praised for his work breaking news on Twitter since 2009. According to his account,

Mann, who has over 45,000 followers, was not involved in the discussions Sky had

on social media policy. Many Twitter users involved in the media were up in arms at

this and soon #savefieldproducer became one of the most-discussed topics on

Twitter (Cellan-Jones, 2012). Andy Carvin, Senior Strategist at NPR, protested the

guidelines under the principle that Sky should trust Mann's judgment, addressing

the corporation in a tweet that read, "Dear Sky News: Please don't shackle

@fieldproducer on Twitter. He's one of the best assets you've got. Trust his

judgment. Love, Twitter."

Carvin, who has been called an "open newsgathering operation" for his

coverage of the Arab Spring, promotes a crowd sourced approach to Twitter, a trend

that Sky News whole-heartedly rejects (Bergman, 2011). In an interview with

Carvin he stated why media companies like Sky News are implementing social

media regulations. "They're resistant to change, and so focused on a competitive

mindset," Carvin said. "I find it absurd. There's no transparency, no engagement in

the public. The problem is that the people who seem most resistant to it are in the

upper management levels. It seems that they don't trust their journalists to be

professional online. It's an extraordinary waste of resources." Carvin added that he

didn't believe that retweeting competitors does anything to effect the bottom-line of

media companies. As a result of prohibiting retweets and crafting other social media

guidelines, Neal Mann, a widely regarded wunderkind of social media, left Sky News

in March for the Wall Street Journal (Beaujon, 2012).

Although BBC social media editor Chris Hamilton stated that Sky's new guidelines were "not the answer" to the challenges that Twitter presents to the principles of news organizations, he sympathized with their reaction.

On February 8, 2012, a day after Sky came out with their guidelines, Hamilton published the BBC's revised policy in "Breaking news guidance for BBC journalists." Hamilton wrote that "We prize the increasing value of Twitter, and other social networks, to us (and our audiences) as a platform for our content, a newsgathering tool and a new way of engaging with people. Being quick off the mark with breaking news is essential to that mission" (Hamilton, 2012). But, according to Hamilton, the BBC's priority remains to communicate important information first to BBC colleagues and audiences without delay, and "certainly not after it reaches Twitter." However, the BBC's breaking news system is unique in that it allows journalists to text to newsroom systems and tweet simultaneously, circumnavigating the potential for a lag between branches of operation.

Just in case this description lead to any misconceptions that the BBC was instructing journalists not to break news on Twitter, Hamilton updated the guidelines on February 9, with a subsequent post: "It's about making sure stories are broken as quickly and efficiently as possible to our large audiences on a wide range of platforms – Twitter, other social networks, our own website, continuous TV and radio news channels, TV and radio bulletins and programmes across several networks."

Dominic Casciani explains that one of the major issues for a big news agency like the BBC is where to break the news first: radio, TV, or online – and now Twitter. However, the biggest tension, explains Casciani, is between the old ways of doing things and the new. "If you're of the old school you will want the (BBC) branding to break it first, but the new way views Twitter as part of the equation as another platform," Casciani said.

According to Hamilton, BBC's Twitter handle, @BBCBreaking, is an extension of the companies branding. Hamilton explained that "We absolutely understand the value of breaking news on Twitter, both in terms of our very successful branded activity like @BBCBreaking, and in terms of our individual journalists, who become sources of news for their followers" (Hamilton, 2012). But, the BBC asks that their journalists prioritize telling the newsroom about breaking news before tweeting, if the technology to do both simultaneously is not available. The BBC social media guidelines are not "tablets of stone," according to Hamilton, who emphasizes that the rapidly changing landscape of breaking news both in and out of newsrooms will afford new rules of practice in the near future.

So why write guidelines at all?

In a post on Reportr.net titled "Why Journalists Should Break News on Twitter," Alfred Hermida comments on both Sky and BBC's breaking news guidance for journalists. "The guidance for journalists not to break news on Twitter is based on a flawed understanding of today's media ecosystem. It assumes that journalists still have a monopoly on breaking the news" (Hermida, 2012). The New York Times doesn't have guidelines; the company views digital journalism as simply changing too fast to write them. However, according to Liz Heron, former social media editor at the New York Times and current director of social media and engagement at WSJ, that doesn't mean there aren't some rules.

"It's a misnomer to say we [New York Times] don't have any guidelines, we have just decided not to write them down as some sort of bible," said Heron. "News organizations have focused on what you should be afraid of and we didn't want to take that approach. Social media is changing so fast that taking time to write something up might go out of date extremely fast."

Heron and other social media editors at the Times emphasize the fact that adopting Twitter takes a lot of conversation and trust, but by allowing journalists to go out and experiment it will better the institution. "In reality Twitter is a trust network," Heron said. "There are a bunch of mainstream organizations and people [on Twitter]. In some ways it helps to guide you to something that is more legitimate than not."

Unlike the top-down guidelines of organizations like Sky, The Times cultivates horizontal dissemination of news. Rather than screen reporters from

breaking news online, the New York Times has made a big effort to break news on Twitter on their main handles, especially on the Metro desk "@NYTMetro," which is self-described as "breaking news and headlines." If you're a journalist tweeting breaking news, Heron says there is an expectation at the Times that you are also working hard to get your story up on a blog post, or in a news story ASAP. Journalists are now trying to serve different audiences and whether or not reporters undermine employers' scoops by tweeting them first depends on the business model of the news organization. However, the understanding at the New York Times is that journalists who are generating an audience on Twitter aren't doing this independently from the institution – their success has a lot to do with their connection to the Times.

In his article "Twitter is all good fun, until it isn't," David Carr, who covers popular culture for the New York Times, writes that, "The rule at The Times is that there is no rule, but there is an expectation, as Philip B. Corbett, the standards editor for the paper, told me in an e-mail: 'We expect Times journalists to behave like Times journalists, and they generally do'" (Carr, 2012).

So what does behaving like a Times journalist entail? Heron says that as a journalist, "you can show your personality and be funny… it is analogous to sort of being on air, you shouldn't express any strong opinions, refrain from using profanity, no personal attacks, act professionally."

Carr, who gained some celebrity after starring in the documentary, "Page One – Inside the New York Times," sees an inherent conflict with 'being yourself' and 'acting professionally' on Twitter. Carr explains that the tension results from a

contemplativeness that is encouraged, but not instinctive in using Twitter. "Yes,

build your personal brand and, by proxy, bring social media luster to your

employer," Carr writes, "but do it in ways that are consumer-friendly and taste-

appropriate." Although Carr describes his terms of practice on Twitter to be as

simple as looking at what he tweets through the eyes of his bosses, he posts on a

variety of topics from media and cultural curiosities to personal outings with his

daughter. His voice ranges from objective to satirical and he retweets posts from

such sources as his own institution, The New York Times, to popular online gossip

on Gawker. According to Carr, "In the current paradigm of media organizations and

Twitter personalities, good reporters are expected to serve as a kind of wire service

for information, and that includes providing links to important stories that they

themselves may not have written" (Carr, 2012). Although his discretion in using

Twitter as a newswire seems to be subjective, his perspective is this: don't take any

of it too seriously.

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So is Twitter a useful tool for journalists?

In an age where followers now exceed distribution numbers for many print

publications, Twitter is something to pay attention to. Especially for reporters who

can gain followers numbering in the thousands. As of September 2011, the New

York Times had a circulation of 1,150,589 daily and 1,645,152 on Sundays (eCirc for

Newspapers). As of May 14, 2012, @NYTimes followers weighed in at 5,049,263, a

figure which doesn't necessarily account for followers of other New York Times

Twitter handles such as @nytimesworld and @nytimesart. To give more

perspective to this figure, David Carr has 367,678 followers (as of 5/14/2012), not

enough to compete with a staggering 5 million, but certainly not insignificant.

Ali Lahore Ahmad, a historian and journalist who has contributed to The

Guardian explained this gap in popularity between Twitter and print circulations as

a positive development in his article, "Is Twitter a Useful Tool for Journalists."

"Indeed, newspaper journalists experienced a rare pleasure in 2009 when

measuring their popularity through Twitter: a graph that curved upwards; print

circulations and profits may be down, but their 'followers' have increased

exponentially" (Ahmad, 2). Twitter provides a fresh way for journalists to connect

with a new audience using the same basic principles of reporting: providing

information through analysis, offering timely critiques, and entertaining readers.

But it also allows for individual journalists to brand themselves in a way that further

separates them from their institution. In terms of the business model of news media,

this poses a risk of losing traffic in the thousands with the loss of a single journalist.

In a system like this, it's anyone's game.

Take Sohaib Athar "@ReallyVirtual," just another Twitter user who was

suddenly dubbed a 'citizen journalist' after tweeting the Osama raid in posts like

this: "Helicopter above Abbottabad at 1AM (is a rare event)" (5/1/2011). But what

is important to note is what came next. On May 2 Sohaib Athar tweeted: "and here

come the mails from the mainstream media… *sigh*." Although the response might

have been slightly delayed, this is an excellent example of how journalists and media

outlets can effectively crowdsource citizen journalism on Twitter. It can take a little

bit of reporting first to find users like Athar, then to verify their location, and reach out for an interview, but in the end you have a source that is immediate and (hopefully) genuine. Liz Heron adds that in order for the media to do this effectively they must layer journalistic practices on top of this. Which is a key rule in any use of Twitter.

A 140-character tweet is incapable of competing with long-form investigative features; it simply is not deep enough. Instead it can work in a way that runs parallel to how audiences consume their news. In "News to me: Twitter and personal networking of news," Kate Crawford explained this perspective: "Some see Twitter as a kind of competitor to traditional news services, without acknowledging its interdependence, or the way it enhances and expands the spread of traditional news services, while also contributing to the news ecology with millions of personal and subjective accounts" (Crawford, 123).

Throughout its short history Twitter has been able to fit into breaking news coverage time and again. From looking at some of these instances we can extract illustrations of how best to develop a symbiotic relationship amongst journalists, news media and Twitter. To this end, it is important to look at case studies including the CNN Fail hashtag, the rise of the Arab Spring, and the Stephen Lawrence trial. These three examples demonstrate how Twitter allows papers to compete with the 24/7-news cycle, engage with their audience, effectively source and verify information, and use the service as a "live-notebook."

#CNNfail: How Twitter can compete with 24-hour broadcast news

With over 7 million followers, CNN Breaking News "@cnnbrk" describes its service as among the world's leaders in online news and information delivery. However there is an apparent asymmetry in how their Twitter feed operates when you consider the number of users that they follow: 65 (as of 4/11/12). While these numbers are constantly changing, it is difficult to foresee how this discrepancy could be quickly resolved. The majority of Twitter users that CNN does follow are associated with the organization in some way, whether they are reporters or broadcasters. CNN is not alone in their lack of engagement with their audience. Other news organizations like BBC also fail to use Twitter as an open platform for broader conversation. BBC Breaking News only follows two users, BBC News (World) and BBC News (UK). The insular nature of Twitter use by news media does not fully take advantage of the many-to-many conversation model that the service affords.

Kate Crawford explains that most news agencies "treat Twitter like another broadcast outlet: delivering dozens of updates per day, but not receiving updates from others in turn, or tracking how the news is received, or responding to any feedback" (Crawford, 118). In looking at the analogy that Crawford draws of Twitter as "a nervous system," it is essential to recognize that news organizations act as a cortex, with users that are linked to them as dendrites reacting and responding to one another (Crawford, 121). In remaining inflexible, official handles of CNN and

other news media use Twitter at only half of its capacity: as a wire to send out messages. News media's traditional use of Twitter has many limitations as news is generated from millions of users daily, but rarely received by mainstream media.

This style of practice cost CNN in June 2009, when Twitter blew up with 140-character messages from Iranians claiming that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election was the result of voting fraud. People gathered in the streets of Tehran to protest, and eyewitness accounts of police brutality soon surfaced on Twitter. Along with citizens' coverage of the situation in Iran, Twitter users began a backlash against the mainstream media for its lack of coverage concerning the issue. Brian Stelter led his story with this statement, reflecting the feeling from many on Twitter, "Cable news normally serves as the front line for breaking news, but the channels largely took the weekend off as Tehran exploded in protests after Iran's presidential election" (Stelter, 2009). The reaction Stelter describes was that broadcast news organizations like CNN failed in their duty to cover breaking news, which culminated in thousands of people tweeting messages with the hashtag #CNNfail, to voice their frustration. CNN was targeted in part because of its prior role in reporting on 24-hour breaking news events like the 1989 massacre of pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square. The same type of coverage CNN had been so applauded for 20 years earlier was all but invisible from its initial coverage of Tehran. After covering the Iranian election on his blog, The Daily Dish, journalist and *Atlantic* blogger Andrew Sullivan commented on the #CNNfail trend and the mainstream media's inability to cover real breaking news, saying, "There's a reason the MSM [mainstream media] is in trouble" (Sullivan, 2009).

This example is an excellent case study in the importance of listening to your audience. The #CNNfail could have been avoided by a two-way conversation between CNN and users within the Twitter community. However, comments being addressed to CNN went unheeded and thus the network stayed in the dark much longer than it may have. Coverage on stories like this has the potential to be deepened by crowdsourcing, starting a discourse, and engaging in the story. This cannot happen until the mainstream media stops attempting to replicate its traditional model of breaking news onto Twitter. Organizations must reassess their role in the new reflexive architecture of news dissemination.

As a case study, #CNNfail also exhibits how print news can benefit from the ability to engage with an audience to compete with the 24-hour news cycle of broadcast media. In Nicola Bruno's paper, "Tweet First, Verify Later?" she describes the changeover in the media landscape from the CNN effect of the 1990s to today's "Twitter effect." The term 'CNN effect' was first used during the Gulf War of 1990 when the rise of the 24-hour news cycle style of reporting dominated the media (Price, 357). Steven Livingston listed three potential shifts resulting from this trend: media as an enhanced agenda setter, an impediment to policymaking, and an accelerant to policy decision-making (Price, 357). Although its effect on transforming the foreign diplomatic sphere has been contested, the requirement that correspondents needed to be on the ground in order to broadcast live breaking news was essential (Bruno, 8).

In comparison, Twitter allows for remote live-coverage simply from gathering user-generated content. This shift in how news is aggregated is something

that broadcast companies like CNN must be aware of. But even more so for print, the "Twitter effect" allows smaller newsrooms the opportunity to cover events that were once considered out of their realm. The Twitter effect is changing the way people communicate breaking news and how users are embracing the role of quasi-citizen journalists. Citizens are not quite journalists, because for many users they do not tweet with the intention to 'break news,' but rather to document and broadcast events happening in their daily lives. Users on the whole are not trying to 'scoop' news media, but instead direct attention to stories that they believe should be covered, as in #CNNfail. The benefits of this are numerous as it promotes a more active readership that is interested in the news that they consume. Twitter users have the potential to create an axis of interest that news media can respond to.

Bruno explains that "Just as the CNN effect was crucial in centering media and political attention on a global crisis, the Twitter effect too promises to offer a more in-depth coverage of natural disasters and 'forgotten' wars, to provide visibility to threatened voices and political protests in less democratic countries, to quickly spread information regarding upcoming catastrophes and/or current health pandemics" (Bruno, 9). The sheer scale of Twitter in the number of voices that it encompasses is the biggest Rolodex that any journalist has ever laid hands on. Although many members of the media, like Andy Carvin, are already utilizing Twitter as such, it is just a matter of time and shifting perspective before mainstream news sources begin to see the benefits of engaging with their audience. •••••

#ArabSpring: How Andy Carvin uses Twitter as a newswire and a newsroom

Weeks before the mainstream media picked up the story of Tunisia's

revolution, the uprising was circulating virally online. The revolt was sparked on

December 18, 2010, after locals in the Tunisian village of Sidi Bouzid protested

Mohamed Bouazizi's death. Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest, after being

prohibited from selling fruits by a female municipal inspector who purportedly

slapped him for trying to retrieve his apples; he was later beaten by other officers in

the streets of Bouzid (Fahim, 2011). When Bouazizi later demonstrated against

police corruption in front of the governor's high gate by pouring paint thinner over

himself and lighting a match, cell phones and cameras captured images that were

instantly transmitted online. His picture became that of Tunisia's 'martyred hero.' In

a country that had seen 23 years of dictatorship, Bouazizi's message resonated with

others. The overwhelming consensus was revolution, and that revolution would be

aided through social media platforms. However, Tunisia's government restricted

Internet access and hacked into social networks to track activists. In response, the

Internet 'hacktivist' group Anonymous launched an effort to help the Tunisian

people by targeting government sites for what they called "an outrageous level of

censorship" (BBC, 4 Jan. 2011). Thus, a new power structure emerged through social

media.

Egyptians saw similarities in their own power structure; inspired by the

Tunisian success, they too revolted in what would become known on Twitter as

#ArabSpring. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak clamped down on the Internet by

using a firewall, but it was too late (Tsotsis, 11 Feb. 2011). The conversations had

happened and the movement was in motion. Once the Internet was down, citizens flooded the streets. Journalists in Egypt used tweets to send messages to friends to get the word out. In an application of Twitter as a tool for digital revolution, the dissemination of news began to shift.

Which brings us to Andy Carvin.

Carvin, who is the senior strategist of online communities at NPR, has been called a "living, breathing real-time verification system" by the Columbia Journalism Review for his work 'tweeting revolutions' in the Middle East (Silverman, 2011). After spending a lot of time on the ground visiting Tunisia, Carvin was initially surprised by the outbreak of protests there. After his curiosity was piqued, his professional interests in the Middle East and the Internet led him to cover the Arab Spring on Twitter @acarvin. By this time, Carvin had already been on Twitter for four years experimenting with other social media to cover developing stories (Kiss, 2011). His connections in Tunisia and Egypt allowed him to begin to effectively aggregate stories, painting a 360-degree picture of the uprisings throughout the Middle East. His sourcing was built on networks of trusted sources in these areas, which ranged from mainstream media reporters to a mix of local voices and eyewitness accounts. NPR President Gary Knell said Carvin has "done amazing things...I literally felt I was on the ground at Tahrir Square. We need to be able to do that on the local level as well" (Janssen, 2012).

Carvin has been on this beat as revolutions have spread from Tunisia, to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria. As these stories unfold, Carvin has had to field thousands of voices in an effort to disseminate the news coming from each

area. To keep up with all the news, Carvin told the Washington Post that he tweets seven days a week and up to 16 hours a day. Carvin's relentless tweeting totaled a record 839 tweets and 614 retweets on February 18, 2011 (Tobey, 2011). Carvin's followers' number over 67,900 and range from media personalities to actresses, policy planners, and activists. Although Carvin has been called everything from a "one-man Twitter news bureau," by The Washington Post, to "a personal news wire about Egypt," by The New York Times, his followers are what he attributes to his success (Schumacher-Matos, 2012). After winning a 2012 Shorty Award, an honor for top short-form content creator on Twitter in the #journalist category, Carvin tweeted: "I don't just have Twitter followers. You're my editors, researchers & fact-checkers. You're my news room. And I dedicate this award to you" (March 26, 2012).

Although Carvin uses his Twitter feed in the style of a 'newsroom,' he also admitted to its role as a wire. "When you look at Twitter the first analogy that comes to mind is news wire, rapid fire messaging, real time messaging, and the fact that news organizations use it for headlines," Carvin said. "There is an element of my

twitter feed that is newswire-ish, when I work as an aggregator." But Carvin says he tries to use twitter in a way that's different from this because, there's an assumption with the newswire that everything that is coming out is verified, considered high quality enough to run from other news sources. However, the assertion: "Twitter is the new newswire," doesn't make the assumption that everything posted is accurate, as Carvin suggests. Instead it is the claim that the wire is changing, allowing anyone to post anything in real time – whether it is accurate or not. This is exactly how Carvin uses his feed, to share information in real time, even if it is not necessarily confirmed. Carvin equates his Twitter account to "getting to see how the sausage is made," by allowing for debate and powwowing.

Carvin furthered the differentiation between wire and newsroom analogies, saying, "the core competency of twitter is conversation," whereas the key to the newswire is dissemination. "I don't have a problem with news organizations sending out wires on feeds, but it's not Twitter's strength."

Although Carvin has described his Twitter account as an open-source newsroom that anyone can participate in, his sourcing is more complex than that (Sonderman, 2012). He does not simply sample or retweet anything related to the Arab Spring. His curation process is a system of following feeds of activists, bloggers, and journalists, fact-checking content before retweeting and vetting new sources via Skype and e-mail (Silverman, 2011). When asked in an #spjchat (Society of Professional Journalists chapter for DePaul University College of Communication) forum on Twitter about this process, Carvin replied "I start with sources I already know and see who they @ reply and/or RT the most. You can learn a lot from

watching" (June 2, 2011). These are the same basic journalistic routines that reporters have practiced in print, translated onto Twitter.

Hermida and professor of journalism at the University of Minnesota, Seth Lewis, studied Carvin's use of sources during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. In their paper, "Sourcing the Arab Spring: A case study of Andy Carvin's sources during the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions," they examined the role of journalistic sourcing as applied to networked digital media. Hermida and Lewis analyzed more than 5,000 tweets from Carvin's feed (Hermida, "Study Points to Prominence of Activists"). Because of Twitters open nature, Hermida and Lewis were able to effectively complete a quantitative content analysis of Carvin's most cited fellow users in an effort to explore how newsgathering and dissemination is evolving on Twitter.

"We are familiar with journalism as product," Seth Lewis said, "but this is journalism as process." Lewis explains that Carvin's approach to journalism on Twitter is increasingly transparent, reflexive and responsive, which ideally makes it more accurate. In covering the Arab Spring uprisings, Carvin has not only tweeted confirmed material, but has also promoted crowd-sourced verification, circulated by the community that he has described as his 'newsroom.' On the whole, Hermida and Lewis found that Carvin gave priority to tweets from "citizens in repressive societies who were documenting and expressing their desires for social change on Twitter" (Hermida, 2012). The study reports that during key periods of the Tunisian and Eyptian uprisings, just under half of Carvin's tweets (48.3%), came from activists and bloggers, and made up a quarter of his sources overall (26.4%)(Hermida, 16). A

frequency analysis shows that even though alternative voices only made up a quarter of Carvin's sources, they accounted for about half of his tweets overall. Journalists, by comparison, were a significant percentage by source type, but not by frequency of tweets. This more nuanced analysis reveals that Carvin relied far more on alternative than elite sources in order to collect information on protests and events occurring in real-time.

Carvin attributes this to the fact that rebels and activists were the only sources on the ground throughout the protests in the Middle East. It was simply not safe for reporters to be on the ground, which meant Carvin had to rely on what would be considered "citizen journalists" for information. "Many of the people I'm retweeting are the same people being put on air," Carvin said. But he explains that the difference is that, "We don't call them citizen journalists on air, we call them eye witnesses." Carvin explains that if he isn't on the ground, which he generally can't be, he sees these voices as the primary source of information. In the case of the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings they happened to be predominantly activists, because those were the people in the action.

This is not generally the trusted journalistic method of sourcing, according to Hermida. "What studies show is that journalists tend to privilege people in power because they have ready-made authority attached to themselves. They're police, they're politicians, they're business leaders, university profs… they are already bringing a degree of authority and trustworthiness," Hermida said.

In studying Carvin's sourcing patterns Hermida said that they were surprised to learn that many of his tweets were also from members of the media. "One thing

that we found quite remarkable was that when it came to Egypt a lot of his tweets were from mainstream journalists. It made up the largest percentage of his interaction on Twitter," Hermida said. Mainstream media journalists comprised about a quarter of Carvin's sources (26.7%), and journalists accounted for 29.4% of tweets. Hermida still asserted that their findings point to a much broader range of voices than seen typically in conventional journalism, particularly in Carvin's championing messages from activists. "The prominence of what many may consider to be rebel voices raises questions about traditional journalistic approaches to balance and objectivity," Hermida said (Hermida, "Study Points to Prominence of Activists").

The difficulty for journalists like Carvin who are reporting on Twitter is: how do you detect an authoritative source online? In the digital sphere 'authority' is not solely contingent upon status. The questions of authority have changed online because the gatekeepers to the news are now those who are living it. Questions are based on confluence of time and place. If an eyewitness is there at a particular moment and has access to that fragment of knowledge at that particular time, they almost become the authority due to circumstance. Hermida explains that this makes it difficult for journalists to rely on them or not, because they may not be attached to an institution.

Institutional or no, Carvin's contacts have enabled him to generate as well as debunk stories circulating online. In one example of crowdsourced verification, Carvin's followers were able to help him curate and translate key information that discredited a report of Gaddafi using Israeli-made ammunition in Libya against

rebels. Carvin explains this process via his Storify on "Israeli weapons In Libya? How @acarvin and his Twitter followers debunked sloppy journalism." Shells found in Libya were emblazoned with a symbol that looked like the Star of David. The image was posted on the Facebook page of Al Manara, a Libyan expat news service in the UK, and IDed as Israeli. Israel's unpopularity within Libya made it an easy target.

After various news organizations led with this story, claiming that Israeli munitions were being used in Libya, Carvin asked his followers to help investigate. Through a crowd-sourced verification system of engaging in conversation with followers and using them as fact-checkers, the story was debunked. Based on the information that Carvin and his users retrieved, Carvin was able to report that a NATO manual identified the star on the ammo simply as a symbol, unrelated to Israel. The role of users as a filtration system exhibits how self-correcting of a system Twitter can be. This case study points to the techniques that can be used in effectively verifying social media content through conversation and engagement.

Carvin has proven to be an example of the 'best practices' in sourcing and verifying news on Twitter, but he came under fire for posting graphic images in his coverage of Syria. On February 5, 2012, Carvin tweeted this: "2 boys: one w/ his jaw blown off; the other his foot. Worse than graphic; an abomination. My hands are

shaking. http://bit.ly/z7BL1C #syria."

The link was to a video that showed gruesome footage of children in Homs injured in the conflict, deemed "horrifying" by the Telegraph in a story titled "Too graphic for the internet: Shocking footage of children caught up in Syria violence." The reaction from the Telegraph and many others in the news media was that Carvin's decision to post the video was inappropriate. Carvin expressed hope that the message would spawn an effort to find the injured boy and get him medical treatment. However, Carvin's tweet generated a debate on social media among other members of the press. Neal Mann, Sky News digital news editor, described the video as "disturbing," saying that he would not post it (The Telegraph, 2012).

Despite the editorial standards of many papers, Twitter affords far more flexibility than mainstream media. In an interview with NPR's Edward Schumacher-Matos, Carvin explained the difference between social and traditional media. "Until very recently, mass media had no choice but to be very discrete when it came to such imagery: think of the evening news playing in the family room, or the newspaper sitting on the counter at breakfast," Carvin said (Schumacher-Matos, 2012). Because of this he explained that news organizations are limited in the content that they share. But Carvin cites examples of times in which the media has

decided to show graphic images, such as the photograph of a young Vietnamese girl

running unclothed from a napalm explosion or footage of Muammar Gaddafi after

his death. On Twitter, Carvin sees the flow of information to be much more

transparent. To see the graphic content Carvin posts on his feed you must first be a

Twitter user, then subscribe to @acarvin, and finally choose whether or not to

watch the footage, which has been labeled as "graphic." Seth Lewis explains that,

"The graphic videos Carvin posts is a level of transparency. He recognizes that

unlike the NPR website, Twitter has more leeway for posting this kind of

information."

The latitude that NPR has given Carvin in expanding his role as a curator of

news on Twitter has allowed him to develop a news system that is revolutionary in

its own right. Carvin has generated a web of sources and information that reveals to

others a flow of news that has always been hidden in the depths of the newsroom.

Twitter has enabled the reporting process to be turned inside out.

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#StephenLawrence: Impact of Twitter on traditional court reporting

Twitter's reversal of the typical news process is most apparent in how

journalists cover the courts. This is evident in the United Kingdom, where a strict

system of non-disclosure has historically been practiced. In a recent trend, the

courts have begun to permit journalists to tweet from trials, adding a level of

transparency that has never before been sanctioned. In this way, Twitter serves as a

live notebook of information – what was once only seen by journalists and editors, is now visible to the public. Twitter has turned journalism inside out.

Reporters have effectively been able to live-tweet trials, allowing news media to stay up to date on a developing story. Twitter has changed the nature and rapidity of how journalists can report. Dominic Casciani said, "Historically [in the UK] reporters come out of court checking each others top lines so they all feel assured they will accurately report what happened – Twitter turns that on its head by doing the publishing first." Casciani reflected upon this change in relation to his coverage for the BBC on a heavily publicized murder trial in Britain, that of Stephen Lawrence, #StephenLawrence.

On January 3, 2012, 18 years after a black teenager named Stephen Lawrence was stabbed to death in south east London, Gary Dobson and David Norris were convicted of the racist murder (Prodger, 2012). The first investigation into the murder in 1993, led by the Metropolitan Police, failed due to a series of police errors and what was believed to be institutional racism. After a second prosecution that also resulted without any convictions, a four-year-long cold case review was launched in 2006, which culminated in the most recent trial (Prodger, 2012). The review led to fresh evidence connecting the men to the murder. With reporting on such an extensive and complex case it was imperative for journalists to track the scientific evidence and forensics, which would have taken place on an individuals note pad in the past. But unlike coverage of the trial in 1993, it was 2012, the age of social media, and the BBC's Matt Prodger "@mattprodger," Dominic Casciani

"@BBCDomC," and Philippa Thomas "@PhilippaNews," worked together to provide information on the case on Twitter and on-air.

"Twitter provides an immediate, direct conversation with the public. It became apparent in the sentencing inside the court, sending lines out via Twitter," Casciani said. "In essence what you are doing with your tweets is creating a virtual public notebook." Philippa Thomas, BBC news correspondent, used quotes and sound bites from Casciani's Twitter feed in reporting live on the verdict from outside the court.

Thomas explained that the traditional means of on air coverage after a verdict has been handed down is that the results will be texted from the courtroom. A producer standing next to the camera will then write the contents of that text on a piece of paper and hold it up next to the camera, at which point the broadcaster will take over. "It seems very old-fashioned even saying that now, but it's partly a way of getting it right, because you can't get a verdict wrong on air," Thomas said. "But with Stephen Lawrence I think the balance really tipped with Twitter."

During the trial Thomas built up knowledge of what reporters could accurately and quickly tweet from court. She relied on Casciani and Prodger to send her a stream of information and pithy quotes of what was happening inside. In addition to her understanding of the case, Thomas credits these tweets with helping her to sustain two-and-a-half hours of live commentary when the verdicts were read out, and then an hour-and-a-half of live commentary the day after the judge did his sentencing. While on air, Thomas read tweets from BBC reporters from a smart phone. Twitter worked for her partially as an aide-mémoire, but also provided some

key facts about what was happening inside the courtroom. "It [Twitter] was an invaluable tool and it made possible the live broadcasting to an extent that I just wouldn't have been able to do without it," Thomas said.

This use of Twitter got a lot of attention among the British media because it was one of the first times it was used in this way. Hermida describes this practice of reporting in simultaneous real time as a great study in the uses of Twitter. "Rather than try to stop your reporters from breaking news on twitter," Hermida said, "train your newsroom and develop mechanisms to monitor your reporters accounts – finding ways of maximizing these communication tools."

Given the positive response to the BBC's coverage of #StephenLawrence on Twitter it will be interesting to see how a similarly high profile case in the United States, such as #TrayvonMartin, might be covered once court proceedings begin. Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American was shot and killed in Florida on February 26, 2012, by George Zimmerman. Zimmerman, a 28-year-old man and community watch coordinator reportedly shot Martin, who was walking home to his father's girlfriend's home. After Zimmerman was released without charge on the count of self-defense, allegations of police misconduct and racial motivations triggered an overwhelming attention to the issue on Twitter.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEW) reported that following the release of 911 tapes on March 17, 2012, the press coverage regarding the Trayvon Martin case exploded on social networking sites such as Twitter. The audio of the 911 call from Zimmerman to the police revealed that they had advised him not to follow Martin (PEW, 2012). Although Twitter users previously had little exposure to

the Trayvon Martin story, the tapes triggered an outpouring of tweets. The PEW center found that coverage on Twitter related to the controversy through the hashtag #TrayvonMartin. Most of the commentary emphasized sympathy toward the teenager and his family, in addition to calls for justice. The concentrated attention on Twitter launched the Trayvon Martin story to become more featured than the presidential race in mainstream media (PEW, 2012).

Allowing journalists to tweet in court is a gamble between providing information to the public and conducting a fair trial, which hasn't always paid off. On April 11, 2012, a Kansas judge declared a mistrial of a murder case after a reporter tweeted a picture of the courtroom that included the profile of a juror (CBS News, 2012). Although the identity of the juror was difficult to distinguish from the photo, taken from a camera phone, it prompted debate as to the impact of social media on trials. The reporter, Ann Marie Bush of the Topeka Capital-Journal was unaware that the juror was visible in the picture. Managing editor for the Capital-Journal, Tomari Quinn, said, "We will use this as a training opportunity for our staff members as they strive to bring information to our readers in digital and print media" (CBS News, 2012). The relationship between social networks and the media has posed questions about many longstanding practices in legal systems.

On April 14, 2011, Ryan Giggs, British soccer star, won an injunction (gag order) prohibiting London's tabloids from publishing his name in relation to the affair that landed him in court (Faiola, 2011). The level of protection afforded by Britain's privacy laws are at risk in the age of Twitter, when new media can't be held accountable to the same degree as the mainstream. For Giggs, the rampant use of

Twitter couldn't have come at a more inopportune moment. In early May, an anonymous Twitter user, @injunctionsuper, tweeted about the allegation of Giggs' sexual exploits, stating: "Footballer Ryan Giggs had an extramarital affair with Big Brother star Imogen Thomas which lasted for 7 months #superinjunction" (5/8/11).
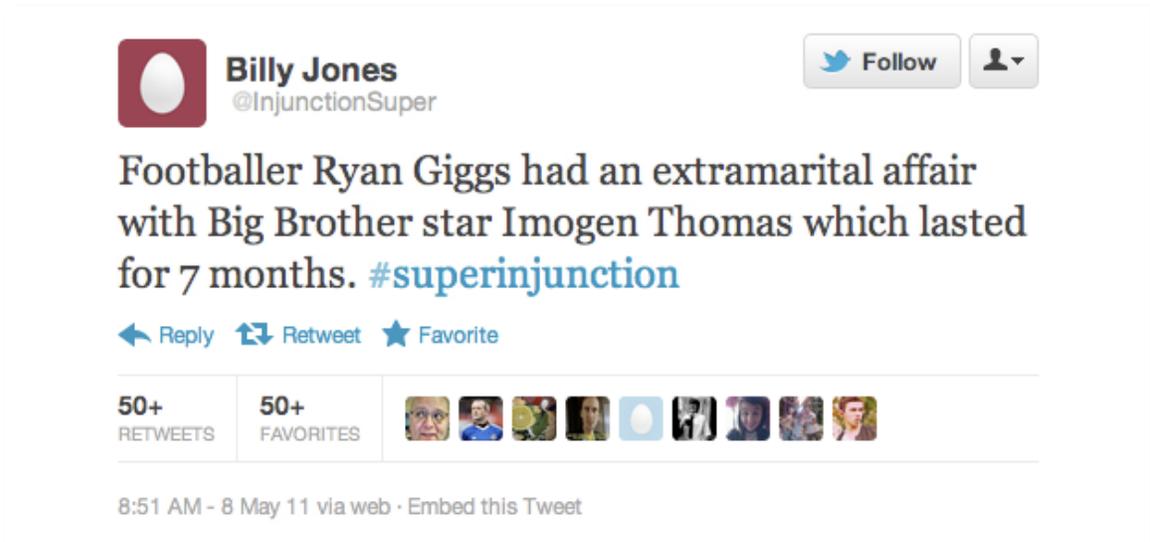
He tweeted only five more times, naming other British celebrities with gag orders like comedian David Schneider and Gordon Ramsay, prompting "Twitterati" like Piers Morgan to retweet or write similar messages (Faiola, 2011). Giggs' identity was revealed in the House of Commons when Member of Parliament John Hemming said, "With about 75,000 people having named Ryan Giggs on Twitter it is obviously impractical to imprison them all" (Faiola, 2011). His commentary argued that Twitter firestorms such as these challenged the pillars of Britain's legal system and rendered media injunctions outdated. In reaction, Giggs' legal team launched a suit against Twitter Inc and the persons "responsible for the publication of information on the Twitter accounts" (Halliday, 20 May 2011). The response reflects

a system desperately trying to grasp at straws in a rapidly changing media environment where a Twitter user can circumvent privacy laws to break news.

The trickle down effect of Twitter users discussing celebrities in this way is that tabloids and newspapers then catch on. For Britain, it's unraveling their system. But, it is impossible to imagine a way to control millions of voices that are, most importantly, unattached to media organizations and also inherently capable of group action. Social media evangelist Clay Shirky commented on this in a talk on his book "Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations." He explained that forming connections that lead to the rapid spread of news is unavoidable, making it unfeasible to try and staunch the dissemination of information (Shirky, Berkman Center). Shirky states that a big part of the way in which tools like Twitter are used depends on the political context. In high freedom environments social media tends to be used for entertainment, but in settings like Egypt, or even the UK in the case of Giggs, citizens use Twitter to respond to the authority. Thus tweets from @injunctionsuper and other Twitter users represent a collective action leading to more media attention. It is a cyclical effect that presents a conversation between media, citizens, and government.

FUTURE: A more interactive newswire••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••

The race to be of value

"Assuming we still have Twitter in five years it will be completely embedded in what we do, fundamentally engrained in our journalism DNA," Dominic Casciani said.

Just as people were wary of the original wire, according to members of the media, the future of Twitter is still uncertain.

The assumption of Twitter's longevity is one that Philippa Thomas is hesitant to make. "If we're still using Twitter [in five years] it will be entirely integrated and the questions we're asking now will seem ridiculously old-fashioned," Thomas said. "But I think we'll be using something else that hasn't even been invented."

While Twitter might not be current five years from now, the questions that are being raised about its role as a newswire bring up important issues about journalistic practices. This is one of the most exciting times in journalism since the basic technology of the newspaper industry began in the 17th century. When one considers that social media is allowing reporters and news media to engage in their work directly with an audience, an industry in upheaval becomes an industry in a process of renewal. What is key to this transition is for journalists and news media to do exactly what Casciani and Thomas prescribe: change with it.

The makeup of journalists is firmly rooted in the scoop - driven by breaking the story first. Today the notion of a scoop has changed drastically. When it comes to breaking news, the expectation is that someone is ultimately going to get there first.

Whether it's political or entertainment news, Twitter and social media have largely done away with the ability for journalists to break news first. News media and journalists can try and resist the shift, from prohibiting RT's to opposing transparency, but at the end of the day stories like this one are still going to break before institutional sources: "omgg , my aunt tiffany who work for whitney houston just found whitney houston dead in the tub . such ashame & sad" (Aja Dior Mintz "@AjaDiorNavy," 2/11/12).

Over a half hour later, the Associated Press confirmed Houston's death in a tweet sent at 4:57 p.m. local time, citing her publicist (Lee, 2012).

Journalists are no longer the sole gatekeepers of the news, but the solution is not more regulations or a resistance to change. Instead of turning a blind eye to other Twitter users, journalists and the media must embrace the service as an open and interactive technology, a new and *different* newswire.

"Who gets it first matters far less than who gets it right," Seth Lewis said. The traditional principles of journalism such as verification and sourcing still apply, but

the way in which we do them must change. The next step is for news media to realize that who breaks the news first is far less important than before. As Seth Lewis explains, "People care far less than journalists do about scoops; it's very inside baseball." The focus of breaking news must then slow down and, as Lewis says, put a premium on "getting it right."

Twitter has a seductive quality that journalists must resist when trying to be accurate. "A rumor on Twitter can spread like wildfire, there's this temptation among journalists to get in with the flow and be first with the news, and I think you really do have to resist that," Philippa Thomas explained. Without vetting sources, asking questions, and engaging there is no significance to information pushed out carelessly. Despite the allure of the 140-character rapid self-broadcasting system, Twitter as the new newswire should still be viewed with the same standard of accuracy as the original wire. "When in doubt," Liz Heron said, "It's better to be right than it is to be fast." The dichotomy of speed and accuracy is one that journalists have always struggled with, but with the new paradigm of Twitter transparency must be central to breaking news. For media organizations on Twitter there is no longer a race to be first, but there is a race to be of value.

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Best practices for journalists on Twitter

In working out best practices for Twitter's use by journalists as the new newswire, Liz Heron and Andy Carvin shared their thoughts on how to break news using transparency, verification, and crowdsourcing.

Liz Heron listed three specific practices to use when breaking news on Twitter. At the top of Heron's list is transparency: "When you're breaking news either make sure that it's correct, or frame it in a way that peels back the curtain on your process."

This use of Twitter gives readers a look into the development of a story. The only danger with doing this is showing the process to competitors. In the view of transparency, however, the aim isn't competition - it's open journalism. "You almost have no choice but to adopt an open journalism mindset if you don't you become a ghetto," Hermida said.

Heron also warned of regurgitating messages on Twitter: "Be careful of just straight re-tweeting," Heron said. "It's better to write your own tweet and then link to give more context." Hermida explains that providing relevant links increases your value as a journalist, "What you're signaling to your readers is that you want to point them to the best coverage."

Lastly Heron said that, "To really do well on Twitter as a journalist you have to develop a community of sources." The greater level of engagement works two fold: it allows journalists to connect at a deeper level with their readers than ever before and it also lets them show some of their personality. The emphasis is on being as open and participatory as possible.

Twitter operates under the premise of what social media analysts like Clay Shirky have called 'shared awareness.' Many are scared of this news democratization of social media. Carvin, on the other hand, has embraced it. Carvin has developed ways of ferreting out information by maintaining a completely

embedded role with his beat on Twitter. At the core of his technique is finding

experts and eyewitnesses, then mobilizing them into a conversation.

Carvin says that the most essential practice on Twitter is to go beyond

crowdsourcing in engaging with the audience. "You can't just go in as a journalist to

exploit those people, you have to become a part of those communities," Carvin said.

In order to participate in this dialogue you have to cultivate, and as Heron explained,

be interactive.

"The worst thing a journalist can do is join Twitter when news breaks,"

Carvin said.

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Conclusion: Twitter and the digital public sphere

The reality is that not everyone can be Andy Carvin, but the idea with looking

at Twitter as a new and different type of newswire is that we can begin to reevaluate

what we want out of our news. In the days of the telegraphic wire what we got out of

it was simple: breaking news. Today, breaking news is no longer funneled through a

wire. It comes from all directions and platforms. As social media editor for the wire

service Reuters, Anthony De Rosa, explains "in a perfect world" you could break

news on the wire, web and Twitter simultaneously (De Rosa, 2011). De Rosa goes on

to say that conventional wire services must extend into the real-time realm of social

media. By implementing these practices wires don't have to be used in only one way.

Twitter today is connecting news outlets to users through a web of millions

of wires. Like a fly being caught in that web, a story isn't simply passively consumed.

The Twittersphere voraciously engages with it by redistributing and questioning. According to De Rosa, ignoring social networks is "like writing a death sentence" for wire services in the world of digital media. "To bury our head in the sand and act like Twitter (and who knows what else comes into existence next month or five years from now?) isn't increasingly becoming the source of what informs people in real-time is ridiculous" (De Rosa, 2011). For a wire service like Reuters to make comments like this it seems self-evident that Twitter increasingly is becoming the new newswire. The next generation newsroom will inevitably be online, and must embrace an increasingly democratic landscape of information dissemination.

The idea of the democracy of social media, discussed by Heron and Carvin, is echoed in much of the rhetoric surrounding Twitter, from its role as a catalyst of revolution in the Middle East, to it's ability to incite backlash against mass media as in #CNNfail. The abstract concept of this digital public sphere takes a feather out of Jürgen Habermas' theory of a public space in which individuals exchange views and knowledge (Habermas, 1989). Habermas contended that the public sphere was based on conversation, supported by public spaces for sharing ideas like town halls, coffeehouses, and newspapers. According to Habermas, broadcast media departed from this democratic landscape, and caused the deterioration of dialogue. But today, as our interaction shifts to a computer-mediated system of communication, the public sphere seems to be increasingly online in social media platforms like Twitter.

Twitter users have a role in what type of information will become important to the digital public and, as a result, what journalists will cover. Twitter has become an unlimited space for engagement, discussion and information, where the

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consumers and producers of news are one and the same. But the role of journalists still remains. James Bohman argues, "The Internet becomes a public sphere only through agents who engage in reflexive and democratic activity" (Bohman, 140). Bohman goes on to state that the Internet enables dialogue across borders and publics, but only if there are participants who engage with it in this manner. The Internet can facilitate discussion, "only if there are agents who make it so and transnational institutions whose ideals seek to realize a transnational public sphere as the basis for a realistic utopia of citizenship in a complexly interconnected world" (Bohman, 154). While Bohman was not speaking about journalism specifically, the idea that the media is inherently related to citizenship is tantamount to this discussion. In today's digital sphere, the public press – as journalism is defined – must become increasingly interactive in order to break news effectively.

The press today is held accountable by a range of voices online. Twitter allows a level of back and forth between the media and its audience that has been uncommon in the history of mass communication. People have taken notice of this aspect of Twitter and are using the service in ways that work to bring attention to public issues. This is not unlike the reaction to the telegraphic newswire by James Gordon Bennett in the 19th century that, "The public mind will be stimulated to greater activity by the rapid circulation of news. Thus the intellectual, philosophic, and original journalist will have a greater, a more excited, and more thoughtful audience than ever" (Huntzicker, 96). To a large degree, Twitter has become a public newswire that reflects, "What's happening now?" to millions of users. Although what is happening might not always be newsworthy, it is an effective service for

journalists to track the pulse of the digital sphere. Twitter is like an amplified public

square, and it points to the necessity of verification. The ever-growing influx of

information means that journalists must work more than ever before as a filter in

this system, teasing out fact from fiction and giving greater depth in analysis. Just as

Bennett described the role of the media during the advent of the telegraphy, with

the new newswire of Twitter journalism yet again has the potential to be the focus

of attention.

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