

MEET THE AUDIENCE

How Journalists Adapt to Social Media

So far in this book we have explored the roles that social media have come to play in our engagement with the news, in the context both of acute, breaking news events and of everyday sharing and discussion of the news. Central to these now widespread, demotic practices is the multitude of ordinary social media users, who—acting as gatewatchers—both identify new news articles and other materials on the Websites of mainstream and alternative news organisations and of other relevant sources share them within the social media space, and help to selectively amplify the visibility and circulation of other users' posts by liking, sharing, retweeting, and commenting on them. In this we should not overlook that an important subset of the social media posts amplified through this latter practice of user-on-user gatewatching that is internal to the social media platforms originates from the accounts of news organisations and individual journalists themselves; this points to the fact that such institutional and professional actors have now also at least begun to embrace social media as additional channels for distributing their news content, and perhaps also for engaging in other activities that advance beyond the mere sharing of existing content. This and the following chapter explore these developments in the adoption and adaptation of mainstream social media platforms for professional journalistic work, and shows how such processes compare with the

journalistic response to the first wave of citizen media. Chapter 5 mainly focusses on the gradual adoption of social media by individual journalists, while Chapter 6 examines institutional responses by news organisations.

There are, to begin with, some obvious parallels between the industry's reactions to the organisational and technological disruptions introduced by the two waves of citizen media. Blogs and the other platforms for online publishing that emerged in the late 1990s were at first viewed cautiously, even suspiciously, as we have seen in Chapter 2; they were seen as unruly, disorganised spaces where the institutional imprints of major news organisations did not inherently carry greater authority and which operated to very different rhythms and requirements than conventional journalistic production, and journalists interested in exploring these new platforms were therefore also concerned about the added workload and exposure to criticism that an adoption of these new publication models would lead to. Similar concerns have been voiced again also in the context of the incorporation of *Twitter* and *Facebook* into journalistic practice: in particular, the need to be regularly present and active on these platforms has generated substantial concerns about workload implications for a professional community that (in the context of job cuts and increasing competition for audiences) is already under pressure to deliver more content with fewer resources.

As a result, the initial response by journalists and news organisations to social media has been deeply conflicted. Some journalists emerged as enthusiastic advocates, and represent perhaps this decade's equivalents to the Rosens, Lasicas, and Gillmors of the early 2000s. Amongst these are especially some of the news workers who represent the more agile and unconventional professional practices in professional journalism: this includes various columnists and pundits as well as tabloid journalists and freelancers, who work in journalistic roles where the development of a recognisable personal identity in distinction from the institutional imprint is particularly important. Again, this can be compared to some extent to the adoption of blogging by journalists in the early 2000s: here, too, columnists and pundits—whose daily or weekly columns already aligned well with the blogging format—were amongst the earliest and arguably most successful adopters.

Against this, the vast majority of journalists responded initially with considerably greater scepticism to the challenges posed by social media. Although widespread across the profession, this response was especially pronounced amongst those journalists who had not yet fully accepted the professional transformations enacted in the wake of the first wave of citizen media: those

journalists still rebelling even against the transition in priority from offline to online channels were naturally unlikely to see social media as anything other than yet another blow to journalism as it had been practiced in the mythical pre-Internet ‘golden age’ of the mass media. In many ways, then, the divisions between social media enthusiasts and sceptics amongst journalists also represent a digital divide, extending at least in part also along generational lines.

Finally, the dismissive response of such journalistic social media sceptics was based in part also on the lack of credible demographic information about the user populations of leading social media platforms—a gap in knowledge which has still not yet been fully addressed, especially from a perspective that also pays attention to the situation in smaller nations and to longitudinal patterns of userbase development across platforms. In the absence of such credible information, journalists and other interested parties were able to summarily dismiss—based on little more than anecdotal evidence and ‘gut feeling’—the user populations of platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* as representing only narrow and unrepresentative demographic or ideological groups that did not constitute a relevant and legitimate audience for their efforts; from this self-serving perspective, it naturally seemed more sensible to continue to focus on newspapers, news broadcasts, and news Websites as the mainstream products of journalistic work, and to stop wasting time on social media engagement until these platforms had attracted more grown-up, important, and commercially attractive audiences. It is only much more recently, with improvements in demographic data on social media users and in audience engagement metrics for journalistic content on social media platforms, that such intuitive and apparently commonsensical dismissals of social media are countered by hard evidence of the important function of social media as news media.

While based on questionable evidence, such attempts to balance the energy and resources invested in established and emerging media channels are of course also driven by the considerable economic challenges facing the contemporary news industry. Social media have caused significant additional anxieties for an already highly anxious industry; in particular, as paywalls and other micro-payment approaches for news sites have failed to deliver unequivocally on their promises, the circulation of news stories through social media—especially where it is encouraged by the industry’s own embrace of social media—has been seen as another instance of allowing content to circulate freely without an opportunity to generate commercial returns from it, and therefore as repeating what some commentators see as the fundamen-

tal mistake of setting up open-access news Websites in the first place, in the 1990s. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, social media contribute substantially to atomising the news and encouraging deep linking, thereby further undermining the public standing of news imprints (and the ability of publishers to generate revenue from that standing): as a result of the habitual, demotic adoption of newssharing and news curation practices by social media users, the same news story will now be circulating in versions originating from a wide range of mainstream and alternative news outlets, globally in English and within specific language- and nation-specific networks. This enhanced circulation means that direct access to many—and especially minor—outlets is likely to decline further.

It is therefore hardly surprising that some of the harshest critics of the first wave of citizen media have reappeared again to also register their staunch opposition to the role now assumed by social media as a part of the news ecology. At times their attacks represent almost a carbon copy of the criticisms expressed a decade earlier; for instance, in a virtual re-run of Australia's 'blog wars' of 2007, *The Australian's* former editor-in-chief Chris Mitchell writes in his column in the same paper in 2016 that

Twitter, a medium with a maximum of 140 characters, is not conducive to logical thought, deep research, reflection or independence of thought. It is really a place where activists cheer each other on, often in the foulest language or with the most naive affirmations of clearly partisan positions. (Mitchell 2016: n.p.)

Then as now, much of this emotional and over-the-top response appears motivated by the realisation that social media serve as an effective mechanism for responding publicly to the coverage proffered by major news outlets: for senior editors such as Mitchell, this represents an increased and evidently unwanted scrutiny of their publications' editorial decisions that did not exist to the same extent or with the same visibility in the days before citizen media. Such visceral, banalising, and counterfactual responses to the challenges posed by social media—Mitchell goes on to state that “Twitter is the worst. I would call it little more than a leftwing echo chamber for various highly politicised activists, including many journalists. This is not surprising since it was actually invented as a way for pop stars to talk to their fans rather than to discuss serious issues” (2016: n.p.)—are revealing of a particularly old-fashioned, patriarchal attitude to the news process, in which audiences are clearly positioned as passive recipients of the news reports and framing worldview fashioned by the journalists working for a particular outlet and which allows little

opportunity for those audiences to actively respond and engage. As Hermida points out, they also demonstrate a fundamental lack of new media literacy amongst some industry leaders:

viewed through an industrial mindset, Twitter is a shambolic, messy, and noisy torrent of seemingly everyday details of life. These negative attributes are transformed into positive attributes when viewed through the new literacies of a post-industrial mind-set, revealing instead a complex, networked communications environment. (Hermida 2014: 364–65)

Towards the Normalisation of Social Media

In spite of this continued animosity towards social and indeed any kind of citizen media from some quarters, however, past years have also seen a gradual process towards the normalisation of social media such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* as part of mainstream journalistic practice; even Chris Mitchell admits, if grudgingly, that “smart editors want reporters with large Twitter followings to use social media to market their stories” (2016: n.p.). The speed and enthusiasm with which such normalisation processes have progressed varies considerably across publications and organisations, however. A number of diverging dynamics have emerged in this context.

First, there may be an incentive for traditionally disadvantaged news organisations to position themselves as first movers when it comes to social media adoption. Journalists working for “the nation’s leading news organizations ... may be more inclined to keep the status quo than their counterparts at news organizations with possibly less reach and influence. The latter, meanwhile, might have to struggle more to make themselves heard” (Lasorsa *et al.* 2012: 31). This perspective mirrors similar developments in other content markets, where the greater and potentially global connectivity afforded to small players by online publication enables them to address a dispersed niche audience that had been difficult to reach using conventional media forms.

Conversely, however, some of the larger, better established news organisations may also have more room to innovate: their larger workforces and greater resources might better enable them to establish social media teams charged with re-envisaging their news reporting processes for a social media environment. This is true especially for news outlets that are organisationally insulated from commercial concerns at least to some extent—for instance,

major public service media organisations such as the BBC, or trust-funded non-profit media outlets such as *The Guardian*. Although the financial and institutional resources available in such organisations still are anything but limitless, of course, their initiatives in addressing new content formats and channels may nonetheless have a greater freedom to experiment without needing to demonstrate commercial viability immediately. We will explore these initiatives in greater detail in the next chapter.

But in addition to such divergences at the institutional level, there are also significant differences in social media adoption that exist between individual journalists. Here, younger and more ambitious journalists have often appeared to emerge as the drivers of social media adoption and adaptation for professional purposes; doubly so when they also work for equally innovative and ambitious news organisations. Unsurprisingly, in particular, journalists working for online-only, 'born digital' news outlets have also been especially open to incorporating social media into their day-to-day work practices; for instance, in a comparative study of journalists' *Twitter* activities, Russell *et al.* found that "prestige traditional journalists were not as active as online journalists on Twitter. Nearly two-thirds of our tweets came from online journalists" (2015: 934). Having had less time in their careers to date to settle into a specific set of professional practices, and having started their professional activities at a time when social media were already part of the overall media landscape and used at least in personal contexts, such journalists are perhaps inherently more open to exploring new, non-standard approaches to using social media to promote their news stories, engage with audiences after publication, and even develop a recognisable professional persona that is distinct from the news outlet they work for.

In this context it is important to recognise that such generational gaps in the adoption of new technologies for journalism are far from uncommon, and have re-occurred a number of times in the historical evolution of journalistic practices. Reflecting on his findings on the adoption of *Twitter* amongst American sports journalists, for instance, Reed suggests that this is

a generational and technical gap similar to what scholars described following the advent of radio and television journalism. Sports journalism practice changed significantly when television became a competitor, and behaviors once previously considered unprofessional (i.e., writing about athletes' personal lives, writing about taboo subjects, altering grammar usage) became a new standard of journalistic professionalism. (2013: 568)

Both in the context of such historical transformations as well as in the course of the present social media adoption and normalisation process, however, the generational gap is neither complete nor insurmountable; contrary to the widespread popular myth that positions younger people as “digital natives” (Prensky 2001), not all younger journalists are inherently more adept at using social media for professional purposes; nor are all older journalists out of touch with and unable to effectively use new media platforms and tools. As Revers has shown in his ethnographic study of U.S. journalists, “neither was early adoption necessary for, nor did late adoption exclude from intense engagement” with *Twitter* (Revers 2014: 812).

Finally, national and international media systems also emerge as an important context determining the speed of social media normalisation amongst journalists. Adoption in the English-speaking world, for instance, may proceed most rapidly both because leading social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* originated from the United States and therefore found their first users there, and because the Internet has placed news outlets in the U.S., the U.K., and other leading Anglophone nations in direct competition with each other, thereby increasing the pressure to innovate in order to remain ahead of one’s competitors. News outlets in other nations, serving smaller language communities, operate under different market conditions; in Germany, for instance, the newspaper industry has declined considerably less rapidly than its counterparts elsewhere, and social media adoption across the wider population has also been slower—as a result, there is less pressure to alter established journalistic practices by incorporating social media. This would at least partly explain results such as Gulyas’s, who finds that amongst her respondents “UK journalists, who used social media the most, had the most positive attitudes towards social media ... German journalists had the most negative attitudes” (2013: 280).

As Revers notes, in words that echo Chris Mitchell’s grudging acceptance of the commercial need for news organisations to engage with *Twitter*, “many older reporters first recognized Twitter’s economic utility, which accounts for their initial skepticism, and only embraced it once they perceived its professional merits” (2014: 813). In addition to larger generational or structural factors, therefore, the gradual normalisation of social media (including *Twitter*, but also other platforms) into journalistic processes and practices has also been driven by the constructive contribution that such social media platforms have made in the context of key events and topics. We have already explored a number of acute events as key moments in the development of user-led so-

cial news curation, and as drivers for the demoticisation of newssharing across online populations; much as such events have added to the popular recognition of social media as important spaces for the discovery and circulation of news stories, so too have they caused journalists to look again at how social media might be incorporated into news coverage. In addition to the major natural disasters and terrorist attacks we have focussed on in Chapter 3, other such events include unexpected celebrity news such as the death of Michael Jackson or the arrest of Oscar Pistorius, as well as acute political crises such as several high-profile political leadership challenges in Australia in 2009 and 2010. Journalists' uses of social media especially during the earliest of these events were largely *ad hoc* and experimental, at times using social media accounts set up for the purpose of covering one specific event—such as the *Austin American-Statesman's* @trackingike *Twitter* account, for covering the impact of Hurricane Ike in 2008 (Gleason 2010: n.p.)—that could be discontinued if the experiment turned out to be unsuccessful; with many such initiatives generating significant user engagement, however, the experiences made from such explorations were gradually incorporated into more mainstream, day-to-day practice.

The success of such social media activities in changing the coverage of specific events has sometimes also generated impacts across the industry, well beyond the news organisation responsible; reflecting on the role of *Twitter* in covering an unexpected leadership challenge in Australia's Liberal Party in 2009, for instance, one of the country's leading social media journalists, Lati-ka Bourke, recalls that "I can't tell you how many times I heard journos admit they 'better get into this Twitter thing,' that fortnight ... It was the only service providing minute-by-minute updates of the very fluid situation" (qtd. in Posetti 2010: n.p.), not least also because—in addition to journalists—a number of politicians and other interested parties were also experimenting with *Twitter* as a tool for keeping track of developments. The specific drivers of these development in each national media system are necessarily different, of course; while major global, national, or local breaking news stories have often been cited as acute game-changing moments, more foreseeable, longer-duration developments can make a similar contribution; for Beckett, for instance, it was the role of new and social media in the 2010 British general election that "has made it absolutely clear that networked journalism has arrived. The journalism about the campaign, the result and its consequences has been a remarkable combination of online and mainstream, professional and citizen media" (Beckett 2010: 1).

Beyond that initial phase of exploration and experimentation, then, the adoption of social media has generally occurred over a number of distinct phases. In the first place, towards the end of the 2000s many leading news outlets chose to create distinct newsroom positions, often under titles such as ‘social media reporter’ or ‘social media editor’; the task of these staff was not necessarily to report *about* social media, but rather to report *via* social media: to publicise stories in the main publication by posting updates and links on social media platforms, to monitor reader responses received through social media, and to engage with audiences on these platforms. Additionally, especially in the context of breaking news stories and similar developments, they would also be tasked with sourcing additional information *from* social media channels.

Further, in addition to these outward-facing roles, such social media editors also served as social media evangelists within their own news organisation, highlighting the benefits of developing a social media presence and encouraging still-reluctant colleagues to explore these new media. As the *New York Times*’ social media editor, for instance, Jennifer Preston

met regularly with section editors and reporters to demonstrate how they could use social media tools not just to promote content but to build communities and attract new audiences. Now, Times staffers regularly use social media to publish real-time news and updates for breaking stories and live events. Some departments, she said, have started using Facebook to help seed communities around areas of content. (Tessore 2010: n.p.)

Given the general scepticism and downright animosity towards social media that had been expressed by many journalists (cf. Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013: 381), such social media editors faced considerable and persistent challenges; however, attitudes gradually changed as social media continued to demonstrate their potential utility. Speaking in 2011, the BBC’s “social media editor Alex Gubbay agrees: ‘18 months ago, I would have conversations with BBC correspondents about how they couldn’t spare the time ... now they are ringing me saying when can I start doing this?’” (Newman 2011: 48). As social media editors assumed a greater training and leadership role for their peers, they therefore also served increasingly as enforcers of the emerging implicit or explicit quality standards for the journalistic use of social media: as one of Parmelee’s respondents reports, her paper employs

a social media coordinator who helps reporters new to the Twitosphere [sic] and who reels in reporters when necessary. We did have an instance of a reporter who fre-

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quently editorialized in his tweets, which he would never do in his reporting. He was told to stop tweeting until he got some additional training from the social media coordinator. Our basic rule is that we don't tweet anything we wouldn't allow in the paper. (Parmelee 2013: 301–2)

In addition to the role of social media editor or coordinator, which in most instances appeared to be focussed most centrally on encouraging the use of social media by journalists and other newsroom staff, and therefore ultimately on outbound communication activities, some news organisations also established a community coordinator role to address inbound communication from audiences, both through on-site commentary functions and third-party social media platforms. At *The Guardian*, for instance, “their job is to read all comments and make sure that the conversations on the Guardian website and around the web are reflected by the editorial department”, and as the publication's then Head of Digital Engagement Meg Pickard explained in 2011, “the community coordinator can go to the editorial department and ask for a story” about issues that surface in audience responses. “It's not just about tips, it's something more” (Pickard qtd. in Bruno 2011: 40). Such observation and analysis of the social media responses to current news stories has become increasingly sophisticated, in fact: interviewed in 2011, *The Guardian*'s community coordinator for news Laura Oliver explained that “[journalists] will have their own [Twitter] lists of correspondents which is a great place to start and then what we do ... is look at the secondary network. Who are the correspondents talking to? Who are they linking to” (Thurman and Walters 2013: 94)?

In turn, such community coordinator roles have evolved further as the available tools for analyzing audience responses and engagement have grown more powerful.

At the centre of this development are people in the newsroom with new job titles like ‘audience editor’, ‘growth editor’, ‘audience development editor’, or ‘audience engagement editor’. They are developing and using analytics for editorial purposes that were in the past more narrowly tied to predominantly commercial objectives, using tools and techniques previously rarely used by journalists. (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016: 9)

This signals a shift towards the quantification of journalistic activity and its impacts which we will return to in Chapter 6; more fundamentally, however, it also points to the comprehensive incorporation of social media as one of the key channels through which news content is disseminated, and through which audience reception and engagement is expected, by the mid-2010s. In less than a decade, therefore, the positioning of social media in relation to

newsroom activities has moved from small-scale experiment to core practice. Paradoxically, however, this has also meant that some of the earlier roles of social media reporter or social media editor have already begun to disappear again: for a social media editor like Meg Pickard, for instance, “an obsolete job description just might equal success” (Mayer 2010: n.p.) as it indicates that a newsroom-wide adoption and normalization of social media has occurred.

This, then, represents a shift in the organisational mindset, from positioning social media activity and engagement as a single-person activity for dedicated specialists (cf. Myers in Gleason 2010: n.p.) towards an understanding of social media as everybody’s business; the *New York Times*’ Jennifer Preston has stated, for instance, that “social media can’t belong to one person; it needs to be part of everyone’s job It has to be integrated into the existing editorial process and production process” (qtd. in Tenore 2010: n.p.). And indeed this shift in mindset is occurring across much of the journalism industry, to the extent that journalists like the BBC’s Silvia Costeloe can state with certainty that in future, “if you haven’t made it already as a journalist, you won’t become a journalist unless you engage with social media” (qtd. in Stray 2010: n.p.).

Crucial to this comprehensive embedding of social media across the newsroom are two interrelated aspects. First, there is a need for considerable formal institutional support for this transformation at senior levels; as Preston puts it, “we need to have our desk and department heads and section editors owning the social media channels and managing the conversation that’s taking place” (qtd. in Tenore 2010: n.p.). Second, one expression of such support must also be a coordinated effort to develop the social media skills of newsroom staff to a level where they are able to operate competently and effectively without constant oversight. The lack of such training, and even of available courses and other training opportunities, has been highlighted repeatedly by journalists and editors (e.g. Neuberger *et al.* 2014: 6). Notably, in fact, social media platforms themselves have sought to address this gap by offering their own advice and guidelines for journalists exploring these spaces (Hermida 2013: 296); *Twitter*, for instance, launched a guide on “Best Practices for Journalists” in 2011 (Twitter, Inc. 2011), and a “Twitter for Newsrooms” site in 2013, even if the tone of the latter resource may have appeared somewhat patronising:

we know you come from different generations. Some are native to the pilcrow, others to the hashtag. You began your careers in different media: radio, print, broadcast, online and mobile. But you share a common bond: the desire to make a difference in the world, bringing reliable information to the communities you serve. (Twitter, Inc. 2013: n.p.)

The extent to which such advice and guidelines have contributed to journalists' adoption and adaptation of social media into their day-to-day professional practice is unclear; "Twitter for Newsrooms", at any rate, appears to have been discontinued in 2014 and is now available only through the Internet Archive's *Wayback Machine*. What is evident, by contrast, is that with the help of formal resources or through a more gradual process of "learning by doing" (Neuberger *et al.* 2014: 6) a very substantial number of journalists across diverse news organisations and national contexts have now developed their own social media presences on platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*.

Journalistic Uses of Social Media

Today, most news outlets and organisations operate their own institutional accounts on *Twitter* and/or pages on *Facebook*, and have perhaps also developed presences on *Instagram*, *Snapchat*, and other comparatively more recent additions to the social media landscape. Such accounts may be automated—posting links to newly published news stories without human intervention—or operated by dedicated social media teams; in the larger news organisations, the central institutional account (@BBCNews, @CNN) may also be complemented by more specific accounts covering particular beats (@BBCSport, @CNNbusiness) or types of news (@BBCBreaking, @CNNbrk). The operation of such accounts—especially where they are used purely for disseminating links to news articles—is relatively straightforward; however, on platforms such as *Facebook* where user comments appear directly on the institutional page itself there is also a need to engage in content moderation, and to translate approaches similar to those already established to manage user comments on the institution's own Website to the third-party social media environment.

Existing research on the adoption of social media by news outlets and their staff has paid relatively little attention to the operation of such institutional accounts, and focusses much more strongly instead on the use of social media by individual journalists, editors, and other news workers. Here, a complex and at times contradictory perspective on journalistic attitudes and practices regarding social media has emerged in recent years, not helped by the substantial diversity in the timeframes, publications, news beats, and countries covered by such studies; in particular, the rapid evolution both of social media platforms themselves and of the journalistic uses made of social

media has meant that our understanding of the intersections between social media and journalistic practice remains highly fluid and changeable. Most of this research, it must also be noted, focusses predominantly on journalistic uses of *Twitter*, even in spite of the considerably greater popular adoption of *Facebook*, but this also reflects the platform preferences expressed by many journalists themselves: reviewing the findings from a study of American sports journalists, for instance, Reed reports that “Twitter and Facebook are not used equally in newsgathering. Twitter has been accepted as a ‘normalized’ medium, particularly among younger professionals” (2013: 568). This is an observation that appears to hold well beyond the sports beat itself.

Key reasons for this preference appear to be the underlying differences in platform metaphors and design. In particular, the distinctions between ‘following’ on *Twitter* and ‘friending’ on *Facebook* are crucial here: journalists appear to be generally reluctant to become *Facebook* ‘friends’ with their sources and informants (and are especially averse to displaying such relationships to other users of the social media platform), believing that this could be misunderstood as an endorsement of specific causes or ideologies (Parmelee 2014: 442). Additionally, unless they are prepared to go to the trouble of setting up their own page or to break *Facebook*’s user rules by creating two distinct profiles, on *Facebook* journalists would need to operate from their own personal profiles, which may lead to an unwanted and unmanageable collision and context collapse (Marwick and boyd 2011) between their personal and professional networks. On *Twitter*, by contrast, the ‘following’ metaphor signals considerably less direct and affective attachment, and (partly as a result) *Twitter* networks tend to be built around a larger and more diverse range of weak rather than strong ties; this breadth and diversity of connections is naturally well suited to information gathering and dissemination tasks that lie at the heart of professional journalistic practice. Finally, similar logics also apply to the social media uses of other professionals—including politicians, domain experts, sportspeople, and celebrities—, so that journalists are also likely to prefer *Twitter* because the majority of the societal actors about whom they might report can be found here (Parmelee 2014: 442). In this sense, such preferences for *Twitter* amongst various news actors are also likely to be self-reinforcing; these network effects have the potential to cement *Twitter*’s role as an elite medium.

The vast majority of the literature covering social media adoption by journalists therefore focusses on *Twitter* as a core platform. From it, a number of key journalistic practices can be identified.

Promoting Stories

First, and perhaps most obviously, journalists as well as their news organisations utilise social media platforms to publicise and promote their own content. This mirrors other, previous adoption processes; almost always, the first step in the adoption of new platforms for news-related purposes has been to ensure that the audiences of these platforms are aware of new news stories published by the journalist or news organisation. At first, the model embraced here therefore simply takes a broadcast approach (also described, less charitably, as ‘shovelware’) where headlines and story ledes are simply transferred from the core publication to the spaces offered by the new platform, and where brand name recognition is expected to attract audiences in the new space. Over time, however, the approaches to such content promotion have gradually become more sophisticated; where on *Twitter*, for instance, news organisations’ earlier “lack of hashtag usage” (Pew Research Center 2011: 14) was surprising, many organisations and their journalists have by now learnt that the sensible and consistent use of meaningful hashtags can contribute considerably to increasing the reach and visibility of their news updates. *Twitter*’s own advice on ‘best practices’ has also contributed to this improved understanding of platform affordances (Twitter, Inc. 2011). Additionally, journalists and editors have over time developed a better understanding of the features in news headlines and tweet texts that are especially likely to catch the eye of audiences.

Such posting of news headlines and links to the full articles on the core news site is designed in the first place to drive traffic to the institutional Website, and has been broadly successful. In this context, *Twitter* essentially represents a latter-day equivalent of the site’s own RSS feed, which serves to disseminate an up-to-date list of headlines to newsreader apps and similar software (and the automated institutional accounts that post new headlines to *Twitter* and *Facebook* are indeed very likely to draw on such RSS feeds as input). By contrast, even in light of the obvious utility of *Twitter* and other platforms for covering fast-moving breaking news events, news outlets and journalists have traditionally been a great deal more reluctant to use social media to post news updates before the full articles have been made available on their Websites—that is, to post breaking news and similar scoops directly to social media as news items in their own right. For instance, Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck’s informants stated bluntly that “sharing a scoop with your followers is ‘not done’” (2014: 729), as it may alert competing journalists and

news outlets to a breaking story and enable them to capture the audience's attention by publishing a full news article more quickly than the original source of the scoop. However, journalists' views on this matter are divided; one of Schultz and Sheffer's interviewees stated instead that tweets about scoops enable a "branding of the breaking news as ours. It's the first stamp we can put on it" (2010: 235).

Such diverging views also point to significant differences in opinion about the extent to which the institutional and individual accounts of journalists at competing news outlets should be acknowledged. The initial response to this question mirrors the patterns observed in the early development of news outlets' Web presences: these usually eschewed acknowledging the existence of their competitors by strictly avoiding any links that connected with resources outside their own sites; such policies of self-isolation from the wider Web have been softened only much more recently, and mainly on the sites of public service and non-profit media organisations that are less immediately exposed to commercial competition. In social media, too, the accounts of news outlets and journalists at first largely engaged only within their own institutional stable: journalists' accounts shared and retweeted their institutional account's posts, as well as those of their in-house colleagues, but engaged only much more rarely with the accounts of their competitors.

Curating Content

However, a contrary dynamic has now also emerged amongst the accounts operated by individual journalists. Here, collegial solidarity across institutional boundaries has led to a growing willingness to acknowledge the good work of others independent of the news outlets they work for. Such solidarity is especially pronounced in the context of complex and acute events where the full picture of current developments emerges only in aggregate, from a broader range of the social media updates and news articles posted by various individual journalists. These acknowledgements of other journalists are expressed especially through shares and retweets of their posts, as well as by follow-up comments and public discussion on social media; such engagement with peers also provides journalists with an opportunity to bring their own relevant articles to the attention both of their peers and of their shared imagined audience, perhaps in hope of also receiving a reciprocal retweet for their own content.

Notably, part of the shared audience especially of elite journalists engaging with each other in this form are also other journalists working for more

generic, secondary outfits, both online and offline: for them, the social media discussions and retweeting activities amongst leading journalists that are publicly observable on *Twitter* become input into their own news coverage. Revers reports that one of his interviewees, for instance, “told me his boss ‘loves it when the *New York Times* breaks a big story at three in the afternoon because it gives us time to pick it up, match it and write it in the [newspaper]” (2014: 816). This provides an illustration of how, through their presence on social media, “prestigious news organizations and journalists influence the news judgment of other news organizations and journalists” (Russell *et al.* 2015: 928).

Further, journalists’ accounts (and more rarely, those of their news organisations) may also share links to other sources that are relevant to current news stories and topics. On the one hand, this may be seen as less controversial than linking to or on-sharing the content posted by their journalistic competitors, and is therefore perhaps somewhat more likely to occur; on the other, however, journalists may also be concerned about being seen to endorse particular political, civic, or commercial entities by linking directly to their content. Overall, nonetheless, the perspectives emerging from recent studies show a growing willingness to engage in such linking, in the belief that it presents the journalist in a more favourable light and as taking a genuine interest in their subject matter:

there aren’t rules against it, ... so why not let people know what else is going on in the world? It’s not a bad thing or something that hurts me as a reporter. If anything, it lets my readers know that I actually care enough to put good news ahead of my own ego. (Anonymous informant qtd. in Molyneux and Holton 2015: 234)

Ultimately, such broader sharing activities—whether they specifically acknowledge the content posted by journalistic competitors or highlight more general material available from a wider range of sources—position the journalist as a content curator, mainstreaming and normalising the approach taken by NPR’s Andy Carvin in his curation of Arab Spring updates as a part of everyday professional practice. This therefore represents the professional equivalent of the demotic adoption of newssharing as a habitual, everyday practice that we have examined in the previous chapter, and offers an opportunity for journalists to retain their position as influential opinion leaders even in an environment where the majority of social media users are now engaging in such newssharing. Acting as social news curators, journalists thus perform “a new service for users ... helping followers know what content elsewhere on

the web might interest them” (Pew Research Center 2011: 9). However, for journalists such newssharing should remain balanced with original activity: “it seems that audiences prefer journalists to ‘churnalists’ of external links and expect original content from the correspondents they follow on Twitter” (Cozma and Chen 2013: 43).

In this context, Newman highlights the example of Neal Mann, “a freelance desk editor and field producer, mainly with Sky News” in the U.K. (Newman 2011: 42): by building a strong social media network of journalists and other news actors as quality sources and curating the content originating from these sources into his own social media feed,

he has also become a ‘broadcasting channel’ in his own right—breaking news, retweeting (passing on) new information, and adding context to important stories through links or by highlighting an authentic voice. All of this has enhanced his reputation to the extent that he has over 15,000 followers, many of them other journalists who rely on him to feed their own intelligence streams. (Newman 2011: 43)

This demonstrates not only the growing importance of journalistic social news curation practices, but also the potential for such curation, in distinction from original reporting and other traditional journalistic practices, to emerge as a new journalistic role in its own right.

That potential is especially strong, unsurprisingly, in the context of acute events such as the 2011 U.K. riots (Nelson 2011). Here, building both on their own experiences and on the observation of colleagues’ activities over recent years, event livetweeting has gradually become more prevalent, and is spreading to events as diverse as “trials, government proceedings, school board meetings, crime, and other breaking news” (Artwick 2013: 223). Artwick describes this as a reporters bearing witness, and in many ways livetweeting can therefore be understood as a translation of the citizen eyewitnessing that was an early phenomenon on social media such as *Twitter* into more standard journalistic practice; she also points out that “while journalist-as-witness-bearer is not new, reporting live in a networked environment is still evolving. [Through this practice,] reporters facilitated discourse and empowered the public to be part of the news process during this live coverage” (Artwick 2013: 223).

In such contexts, journalists use social media “as storytelling tools”, as the *Washington Post*’s digital editor for foreign affairs Swati G. Sharma has put it (qtd. in Lichterman 2015: n.p.). *Twitter*’s brief and quasi-stenographic message format may be especially well suited to such rapid live updates (Newman *et al.* 2012: 14), but news outlets are now also experimenting with other plat-

forms from *Instagram* through *Periscope* to *Snapchat* (Lichterman 2015: n.p.). Such instant live reporting via social media may then subsequently also be converted into more conventional story formats, and/or collated as a message archive including the tweets from one or multiple journalists by using social media archiving and curation tools such as the aptly-named *Storify*. This also requires news organisations to conceive of a number of distinct audiences that are platform- and context-specific, and to tailor their journalistic output to these audiences' diverging needs: for instance, the live following for the journalist-as-witness-bearer on *Twitter*; the community of commentators on a journalist's blog or a news organisation's *Facebook* page; or the more or less regular visitors to the news organisation's core Website. Today, therefore, "journalists don't work with the operative fiction of 'a single audience', but increasingly acknowledge that they serve 'multiple audiences' ... via different channels—not only in the sense of an academic modulation, but in a practical sense during their daily work routines" (Loosen and Schmidt 2016: 10). In Chapter 7, we will explore the liveblog as one new format that attempts to cater to one of these audiences by combining the practices of conventional news reporting with the new possibilities of social media.

Personal Branding

As journalists adjust to the demands of their social media audiences, the development of a consistent and reliable pattern of activity also appears crucial: as Cozma and Chen put it, "a more involved presence on Twitter—that is, tweeting more or for a longer time, even if not on breaking news—resulted in significant oomph in correspondents' popularity" (2013: 43). Especially in the context of an uncertain and stressed industry environment which is likely to see increasing competition for a declining number of journalistic jobs, the development of a widely recognised personal brand can significantly enhance the journalist's career prospects. One of Molyneux and Holton's informants describes the increased use of social media in such personal branding as a form of "self-preservation":

you used to try to figure out what your publisher wanted and tried to hit a home run there. Now you know you might lose your job tomorrow or you see a hundred other reporters just like you covering the same things. You go into survival mode, which for me means becoming a walking, talking, texting, tweeting, whatever billboard for myself. (2015: 233)

To strategically use social media to develop and display a personal brand is therefore also an “entrepreneurial” strategy (Molyneux and Holton 2015: 238), designed to make the journalist more indispensable to their present outlet or more valuable to a new employer in case their present position is terminated. “Journalists can build economic capital to position themselves in the marketplace by creating a community of followers. Doing so may allow them to more easily gain a pay increase or find a new job if necessary” (Hanusch and Bruns 2017: 29).

This approach may be especially important for those journalists working in areas that are particularly directly threatened by current industry developments, therefore; this includes journalists working for print outlets, for instance. In broadcast news, personal branding has already been a prominent aspect of journalistic work for several decades—not least because audiovisual media inherently privilege a more personal connection between on-air journalists and presenters and their audiences, compared to the relative impersonality of print. For print journalists, then, social media provides an opportunity to catch up with these developments and achieve similar levels of immediacy; this may enable them to boost their social capital both within their own profession and beyond it (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013: 372).

One important element of personal branding is also the development of a unique journalistic voice that offers an interpretation of current events which is distinct from that of other reporters. Again, especially in broadcast news media the tendency towards such a personalisation of news reporting almost certainly precedes the rise of social media as news platforms; the emergence of journalists and other commentators as news pundits can be traced back at least to the arrival of cable news channels and their need to fill airtime with comparatively cheap programming. But social media, too, enable journalists to develop a distinct analytical perspective—and to do so (and to do so in a way that is attractive to audiences) may well constitute a competitive advantage in a tight job market. “Social media allow everyone to show off their personalities and to publicly express opinions and engage in discussions on politicised matters”, and Rogstad therefore notes that “as political news journalists engage in social media practices, one might ask if all political news journalists will finally end up as self-promoting political pundits” (2014: 688).

Journalists’ willingness to use social media to engage in such commentary differs widely, however (and such differences may in turn be related to demographic and contextual factors such as the age and seniority of the journalist; their social media literacy; employers’ and colleagues’ attitudes; perceived job

security; and prevailing attitudes amongst local and national communities of news workers). While Brems *et al.* note that Dutch and Flemish journalists “on social media ... are willing to voice their opinion, which used to be reserved for the opinion sections in newspapers and magazines” (2016: 10), therefore, Rogstad’s study of Norwegian journalists “finds ... a sharp divide between the way[s] political reporters and political commentators use social media. Very few reporters are comfortable sharing political opinions ..., indicating that traditional journalistic norms still stand in political news journalism” (2014: 688). Opinions amongst German journalists are similarly split (Neuberger *et al.* 2010: 50).

At the same time, some journalists are also developing approaches to using social media that enable them to move between more professional and factual and more personal and opinionated personas in their posting activities. This is done in the first place by clearly demarcating their social media profiles as operated in a personal capacity rather than on behalf of their employers (through common disclaimers such as “views are my own” or “retweets ≠ endorsements”); a more subtle and sophisticated approach draws on the specific affordances of the social media platforms themselves, such as the use of ironic or snarky hashtags:

the pound [or hash] sign served as syntactic separator to insert commentary. After the pound sign, reporters expressed what they really thought while preserving professional distance before it. As a form of speech enabling transparency, hashtag commentary was a subtle representation of professional boundary porosity. (Revers 2014: 821)

Many such uses remain exploratory, however, and also rely on users, fellow journalists, and other news actors having the necessary social media literacies to read such subtle indicators of a transition between professional and personal perspectives. In the absence of such literacies, there is a substantial risk of misunderstandings that could severely affect journalists’ professional standing: sources may become more reluctant to speak to a journalist if they feel, based on the journalist’s personal comments made via social media, that they may not be fairly represented in the resulting news story.

Personal branding is not necessarily always simply a conscious choice made for utilitarian reasons, however: the tendency to express a mixture of professional and personal attributes through social media appears also simply to be inherently built into the architecture of leading platforms. “This use of Twitter ... is ... likely an outgrowth of one of the medium’s characteristics. That is, journalists promote themselves because they now have a direct

connection to an audience to whom they may promote themselves” (Molyneux 2015: 931). In this sense, again, we might point to clear similarities with broadcast media: here, too, the regular and persistent presence of news anchors and leading journalists on screen has almost inevitably led to the elevation of these journalists to a status as news celebrities. In a social media context, although the global nature of these networks means that there is considerably greater competition for audience attention between individual journalists, the leading journalistic accounts emerging from the multitude are similarly able to command a substantial personal following, and will have significant influence on the news encountered by their followers.

In part, then, such personal branding also extends beyond purely news-related aspects; journalists successful at building personal brands on social media often incorporate some of their extracurricular, private activities into the development of their online personas (Brems *et al.* 2016: 11). This is almost unavoidable: “for journalists on Twitter, it is obviously hard to keep the personal out of the professional and vice versa” (Hedman 2016: 10). Displaying a more rounded personal identity that includes professional as well as non-professional aspects contributes to the development of “an emotional connection with consumers” (Molyneux and Holton 2015: 227), which may in turn make the news content shared by professional journalists in social media environments more persuasive for their followers: such journalists are no longer simply followed as professional entities, but take on a role as surrogate friends. This enables them (and the news organisations from whom they work) to benefit from the fact that information received via (electronic) word of mouth is generally regarded by social network contacts as more trustworthy than content from institutional channels (Hedman 2016: 10).

Connecting with Sources

In addition to such uses of social media for outbound activities, including the promotion of news content and personal branding, many journalists have also been shown to utilise social media for sourcing input into their news stories. In the first place, this may include more or less open-ended research designed to identify new stories or surface new perspectives on existing stories; for instance, one of Parmelee’s respondents reported that “he will regularly ‘[trawl] through’ tweets he sees from ‘officials, spokespeople, policy wonks’ and others because sometimes such tweets will ‘spark within me an idea that I might want to present’” (2014: 442–43). Such research may observe general activities in a

journalist's broader network of followed accounts or check on trending topics and hashtags to examine whether they are driven by emerging events and issues; it may also focus more immediately on a set of known sources and actors to track their activities and identify any newsworthy events that they may be engaged in (Neuberger *et al.* 2014: 4). The establishment of such practices as part of journalists' routine activities shows that "social media platforms such as Twitter have become part of the journalists' 'technological infrastructure'", as Paulussen and Harder argue (2014: 544).

Additionally, journalists—especially once they have established a well-known personal brand in a specific news beat or on particular topics—may also find that sources are proactively contacting them through social media, and that this can provide the initial impetus for new news stories. This is true especially for journalists who use their accounts to share at least some information on their current research activities: as one of Schultz and Sheffer's informants reports, "I have been surprised how sources have sought me out on Twitter. They'd seen I was working on a story [on Twitter] and contacted me to contribute info. It's happened multiple times" (2010: 235). For sources, especially when they are seeking to highlight controversial issues, to approach a journalist in this way may also appear to be a lower-risk strategy than calling the journalist or meeting them in person: if they were concerned about their personal privacy and safety, they could easily set up a new and anonymous *Twitter* account, for instance, which would be relatively untraceable if used carefully.

Except in such 'cold call' (or rather, 'cold tweet') situations, however, the translation of journalistic sourcing practices to social media environments may not necessarily contribute to an increase in the diversity of sources utilised in news reporting; for the most part, journalists may continue to monitor, in the first place, the same news actors they had engaged with previously (Paulussen and Harder 2014: 544). At the same time, the wider and at least peripheral or ambient awareness of general social media activities that their presence on a social media platform like *Twitter* affords them does seem likely to affect their perspectives. Broersma and Graham suggest that

this broadens the entrance to the news and makes news coverage more diverse. Alternative sources ranging from activists to professionals and the popular voice are close at hand on Twitter. Our results show that almost a quarter of all tweets [cited by journalists] contain vox populi (ranking third after celebrities and athletes) or people involved. (2013: 461)

It is possible, however, that in developing their own close networks of regular interactants on social media journalists are simply replacing one elite network of colleagues and sources with another in-group of privileged social media contacts.

The statements made by sources in the course of their own social media activities are now also often incorporated—verbatim or in paraphrase—into journalistic coverage. *Twitter* and other platforms have become a source of vox-pop statements (Hermida 2013: 302) that is even more easily accessible for journalists than the proverbial man or woman on the street; however, like such earlier forms of vox-pops, the tweets that are plucked from social media feeds and presented as popular opinion are just as likely to be random and non-representative (Phillips 2015: 78). Although certainly widespread as an easy source of content, journalists themselves are therefore sceptical about this use of tweets as vox-pops (Gulyas 2013: 281). As a practice designed to represent impressions of current social media debates to non-users, they also appear to be increasingly irrelevant, given the substantial popular take-up of social media platforms: “traditionally, we have relied on reporters (and their editors) to collate vox pops Now, through *Twitter*, the reaction from locals is there for all to read” on the platform itself already (Nelson 2011: n.p.).

Social media play a more important role as a new means of receiving direct statements from specific sources, therefore—or, as Broersma and Graham put it in an echo of Rosen’s earlier phrase, from the “persons formerly known as sources”, even “without getting in touch with them directly” (2012: 407). This is attractive to journalists as it can speed up the sourcing process considerably: for instance, journalists “do not have to approach usually quite busy politicians, but can simply flavour their stories from behind the desk with some juicy quotes” (Broersma and Graham 2012: 408). Although the categories of sources cited in news stories may not change significantly as a result of such social media sourcing practices, then, the range of specific sources may well be affected by them: rather than relying on a set of politicians, experts, and other news actors who are reliably accessible for telephone or face-to-face interviews, journalists might now cast their nets more widely and source statements from a broader group of national and international actors with established social media presences. News actors themselves may also deliberately exploit such sourcing practices by circulating quotable statements in response to current events through their social media accounts—and Parmelee reports that such “tweets from political bloggers, think tanks, and interest groups

tended to rank higher with most [journalists] than tweets from candidates or elected officials” (2014: 441). Paulussen and Harder conclude from this that

even though social media do not seem to diminish the power of elite sources, Twitter has the capacity to increase the diversity of voices in the news by including both unknown and well-known sources that are not available—or at least not easily accessible—other than on social media. (2014: 549)

However, journalists’ increased use of statements sourced directly from the social media feeds of major news actors also provides an opportunity for the actors operating such feeds to evade further direct questioning. Rather than expose themselves and their views to critical interrogation in interviews, such actors may direct journalists simply to their social media posts and other official statements;

Dutch right-wing politician Geert Wilders, for example, refuses to talk to (certain) journalists and answer questions. Reporters are thus dependent on his sayings in press releases and—increasingly—on Twitter without having the possibility to set the news agenda, ask questions, or go further into his statements. (Broersma and Graham 2012: 408)

Similar patterns could be observed in the media’s frequent citation of tweets by candidates Hillary Clinton and (especially) Donald Trump during the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign. Such actors thereby retain control over their public image, and avoid any risk of making unintendedly controversial or ill-considered statements in the spontaneous and fluid situation of an interview; conversely, they relegate journalists to a role of mere reporters of their prefabricated statements. In other words, “when reporters rely solely on social media”, the potential for “*negotiation-through-conversation* is bypassed” (Broersma and Graham 2013: 449).

It should also be noted in this context, however, that the wholesale use of politicians’ and other news actors’ ready-made social media statements in the course of news reporting does not *necessarily* mean that their preferred framing of specific issues and events is also adopted unquestioningly by journalists, any more than they do so when relying on press releases as input into their stories; journalists remain able to balance differing views and offer their own counterframes to the statements they cite. Indeed, such critical reporting of their social media statements may in turn draw a new social media response from these sources; in this sense, “it is also likely that journalists’ tweets affect [the] leaders’ agenda” (Parmelee 2014: 448). As journalists promote their

news stories through social media, it is therefore not uncommon now also to see responses from political and other leaders that engage with these stories and correct perceived misrepresentations; this, too, was obvious in Donald Trump's frequent late-night *Twitter* attacks on critical news outlets during (and after) the 2016 campaign.

In addition to such public interactions with sources, finally, there is also evidence that considerable communicative exchanges occur between journalists and their sources (as well as amongst journalists themselves) through non-public channels, such as *Twitter*'s and *Facebook*'s direct messaging functions. Such interactions are by definition invisible to the general public and unavailable for direct observation by researchers, but several interview-based studies have indicated their growing importance. Such direct messaging can be used to conduct brief interview-style exchanges, or to confirm and correct factual aspects of a story (Parmelee 2014: 444); they might also be used to push reporters adopt a particular news frame or point of view, however. One of Parmelee's informants, for instance, reported that Florida governor Rick "Scott's staff definitely uses *Twitter* to try to influence coverage by pushing back on stories or getting into actual arguments with reporters" (qtd. in Parmelee 2014: 442). Such more private and almost intimate engagement with sources may also affect the relationship between journalists and news actors, as it may feel to both parties to be similar to the direct messages exchanged with friends and loved ones and could therefore build a sense of greater personal connection; this could have both positive and negative implications, as it may heighten the willingness of sources to speak openly but also their sense of betrayal once such unguarded statements are incorporated into news stories (Reed 2013: 565). But it should also be noted that such close and friendly relations between reporters and some of their sources are as old as the profession itself—social media merely update the channels through which they are being conducted, and introduce new possibilities for doing so.

Monitoring Developments

Such sourcing practices show that "social media has become an integral part of the journalism workflow in newsrooms, and journalists are often looking to 'scoop' news from *Twitter*" (Heravi and Harrower 2016: 1196); this is also true on a broader scale, where—in addition to tracking the activities of *specific* known sources—journalists are more *generally* monitoring social media feeds (and especially *Twitter*) for new developments. This use of social media as a

news detection mechanism is especially valuable in the context of continuing reductions in the staff numbers across most professional newsrooms: the prevailing view is that social media make it easier to monitor a number of concurrent developments without needing to physically send journalists to observe the scene on the ground. This is particularly valuable in contexts where sending reporters to a location would be costly and potentially dangerous; Heinrich (2012) has therefore especially highlighted the role of social media in covering foreign affairs. In this context, social media feeds are complementing or even replacing conventional wire services, which served a similar function.

Even while journalists may still have been sceptical about *actively* engaging in social media by posting their own content, the journalistic adoption of social media for this *monitorial* purpose proceeded at pace during the 2009–2011 period, as *BBC News* editor Steve Hermann suggests—most likely again also because of the number of major events that proved the utility of such platforms in acute events during this timeframe:

a big difference now is that it is taken as read for anybody working in newsgathering that Twitter is a key source that you need to be across. So not everyone is tweeting but pretty much everyone is keeping track—that has changed in two years. (Hermann qtd. in Newman 2011: 14)

However, to keep track of social media activities for this purpose is not necessarily straightforward, given the considerable volume of new and potentially relevant updates being posted at any moment; there is therefore also a considerable need for further social media training and skills development:

traditionally the journalist has been the mechanism to filter, organise and interpret ... information and deliver the news in ready-made packages. Such a role was possible in an environment where access to the means of media production was limited. But the thousands of acts of journalism taking place on Twitter every day make it impossible for an individual journalist to identify the collective sum of knowledge contained in the micro-fragments, and bring meaning to the data. (Hermida 2010a: n.p.)

In addition to the training and evangelist work provided by the social media editors and similar newsroom staff whom we have already encountered, some journalists and editors have therefore also called for new technological solutions to the information overload they experience on social media (Hermida 2010b: 302); one of the *New York Times*' social media team members interviewed by Schifferes *et al.* is representative of many other news workers when they suggest that “there is a problem with scale ... We need algorithms to take more

onus off human beings, to pick and understand the best elements” (2014: 409). Journalists—as the professional group with the greatest expertise in assessing the newsworthiness of particular stories—will have to play a crucial role in the design of such systems, and engagement in such systems development may be an important “future direction for journalism” (Hermida 2010b: 304). However, it also seems clear that new technologies can only ever provide a partial solution to the complex question of what information is worth incorporating into news coverage—this assessment of news values must ultimately remain a matter for the personal judgment of professional journalists as well as of news audiences turned active gatewatchers and newssharers.

The still somewhat haphazard and serendipitous approach to monitoring news developments via social media that most journalists appear to employ may also explain their reluctance to fully rely on and acknowledge social media as news sources in their own right. Journalists interviewed by Bosch, for instance, “mentioned that they often encountered news stories on social media sites, particularly Facebook and Twitter, but that they would then seek verification from more traditional, official and mainstream sources” (Bosch 2014: 36); Wallsten observes similar patterns in his analysis of social media’s role in the news coverage of the 2012 U.S. presidential election (2015: 34). Social media should therefore be regarded as “agenda-building” rather than agenda-setting, as Bosch suggests; or, as one of her South African interviewees puts it, “if people are talking about it on Twitter it must be newsworthy” (qtd. in Bosch 2014: 36).

Here again, the range of accounts followed by the journalist is necessarily crucial, as it can influence to a very significant extent the variety of social media updates they encounter. At worst, journalists may simply choose to follow other journalists, creating a substantial potential for self-reinforcing groupthink that admits no new or diverging viewpoints (Lee *et al.* 2015: 849). Fully realised, this would come to threaten journalists’ ability to provide effective and multiperspectival news coverage; however, “the degree to which Twitter is facilitating an echo chamber effect among journalists is an area that needs further study” (Parmelee 2013: 293). Similarly, there is also a danger that journalists’ following choices might remain restricted to a narrow elite of major news actors; this would expose them to familiar accusations of being part of ‘the establishment’ and disconnected from ‘the people’, as they are now frequently made (sometimes with justification, sometimes more wilfully) by disenfranchised, dissident political groups in many countries.

Instead, it is therefore crucial for journalists to treat social media “as a dynamic ‘network of influencers’ around niches and real-time events” (Newman 2011: 14), and to employ deliberately promiscuous strategies for connecting with social media users well outside of their own immediate social and professional networks. This requires a broad repertoire of social media friends and followers (Schmidt 2014: n.p.); as Bradshaw points out emphatically to his professional peers,

you design your own filter bubble. And now a journalist’s beat is not just the physical paths that they tread but the **data trails that they leave behind** as they navigate social media and the web: following accounts, liking pages and friending individuals they may not even like or agree with. In fact, preferably exactly those types of people and groups. (2016: n.p.)

It is worth noting here that many journalists have themselves realised these issues (Parmelee 2013: 301), and that the danger of groupthink precedes journalists’ engagement with social media; the tendency for journalists and their regular sources to form elite cliques whose lived experiences are removed from those of ordinary citizens is perhaps as old as the profession of journalism itself. The question, then as now, is whether journalists choose to actively address this danger—whether they take up Bradshaw’s call to “design your way out of the filter bubble” (2016: n.p.)—or whether the allure of settling comfortably into a familiar social network proves too powerful to overcome. Encouragingly, some of the interviews conducted with journalists about their social media strategies in recent years, at least, point to a conscious decision to develop a balanced and diverse connection repertoire (e.g. Parmelee 2014: 443).

Engaging with Audiences

In addition to outbound information dissemination and inbound social media monitoring, a third major range of journalistic social media practices concerns the interactive engagement with audiences. Such engagement is likely to be especially fruitful, in fact, for journalists who have developed a reasonably diverse connection repertoire: a multifaceted and knowledgeable network of social media connections enables them to conduct meaningful discussions with this network about the news stories that they are currently developing. Overall, however, such a harnessing of social media users as interlocutors and collaborators appears at present to remain relatively underdeveloped; as Hermda reported in 2013,

conceiving of the social media platform as a networked space where news is filtered, discussed, contested and verified in the open in collaboration with the public appears to be inconceivable for the profession as a whole. Few journalists engage in exchanges seeking information on a regular and consistent basis. (2013: 304)

Contemporaneous and subsequent studies (Artwick 2013: 222; Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013: 376; Hedman 2016: 7) paint a similar picture: to date, it appears that journalists have largely failed to utilise their social media networks effectively as contributors to their news coverage.

Diverging from this overall pattern, Parmelee's informants (amongst U.S. journalists covering the 2012 presidential election) offer a more positive perspective, stating that "I sometimes use Twitter for crowdsourcing, which leads me to sources I otherwise wouldn't find" (Parmelee 2013: 299). We might speculate that the particularly stressful, high-intensity environment of the election campaign with its multitude of competing demands on the time of the individual journalist might contribute to this greater openness towards input from and engagement with social media audiences; in this context, journalists struggling to keep up with developments may welcome any support available, even when it comes from unconventional sources. Such crowd-sourced input, then, may point to new developments as well as previously overlooked details and perspectives; additionally, it may also be used to fact-check candidates' statements and other information (Parmelee 2014: 444). Social media user engagement with journalistic reporting here plays a similar role to that of news blogs and citizen journalism sites during the first wave of citizen media: these, too, fact-checked and corrected mainstream reporting and surfaced alternative analyses, leading Dan Gillmor to coin his famous statement "my readers know more than I do" (Gillmor 2003: vi). Today, the greater immediacy of social media would enable journalists to ask for such engagement at an earlier, pre-publication stage while they are still developing their stories; however, it still appears that few are prepared to realise such opportunities.

This reluctance to engage may finally be in decline, however. It is notable that several studies published in 2016 are pointing to a greater preparedness amongst journalists to engage more fully with their social media audiences. But such engagement remains unevenly distributed, and related to the organisational histories and attitudes:

some journalists, mainly at legacy media organisations, feel they should remain objective and detached on social media and thus not personally engage with readers and

sources. Others, especially at 'born digital' news outlets, feel they have to develop personal bonds on Twitter to engage readers in news production, but also to become a 'hub' in the network and thus attract news consumers to their work and platforms. (Broersma and Graham 2016: 96)

One driver of this gradual and belated opening up to audience engagement may also be the realisation that the development of a more attractive and interactive social media persona may well have substantial benefits for the journalist's personal standing. Such benefits are increasingly quantifiable, and journalists' and their news organisations' growing social media literacy means that these quantitative indicators are now no longer lost on them. Hedman notes the following important correlations: "the more active (as in the number of tweets sent) a journalist is and the more followers she has, the more interaction with other tweeters. However, it may very well be the other way around: the more interactive a journalist is, the more she tweets and the more followers she gets" (2016: 7). For journalists and their employers, to engage more proactively with social media users might therefore generate a distinct competitive advantage.

Such increased engagement, however, also introduces yet new demands on the journalist's already limited time and resources. Karin Ekman, head of social media activities for Swedish public service media's *SVT News*, describes *Twitter* and *Facebook* as "natural dialogue machines" (qtd. in Larsson and Christensen 2016: 11)—and the volume of such dialogue in response to news content and journalistic social media activities may well be overwhelming, both for individual journalists and for entire newsrooms. The problem here is one which emerges from the fundamental conceptualisation of the news as it is prevalent in the industry: conventionally, journalists and news organisations have treated news as a product—once their stories were published, journalists were free to move on to the next reporting task, without a need to monitor the (usually comparatively invisible) audience engagement with their recent output. Today, by contrast, news has been transformed from product to process, and audience responses via on-site commentary functions and social media platforms are voluminous and highly visible; it therefore becomes necessary for journalists both to continue to engage in the discussion and dialogue around their published stories *and* to research and develop their next articles. These dual and competing demands on their time are proving difficult to manage.

Where audience feedback is (or is perceived to be) largely critical, further complications arise. For instance, Lee *et al.* report from Korea that, rightly or wrongly,

politically conservative journalists perceive themselves as being in the minority on Twitter, whereas liberal journalists are more likely to perceive themselves as being in the majority; as a result, liberal journalists, as compared with conservative journalists, are more likely to use Twitter to talk about public affairs issues and interact with the public. (2015: 859)

This divergent behaviour amongst different groups of journalists can be explained as a “spiral of silence” effect (Noelle-Neumann 1974), in which actors perceiving themselves to hold minority views that are likely to attract substantial majority criticism are increasingly reluctant to state their views publicly, thereby further entrenching their positions as minority views and making fellow dissidents even more reluctant to speak up.

Fully realised, such spiral of silence effects may reduce the level of conflict and disagreement expressed in social media, but also undermine the role of these spaces as enabling genuine public discussion about the events of the day; the concern here would be that what one of Brems *et al.*'s informers calls “the twitterati” represent no more than an echo chamber of like-minded societal elites (2016: 9). Journalists might also choose to connect and engage only with those who share their own worldviews, thereby once again designing their own filter bubbles in spite of Bradshaw's warnings. However, as we will explore in greater detail in Chapter 8, to date there is very little evidence for the existence of consistent political or other biases across whole social media spaces; indeed, a considerable volume of criticism from social media sceptics in the media has also focussed on the highly argumentative and disagreeable nature of political debate in social media. Overall, mainstream journalists on social media should therefore be just as likely to encounter support for their interpretations and analyses of news developments as they are to receive criticism; their own networking choices may well affect how much of this is immediately visible in their day-to-day social media activities, however.

Social Media and Journalistic Disclosure Transparency

Even though such attitudes now finally appear to soften, journalists may well remain reluctant to engage directly with their social media audiences during all stages of the news reporting process because it also inherently serves to introduce greater transparency into the news process. In this context, Karlsson notes that “losing power as gatekeeper might not be the most threatening

aspect” for journalists and news organisations operating in contemporary on-line environments; rather, “as backstage performances become visible it will be difficult for the authority in question to uphold and maintain an image of perfection” (Karlsson 2011: 281), and this could be perceived as an even more detrimental development. This draws on Goffman’s distinction between private, ‘backstage’ and public, ‘frontstage’ behaviours (1959): traditionally, most of the journalistic production process has remained backstage, with only the final products of that process being promoted to the front of the stage in the form of finished news reports, but the shift from news-as-product to news-as-process (in the context of the digitisation of news production and engagement activities) means that much more of the news process now takes place frontstage.

This transformation leads to an increase especially in what Hedman describes as “disclosure transparency”, revealing “the process of making and the rationale behind the news” (2016: 2), and such increased transparency has beneficial as well as problematic implications for journalists working in this new environment. On the one hand, increased disclosure transparency enables ordinary social media users to engage more efficiently with journalists in the process of covering the news: greater disclosure about current news reporting activities provides a better opportunity for new sources to come forward and contribute relevant information, as well as for journalists to involve their audiences in crowdsourcing and fact-checking efforts. On the other, the increased transparency also provides a new opportunity for journalism critics to observe and dissect the framing and interpretive choices made by journalists; while this may be beneficial in principle, it is evident from the persistent efforts by dedicated activist groups to discredit mainstream reporting on issues such as climate change or social injustice that such added insight into journalistic choices can also be used to develop elaborate and (for some) persuasive conspiracy theories.

Overall, however, in spite of such potential for abuse the greater disclosure transparency associated with the digital transformation of journalistic practice should be welcomed; at any rate, the tendency towards such transparency appears at present to be irreversible. Social media play a crucial role here: *Twitter*, as what we have called a first draft of the present (Bruns and Weller 2016), is already a space where a substantial volume of original statements from journalistic sources circulates openly, and to interested observers the public availability of such source information necessarily makes it possible to track which of these statements are eventually incorporated into journal-

istic reporting, and with what framing. Indeed, arguably much of the social media criticism of mainstream reporting that arises on social media platforms emerges when the framing and interpretation of such public source material by journalists diverges markedly from the news frames and interpretations developed in collective social news curation processes.

Journalists themselves remain divided about the extent to which they are willing to actively encourage such disclosure transparency through their own social media activities. For some, this transparency is becoming an important part of their online presence; for instance, they “believe in the value of instant sharing of verbatim statements, documents, updates on political processes, etc.” Importantly, such “instant sharing fosters a processual rather than definitive conception of news” (Revers 2014: 815). Others, by contrast, regard such dissemination of unprocessed source content as diminishing the profession; in line with Karlsson’s warning above, they believe that it undermines the authority of journalism as a distinct practice. One of Revers’s informants, for instance, dismisses such instant sharing of source materials as “a stenographer style of reporting” and suggests that “this has been a disservice. I think it’s not good for the profession” (Revers 2014: 817). Similar, in keeping with the concerns about the use of social media statements by interested political actors as a means of shielding themselves from probing journalistic questions, which we have already encountered, such critics believe that this more processual approach to journalistic reporting “helped political actors more than the public” (Revers 2014: 817).

A balanced perspective that recognises the arguments of both sides may be appropriate here. Not all audiences will always want to work through the full collection of source materials, circulating freely through social media, for themselves; for them, the consolidated reports and analyses provided by mainstream journalists will continue to be valuable, and a processual blow-by-blow style of reporting may exceed the amount of attention they are willing to devote to a particular story or issue. Some news followers, however, will at times want to see the news process revealed with full transparency in order to get to the very bottom of a particular issue or topic; for them, the original content circulated by news sources, and shared on and curated by journalists and other social media users, is going to be of significant value. Ordinary news users are likely to move back and forth between these positions over time, based on personal circumstances, levels of interest in a topic, and other factors; during an acute event of direct personal significance they may pay attention to the raw source information appearing in their social media feeds, for instance, while in their day-to-

day social media practice they may be more likely to rely on the serendipitous discovery of more fully formed news reports being shared by their networks.

But in addition to the materials from which news reports are constituted, another important element of the disclosure transparency encouraged by the growing use of social media for journalistic purposes is also the increase in public “job talking” amongst journalists (Lasorsa *et al.* 2012: 26–27). Social media are used by journalists not least to connect with their peers, and—much as in other professions—the development of such professional networks on social media platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* has enabled a certain amount of in-group discussion and gossip about all aspects of the job experience. Such discussions have no doubt taken place, backstage, within the profession for as long as it has been a profession; however, carried out in the public fora of social media platforms they have now moved to the frontstage and have become observable by a considerably greater audience of non-journalists, as one of Parmelee’s informants points out: “Twitter has taken the conversations political reporters would have at the press table—‘That is BS’, ‘He sounds flat today’, etc.—and pushed them into the public” (2013: 301).

This less guarded, more public discussion of the journalistic process amongst journalists has become increasingly common; as Russell *et al.* note in passing in their analysis of tweets by U.S. journalists, for instance, “some of the tweets examined in this study read more like a conversation among journalists than reporting to audiences” (2015: 938). The very visibility of such interactions amongst journalists adds further to concerns about the extent to which journalists—especially where they cover the same news beats—act as a unified in-group that is no longer sufficiently diverse in its views and approaches. Parmelee’s informant, for example, worries that “it has even more reinforced the groupthink and echo chamber that is Washington political coverage. Reading your fellow reporters’ tweets about the same speech or news event is going to make you more likely to agree and slant your coverage in the same direction” (2013: 301). Observations that “journalists were more likely to interact through retweets and @mentions with other journalists than with public officials or other citizens” (Russell *et al.* 2015: 925) further add to this perception of an impenetrable journalistic clique.

Whether such tendencies towards groupthink have been caused by journalists’ increasing mutual observability towards each other, or whether they existed previously and have merely been translated to social media environments, is hardly relevant in this context; the de-diversifying effects of such groupthink on the journalistic coverage of major events are likely to be the

same in either case. However, the very publicness of such in-group interactions on the frontstage of social media platforms—compared to their backstage existence before the widespread adoption of social media as a space for engagement between journalists—also raises the hope that such groupthink, where it exists, may be moderated in response to critical feedback from ordinary users (or that such users may provide alternative news frames and interpretations in their own right).

It is plainly evident that journalists on social media are frequently targeted by user feedback, both positive and negative; as one aspect of disclosure transparency, many journalists now regularly re-share such feedback with their own followers: research has observed that “journalists frequently retweeted hate mail they received on Twitter and also retweeted praise and other ‘love letters’ sent by their followers” (Molyneux 2015: 930). As Molyneux further notes, “this is a new kind of transparency that is not presentable in a string of news reports the journalist files. This type of job talk breaks down the fourth wall between the media and the audience” (2015: 931). The effects of the feedback received by a journalist, and of their public sharing of such feedback with their followers (including with other journalists), are difficult to assess, of course, and will vary from individual to individual. However, on balance the move of all of these forms of journalistic ‘job talk’ to the social media frontstage ultimately seems set to make the presence of groupthink amongst a closed group of journalists alone rather less than more likely; conversely, if groupthink does persist it now appears more likely to exist amongst the larger network encompassing journalists themselves and their close social media networks.

This perspective is supported by the statements of Parmelee’s informants: as one put it, “I always tweet with the full knowledge that my boss and my most antagonistic readers follow me, so that makes me hold back a few knee-jerk thoughts and keep it professional” (qtd. in Parmelee 2013: 302), while another said that

the public nature of Twitter, where everyone can see who is following who[m], encourages her to find diverse sources so her readers don’t suspect bias. “I sometimes think they’re going to think I’m too conservative or too liberal based on who I’m following, so I really do make a conscious effort to get a lot of Democrats, Republicans, and all sorts of groups.” (Parmelee 2014: 443)

Such self-assessments by journalists demonstrate their awareness of the potential for audience members to use social media as tools of surveillance, observing their reporting activities and editorial choices. The greater transparency

that such tools provide clearly impacts on journalistic activities; in this, they constitute a new step in a long tradition that reaches back at least as far as the introduction of the article by-line as a means for identifying the journalist responsible for a particular news report (Revers 2014: 808).

Clearly, many ordinary social media users with an interest in following the news are just as aware of the opportunities for observing and unpacking the inner workings of the journalistic process that are now increasingly on display on the frontstage (cf. Popplewell 2016 for a concrete example); as a result, Posetti suggests, social media have “broken through barriers that have historically isolated political journalists from media consumers” (Posetti 2010: n.p.), and may enable more participatory democratic engagement. Whether such loftier, societal goals are going to be realised remains to be seen; however, in relation to the journalistic profession itself Revers is certainly justified in noting “that Twitter serves as a venue for meta commentary about what constitutes good journalism (generally, on Twitter, and the relationship between both)”, and that this “bears deliberative potential for journalists themselves” (Revers 2014: 823).

Finally, then, this substantial increase in transparency about the journalistic process, which is associated clearly with the growing adoption of social media as part of the journalist’s toolkit, also raises considerable questions for the self-understanding of journalists themselves. Disclosure transparency may apply in the first place to the journalistic process as such, but because of the strongly personalised nature of social media engagement it also translates to a substantial increase in transparency about the actions of the individual journalist, who is placed in this context under even greater public scrutiny. As Hedman asks, therefore, “does *journalism* now include not only the content but also the journalist herself? ... Is this an inevitable consequence of the growing hybrid logic of adaptability and openness ... ? ... These are crucial questions for future journalism” (2016: 11), at both practical and theoretical levels. Their answers, we might add, may also have considerable implications for the kinds of people recruited into the journalistic profession in future. If—much as is now the case in politics—to become a journalist will mean intense and sustained personal scrutiny and critique by one’s social media audiences, who will still want to be a journalist?

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