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HYBRID NEWS COVERAGE

Liveblogs

Over the past two chapters we have explored a range of individual and institutional responses to the disruptions and challenges arising from a media ecology in which social media have become increasingly important both as news media in their own right, and as a tertiary mediaspace in which the representatives of mainstream and alternative news media mingle and interact alongside ordinary users. The adaptations to professional journalistic practices with which news workers have experimented in response to these challenges often still remain *ad hoc* and incomplete—but, as Hermida *et al.* point out, they indicate "the innovative forms of production that emerge in the initial stages of new communication technologies" (2014: 495). In this chapter, we focus on one by now particularly well-established new news format, which combines both conventional news logic and social media logic in an especially effective fashion: the liveblog. Liveblogs can be seen as implementing features of standard social media platforms within the organisational paradigms of conventional news sites. They take advantage of the fact that "social media enhance the opportunities to publish evolving news on a rolling basis instead of presenting complete stories" (Broersma and Graham 2016: 98), yet do so outside of the tertiary spaces provided by leading social media platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*.

Thurman and Walters define a liveblog as "a single blog post on a specific topic to which time-stamped content is progressively added for a finite period—anywhere between half an hour and 24 hours" (2013: 83). Such liveblogs are hosted on the sites of major news organisations, and have become standard tools especially in the coverage of fast-moving, unfolding news stories. Importantly, they embrace a number of features that first emerged within the realm of citizen journalism:

> live blogs make generous use of links; they mix facts with interpretation; and they are often informal in tone, involving conversations between reporters and between reporters and their readers. The format is a crucible for many of the contemporary developments in digital journalism practice. (Thurman and Schapals 2016: 283)

Liveblogs could therefore be seen as a further step in the normalisation of citizen journalism models into mainstream journalistic practice—and from one perspective, such a normalisation comes at a cost: "since the high speed of online news exposes previously hidden journalistic processes, it also produces a loss of control over storytelling" (Karlsson 2011: 291). But while this may have been true during the first wave of citizen media, at a time when the maintenance of clear boundaries between conventional and citizen journalism still seemed a possibility, in a contemporary context the introduction of liveblogging can actually be understood as an attempt to wrest back some control over storytelling processes from the even more fast-placed, even less controllable spaces of social media. From this perspective, liveblogging seeks to address the emerging needs in news reporting, resulting from the unruliness of social media, that Hermida first outlined in 2010:

> Twitter is, due to the speed and volume of tweets, a "noisy" environment, where messages arrive in the order received by the system. A future direction for journalism may be to develop approaches and systems that help the public negotiate and regulate the flow of awareness information, providing tools that take account of this new mode for the circulation of news. Journalists would be seen as sense-makers, rather than just reporting the news. (2010: 305)

Liveblogging does a great deal more than to normalise (and neutralise) the newly available formats and practices of news reporting and discussion that are popular with ordinary users, then. In 2005, Singer outlined how "journalists are rationalizing the blog form: as a high-tech outgrowth of an existing commentary format rather than as an opportunity to change the way news itself is 'made' by professional journalists" (2005: 193). Liveblogs, by contrast,

do introduce more profound change; they do represent a novel format that re-
quires different approaches to the news from both the journalists who produce
them and the users who follow them. They therefore also represent an exam-
ple of the beginning normalisation of journalism into social media and their
prevalent logics that we explored in the previous chapter—and as a result,
they have been met with mixed reactions from both constituencies.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, ordinary blogs had already been normalised
into journalism by the mid-2000s, often simply by rebadging existing opinion
columns as the columnists' 'blogs'. These have little to do with the liveblogs
we are discussing in this chapter, however. "Like a written-through article,
a conventional blog post is composed and published in its entirety after the
event, but, unlike a Live Blog, has no intrinsic mechanism for alerting the
reader to changes as the story develops" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 83).
Liveblogs, by contrast, make use of more recent Web publishing frameworks
that enable live on-page updates without requiring the user to regularly reload
the same page; the same publishing technologies are also used for the contin-
uous refreshing of the Web interfaces of *Twitter* or *Facebook*, or of social media
clients such as *Tweetdeck* or *Hootsuite*. Arguably, then, such liveblogs mimic
the appearance and user experience of mainstream social media platforms,
but do so on a per-story basis within the branded Web spaces of major news
organisations.

As Thurman and Schapals (2016: 284) report, the format emerged in a
rudimentary form in the mid-2000s, driven especially by a number of enter-
prising news outlets ranging from *The Guardian* to the *Huffington Post* (cf.
Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.). By now,

> on any given day, online news sites around the world are using live news pages or 'live
> blogs' to give their readers almost minute-by-minute updates on stories. The format
> is especially conspicuous during major breaking news events but is also used to cover
> sports matches, ongoing news topics, and scheduled news events such as elections or
> the Oscars. (Thurman and Schapals 2016: 283)

Indeed, much as we have observed it in the context of the adoption of social
media into professional journalistic processes, liveblogs, too, became more
prominent especially as a result of their role in breaking news events. For in-
stance, "the London bombings of 7 July 2005 was one of the first news stories
to be covered by Guardian.co.uk using the Live Blog format" (Thurman and
Walters 2013: 83–84), and many other such events have contributed to the
growing adoption of liveblogs as a common format on mainstream news sites.

For conventional news organisations that retain a strong print background (as well as for born-digital outlets that model themselves on their print counterparts), the liveblog has a similar appeal to the standard social media platforms: just as *Twitter* is attractive especially "for print reporters as it offers a way to compete online for audiences with the immediacy of live broadcast coverage" (Hermida 2012: 663), so do "live blogging and realtime curation allow newspapers via their websites and via mobile to compete against broadcasters in rolling news" (Charman-Anderson 2011: n.p.). But in doing so, they also import broadcast news logics into their approaches to news coverage, as Tereszkiewicz points out: "what defines live news broadcasts is not only simultaneity and co-presence of the reporter and the audience, but also the discourse itself, characterised by a loose frame and lack of fixed script" (2014: 301). This open, as yet indefinite structure is imported into (digital) print news formats by the adoption of liveblogging: "live blogs, analogously to live television news broadcasting, can be set up to run the news continuously until the event in question terminates or its newsworthiness decreases" (302).

Like live television—and arguably even more so—liveblogging thus increases the immediacy of news reporting. As Deuze has pointed out, "the digital media environment allows reporters to constantly edit and update their story packages, and even to include end-users in this process" (2005: 457), yet for a number of reasons such opportunities have rarely been realised in full. In part, the barriers to a greater level of immediacy have been technical—for broadcast formats, the core issue is getting reporters and equipment to the scene of the event as soon as possible—, but more fundamentally, the "underlying rules in online news production constrain the fulfillment of a high level of immediacy" (Lim 2012: 72). Lim therefore speaks of "the myth of the immediacy of online news" (72): in spite of the technical and operational affordances of the medium, it is still not being used to its full potential. This, of course, is also related to the constraints inherited from professional journalistic ideals: as Karlsson points out, if "established online news sites facilitate user participation and publish different and contradictory drafts they are, in fact, albeit perhaps unconsciously, abandoning vetting before dissemination and moving towards the bloggers' transparent method of creating truth" (2011: 292), and for many journalists and news organisations this remains a difficult step to take.

Liveblogs as a Hybrid Format

Liveblogs appear to have helped professional journalists overcome such anxieties to a greater extent than either the move towards opinion blogging during the first wave of citizen media, or the gradual adoption of generic social media tools in more recent times have been able to do. Crucial to this appears to be the fact that the liveblog format provides them with the experience of engaging in gatewatching and social news curation while still remaining firmly in control of their own content and interpretations.

In publishing a liveblog, "the journalist moves from a linear, one-off story to a stream of instant witnessing, often combined with background context and analysis as well as public interactivity through comments or email" (Beckett 2010: 3). The journalist will still continue to post their own news reports, if usually in the form of very brief snippets that resemble the first paragraphs of news stories written following the inverted pyramid format; however, these are also combined with a broad range of other original or found content. Such other content may be sourced from other journalists' news stories, wire services, live broadcasts, original sources, or social media streams; in essence, therefore, the journalist operating the liveblog is engaged in a continuous process of gatewatching and newssharing that tracks a number of available news sources and highlights from these what are believed to be especially relevant new items. Overall, then, "Live Blogging differs fundamentally in style and substance from conventional news articles on the Web. In Live Blogging, the emphasis is on the direct relaying of commentary and analysis as events are unfolding, rather than a written-through narrative constructed after the event" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 83).

This must necessarily affect audiences' perceptions of the news event. When covered by liveblogs, "news items are basically published before they have been completed" (Karlsson 2011: 286), and this means that they are subject to further development and revision over time. Similar to what we have already observed within social media spaces themselves, this serves to shift more of the journalistic process from backstage to frontstage, as much of the messy process of distilling the available facts, frames, and interpretations relating to an issue or event into a unified story now takes place in plain sight of the userbase, and indeed may never even result in a finished, complete piece. Rather, "readers following the event over the day will have seen drafts dismissed and the story changed, thus being exposed to the gathering and processing phases of journalism. … This is a shift in what is public and what

is hidden from the audience in, for instance, a newspaper environment versus a digital media environment" (Karlsson 2011: 289)—and while the inner workings of the news production process had already been exposed in this way within social media environments, as we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4, the liveblog format now facilitates a similar push towards greater transparency within the digital imprint of the news organisation itself.

Such perceptions are also heightened by the typical stylistic features of each update within the liveblog. Such updates are displayed in reverse chronological order, with timestamps and source information attached, much like tweets in a user's *Twitter* timeline or posts in the *Facebook* newsfeed. "The independent character of each update is additionally underlined by visual means and cues, such as framing devices used to separate the blocks in question" (Tereszkiewicz 2014: 302); subheadings chosen by the liveblogger may also be used to signal "new stages of the development of the event in question" (303). This serves to channel the incoming stream of updates into a rough order, and to impose a first tentative framing that represents the liveblogger's current reading of events. But much remains fluid and incomplete at this point; as Tereszkiewicz points out, this is even "highlighted by specific tense choices and a range of time adverbials. The blogs offer a 'live' view of the situation and events underway—bloggers report on the events at the scene [and] report on 'what they see and hear'" (2014: 310).

Consequently, "owing to a heavy reliance on external materials, live blogs offer a somewhat fragmented picture of events, composed of reports, comments and witnesses' accounts, with the reporter acting as a moderator and intermediary who brings different voices and accounts into a whole" (Tereszkiewicz 2014: 310). Contrary to conventional news coverage, however, where longer statements are usually turned into brief soundbites, paraphrased or summarised, liveblogs tend both to include longer snippets from original texts and to directly link to these original sources for more information. This fundamentally affects the stylistic features of liveblogs, as Tereszkiewicz points out:

> the abundance of quotes visibly contributes to an increase in the level of genre hybridisation within the reports. The quoted texts introduce to the reports such genres as an interview, debate, report, news story, a feature article, or a comment. Moreover, a high frequency of quotes of spoken messages and posts from online channels increases the level of stylistic heterogeneity, conversationalisation and informality. (2014: 310)

Importantly, the online format also allows for the embedding of longer audio-visual texts within the liveblog itself; this "merger of different codes within a single format adds to the heterogeneity and intersemioticity of the reports" (Tereszkiewicz 2014: 303). Such features are considerably more common in liveblogs than in more conventional news stories, as Thurman and Schapals point out: "live blogs … contain about 15 times more multimedia elements than print articles and nearly five and a half times more than traditional on-line articles" (2016: 286).

The commonality of such linking and embedding practices in liveblogs is especially remarkable given that news organisations have traditionally been notoriously "reluctant to link to other portals", as Heinrich has pointed out. "Because they are too afraid that they might lose their visitors, often the only links … circle within their own pages" (2012: 65). Such reluctance has all but disappeared in journalistic liveblogging. Journalists operating these live-blogs will still promote their news organisations' conventional coverage of the unfolding events (such as stand-alone articles and opinion pieces in more traditional formats), but they will also link to the material published by other, competing sources. This may indicate that in liveblogging, news curation is seen as a more important service to be provided to readers than mere news reporting: "though this approach stands against the natural and widespread competitiveness among news outlets, it may be interpreted positively as a strategy aiming at providing readers with as complete a picture of an event as possible, together with various interpretations" (Tereszkiewicz 2014: 308).

In part, however, such outbound linking could also be related to a per-ceived need to keep the liveblog moving, as Thurman and Schapals point out. They quote one of the livebloggers for *Telegraph.co.uk*, Laura Roberts, as saying that in one case "she was using 'Al Jazeera, Sky, and the BBC' as sources in order to be able to provide the live blog with what it needed as quickly as possible" (2016: 288). Indeed, their study found an average of 22 external links per liveblog, which "compares with an average of just 0.46 links we found in 'traditional' online articles covering the same story. And even when the difference in word length is factored in, live blogs still linked out four times more frequently than traditional online articles" (Thurman and Schapals 2016: 287).

Another significant break with conventional journalistic practice, driven perhaps at least in part by the same need to keep the liveblog ticking over with new content, is found in the substantial inclusion of opinion, commen-tary, and instant analysis, by the liveblogger, other journalists and experts, as

well as ordinary users. This further distinguishes the liveblog from the more conventional articles that the same news site may also be publishing about the event in question: the volume of opinion and commentary in liveblogs suggests "that it may not be the events that are of primary importance in live blogs, but it is reactions and interpretations of the news that are ascribed more value and meaningfulness" (Tereszkiewicz 2014: 310).

Most notable in this context is the presence of opinion statements both from the liveblogging journalists, and from ordinary users. Livebloggers generally appear to have been given greater licence than ordinary journalists to introduce their own views into the coverage of the topics and events addressed by the liveblog: they "do not refrain from expressing attitudinal stance [and] personal evaluations concerning news and events reported on", and Tereszkiewicz found such elements in four fifths of the liveblogs she examined (2014: 313). Once again this also appears to be motivated by the the perceived need to avoid the liveblog's equivalent of dead air:

> Laura Roberts agreed …, drawing a parallel with 24-hour rolling TV news. "If you've got airtime to fill … you end up … elaborating on things that you shouldn't really be elaborating on … the focus on speed versus accuracy within journalism is a huge challenge" she said. (Thurman and Schapals 2016: 288)

Reader comments—made on site or via social media—provide another ready source of commentary that may be used in such ways, and indeed, compared to their use in other forms of journalistic coverage, such comments are quoted or embedded in liveblogs with unusual regularity. For instance, "tweets are quoted to provide an immediate commentary to breaking news, an instantaneous interpretation of the events covered even before they terminate" (Tereszkiewicz 2014: 310), and liveblogs thereby inherit some of *Twitter*'s role as a first draft of the present (Bruns and Weller 2016). Many journalistic livebloggers now explicitly invite their readers to provide their views and feedback on the unfolding news story, while some of those journalists who are regularly in charge of liveblogging activities—for instance operating daily liveblogs to track sitting days in the national parliament or follow the weekend's sports—have also taken to cultivating a circle of regulars on whom they draw for added comments. As one of the journalists interviewed by Thurman and Schapals put it, "you can't fill this hole on [live] news pages just through official sources, just through the old media—you have to look at social media" (2016: 288). Thus, "Live Blogs offer a new context for participation" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 88) that is different both from the dysfunctional spac-

es of the conventional comment threads attached to online news articles and from the open discussion on social media platforms.

From Social News Curation to Curated Social Media Content

In essence, then, "the live-blogger becomes a facilitator rather than a simple gatekeeper to the news" (Beckett 2010: 4); in the terms we have used throughout this book, the liveblogger acts as a curator of users' comments, filtering for the most salient, insightful, or entertaining takes on current developments. Over time, there has been a marked shift in how such comments are received: when earlier, comments were usually explicitly invited (Costeloe in Stray 2010: n.p.), and provided via on-site feedback functionality, now such commenting has been further outsourced to social media platforms (much as we have observed this as a more general pattern in Chapter 6)—to a point where *The Guardian*'s liveblogger Matthew Weaver suggests that producing a liveblog without social media "wouldn't make any sense really" (qtd. in Thurman and Walters 2013: 94). As the BBC's Matthew Eltringham has similarly pointed out, today "social newsgathering encompasses not just trying to get our own audience to share their material with us, but searching social media and the rest of the web whenever a story breaks" (Eltringham 2010: n.p.); arguably this further demonstrates the fact that social media-based news engagement is now a habitual practice for a large component of the news audience, and that leading news organisations such as the BBC have started to adjust to this context by also habitually harvesting this content for use in liveblogs and other forms of rolling news coverage. As Costeloe describes it for the BBC UGC Hub, a key aspect of the team's activities is that "it interacts with communities around the Internet … where the social media communities already form, so obviously Twitter and Facebook" (Costeloe in Stray 2010: n.p.).

The work of the liveblogging journalist as a curator of material from social and other media mirrors that of social news curators like Andy Carvin, whose role we have already explored in the context of breaking news events in Chapter 3. It represents a move towards the idea of the journalist as a "guidedog" through the mass of newsworthy information that Bardoel and Deuze (2001) have formulated, and such "curation and curated social media content can be the means by which media outlets and journalists can establish a new important role in the future media ecosystem" (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 14).

But what livebloggers do is not exactly the same as social news curation, because their work takes place outside of the spaces of social media themselves; as a result, contrary to the professional journalists and ordinary users curating the news on *Twitter* or *Facebook* themselves, the liveblogging journalist still retains the greater power over content and framing of the story that journalists have traditionally enjoyed. Their work here, then, is not social news curation, but the curation of social media content for publication elsewhere.

The distinction between social news curation and curated social media content may be a subtle one, but it is nonetheless crucial. In each case, curation broadly "deals with large corpora of content from diverse sources and connotes the activities of identifying, selecting, verifying, organizing, describing, maintaining, and preserving existing artifacts as well as integrating them into a holistic resource" (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 3–4). However, social news curation as we have examined it in Chapters 3 and 4 takes place *in situ*, driven by social media users themselves; here, curation is largely a matter of selectively amplifying the visibility of selected content items by retweeting and otherwise re-sharing them, not least also within specific channels defined by hashtags and other available social media affordances, and of withholding such amplification from content that is deemed to be less shareworthy. As we have also seen, such curation emerges from the aggregate of many individual, habitual acts of newssharing that may be influenced, but are not inherently controlled by journalists and other leading participants.

By contrast, the curation of social media content "is a publishing model that choses the best content from bottom-up consumer media and provides it to top-down enterprise sites …. 'Curated Social Content' emphasizes the value of user-generated content from social media sites while also stressing the need to curate [it] in order to find the best and most relevant content" (Liu 2010: 20). Here, curation and republication is external to the social media channels from which the content is harvested, and it therefore remains possible for individual, professional curators to be fully in control of the selection process. In turn, the selections made do not directly affect, positively or negatively, the further circulation of the selected content (or of other, non-selected materials) within the social media environment itself; they do mean that non-selected content remains confined to the social media spaces themselves, however, and does not cross over into more mainstream media channels. Some indirect effects on social media circulation are also likely, as users of the curated social media content posted to the liveblog might click

through to the original sources and re-share these content items to their own social media networks.

Contrary to social news curation, where there is a shared and collective responsibility for the selection choices made by social media publics, the curated social media content model returns this responsibility squarely to the journalistic liveblogger, therefore, who acts as a quasi-gatekeeper at least for the circumscribed space of the liveblog itself (even if the same social media content, whether selected or rejected by the liveblogger, already circulates publicly within social media spaces, and is therefore inherently uncontrollable). This raises new questions about the processes of selection and verification employed by livebloggers as part of their journalistic practice. In this context it is notable that—not unlike the approaches employed in the live broadcast news coverage of acute events—livebloggers generally appear to favour the accurate representation of the current informational situation, with all its rumours and uncertainties, over the publication of fully fact-checked accounts only:

> Live Blogging, with its emphasis on relaying information as events are unfolding, may make … [fact-checking] harder to develop and maintain. However, the wider concept of objectivity involves attribution as well as verification, and Live Blogging, with its relatively transparent signposting of source material, may help audiences better judge source credibility. (Thurman and Walters 2013: 88)

This, too, serves to expose the processes of news judgment that previously happened only on the backstages of news organisations, and affords them greater frontstage visibility; it involves audiences more closely in the authentication process, essentially encouraging them to judge for themselves rather than merely trust the journalistic instincts and skills of the liveblogger.

The Guardian's liveblogger Matthew Weaver points out that the incremental nature of liveblogging, where a story emerges through a series of brief snippets of information rather than in fully-formed articles, also reduces the onus of fact-checking at least somewhat—"there's not a rigorous process that goes on of saying this is how I verify an individual tweet because the information is so small there's [usually] no point in going through a huge fact checking exercise" (qtd. in Thurman and Walters 2013: 93). Such light-touch verification can result in the publication of misinformation, of course (much as it does from time to time in live broadcast formats)—and such errors are then also addressed transparently, as Andrew Sparrow outlines:

if I've got something substantially wrong I will acknowledge that—within the [Live] Blog—as quickly as possible in the most recent post. What I will also do is go back to the original post. I won't do an invisible mend [rather] I will insert a correction within the original post. If you just correct it in the most recent post … it's quite possible someone will see the original erroneous post but not pick up the subsequent correction. (qtd. in Thurman and Walters 2013: 94)

This represents a journalistic approach which breaks with some of the most cherished ideals of the profession, then; Matthew Weaver summarises this as "first publish then verify", and states that "on a live-blog you … say: look, we're letting you in on the process of news-gathering. There's a more fluid sense of what's happening" (qtd. in Bruno 2011: 44). Importantly, echoing Shirky's famous adage that the preferred order in online communities is "publish, then filter" (2002: n.p.), this then also involves the userbase for a given liveblog in this process of verification: once again, the users of the liveblog—especially when it deals with unfolding events affecting some of them directly—may well know more about it than the liveblogger in the news outlet's head office, and so they become an important component of the fact-checking process.

Liveblogs and Their Audiences

Liveblogs—and many of the other emerging journalistic practices that incorporate or are inspired by social media—thus move a greater part of the journalistic sourcing, reporting, and evaluation process to the frontstage, where it can be observed in action by audiences, and where news users can participate increasingly actively. This necessarily also implies a transition towards a more processual understanding of the news: as a continuing flow of information to be curated and made sense of, rather than as a series of distinct products—reports—that each tell a complete story. *The Guardian*'s Blogs and Networks Editor Matt Wells has outlined this contrast with reference to the verification approaches: "in the inverted pyramid news story you are saying we know everything in this story … the whole format cries out 'All of this has been verified', whereas the Live Blog format is more freeform, and is more conversational so you can be very open about whether you have verified this or not" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 93). Where information turns out to be questionable, experts and ordinary users following the liveblog are invited to point this out and provide corrections or alternative interpretations. As Weaver puts it,

you can say 'Look, this is out there, we can't verify it, but this is being talked about, this is part of the story'. We're letting you in on the workflow of the journalist in a way … saying 'Look this is out there, help us verify it'. And readers do jump in and say 'That's rubbish', 'That's not true'. (qtd. in Thurman and Walters 2013: 93)

But this does not mean that ordinary liveblog and social media users are necessarily treated as complete equals by the liveblogger; indeed, the fact that—contrary to direct interactions in the tertiary spaces of social media platforms themselves—the liveblog is hosted on the news outlet's Website and thus separate from those social media spaces means that the liveblogger has considerably more opportunity to ignore the contributions made by users. As a result, "live blogs—despite allowing the relatively easy integration of social media, such as tweets—actually quote citizen and activist sources less frequently (on a per word basis) than both traditional online articles and print articles" (Thurman and Schapals 2016: 289); however, it should be noted here that liveblogs are usually also considerably longer than conventional news articles, which means that in terms of total numbers they will still cite more ordinary voices than those articles. In her 2014 study, for instance, Tereszkiewicz reported that the liveblogs she observed featured nearly 10 tweets on average (2014: 310).

Notably, there are significant variations in such practices between liveblogs on different topics: while Andrew Sparrow, the journalist responsible for *The Guardian*'s Politics Live blog, states that "I'm wary of prioritising one individual's reaction over anyone else's, and I think the evidential value of that is pretty meaningless" (qtd. in Thurman and Walters 2013: 94), for instance, liveblogs in other news beats are less reluctant to include the voices of ordinary users: Thurman and Walters found that sports liveblogs had "20–30 times more reader contributors than the other types, probably via emails addressed directly to the Live Blogging journalist" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 91).

This also reflects concerns by livebloggers that in some news beats—not least in politics—interested parties are now running professional sockpuppeting operations in order to generate the appearance of strong public support for their views and concerns. They do so both through flotillas of centrally controlled social media accounts posting similar messages, and by similarly organised commenting activity on mainstream news sites. *The Guardian*'s Paul Lewis suggests that "lots of corporations [and] institutions … deliberately hire people to write below the line on articles to sway the public debate" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 94–95); similar approaches are also being employed by a variety of state and grassroots political actors:

interest groups have … learned to exploit the media's enhanced attention to their public and, by extension, to the voices of the community. Grassroots mobilization has occasionally worked to their advantage—in some extreme cases by making up fake social movements (a technique known as "astroturfing"). (Heinderyckx 2015: 261)

At the same time, many journalists—and not least the livebloggers themselves, who amongst their peers may constitute the group most often confronted with such attempts to game the system—have now developed the necessary digital and social media literacies to distinguish astroturfing from genuine contributions. At least for the majority of journalists, the fact that such sockpuppeteers do ply their trade around the user engagement functionality now available in journalistic spaces is no longer a reason to dismiss user contributions entirely; they may, however, draw especially on a smaller group of regular contributors whom they have come to trust through regular interaction. *The Guardian*'s senior political correspondent Andrew Sparrow has stated, for instance, that in his liveblogging he works "by and large … with a relatively narrow patch of usual suspects and I know who they are" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 93), for instance; in turn this could, at worst, promote some degree of groupthink amongst an in-group of topic experts who are all well-known to each other and draw on the same range of sources.

Usually, however, what results from the combination of different sources and content types in liveblogs is characterised by intertextuality and polyvocality, as Tereszkiewicz notes (2014: 306–7). Liveblogs are by their very nature intertextual, as they combine "direct, indirect, mixed quotes, as well as indirect speech and nested speech" from a broad range of source texts that the liveblog will often also link to directly (307); for much the same reason they are also polyvocal or, as Herbert Gans might put it, multiperspectival (1980: 313). Further, since the liveblogger acts more as a curator of these different perspectives than as an authoritative and objective institution combining them all into a single news report, the liveblogging journalist is also a great deal more free to add their own voice into the mix than professional standards might otherwise allow, as we have seen. Tereszkiewicz notes the prominence of informal phatic and dialogic language alongside more conventional news coverage, and suggests that this makes the liveblog reading experience more vivid, engaging, and enjoyable. At times this even takes on a thoroughly lighthearted style,

where authors enter into a playful interaction with readers. This can be exemplified by directives intended humorously as well as by paralinguistic elements, which create

> an impression of a conversational interaction with readers being in progress, in which some action or statement is ascribed to readers. (Tereszkiewicz 2014: 315–16)

Notably, some such elements are borrowed directly from the linguistic and syntactical conventions of *Twitter* and other social media platforms—including the playful and emotive use of hashtags such as #fail or #win, or the embedding of humorous memes. These elements are not necessarily *only* playful, however: "colloquialisms … may serve an expressive function as well, constituting additional means of evaluation of the news" (Tereszkiewicz 2014: 316).

What results from this work are gradually unfolding liveblogs that reward continuous attention or repeated revisiting by their readers (and that are therefore also commercially valuable to news organisations, as they have a better chance of generating multiple ad impressions). Running for a full day or covering major breaking news stories, such liveblogs can end up at considerable length; Thurman and Schapals found that such liveblogs were usually about twelve times as long as ordinary news articles, for instance (2016: 286). Presented—like ordinary blogs and social media content—in reverse-chronological order while they are active, liveblogs are primarily designed for a live audience, of course; however, "readers consume Live Blogs both live, as they are being updated, and *post hoc* as an historical, archived account of how an event unfolded" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 83), and many news sites now automatically revert their liveblog posts to a conventional linear storytelling order (that is, chronological rather than reverse-chronological) once the 'live' aspect of the liveblog concludes. Having already described liveblogs as an extension of social media's role as a 'first draft of the present', we might see this as the exact point at which such liveblogs return to serve in the traditional journalistic role as 'a first rough draft of history'.

Thurman and Schapals cite an anonymous *BBC World News* journalist who suggests that live blogs have "transformed the way we think about news, our sourcing, and everything" (qtd. in Thurman and Schapals 2016: 283). For the users who follow liveblogs regularly, much the same may be true. As noted, liveblogs pursue a "transparency strategy, where truth-telling is created through forthrightness and discourse, and is subject to change over time" (Karlsson 2011: 283); however, whether any new understandings of the matters addressed by the liveblog emerge for users also depends fundamentally on their levels of digital media literacy and engagement. "The conventional newspaper story strives to convey a definitive and authoritative account of an event. Live blogs present an iterative and incremental account" (Hermi-

da 2014: 367)—and some users may as yet be ill-equipped for reading and processing such an account, or may simply not have the time and energy to invest in doing so. (The same, of course, is also true for similar uses of *Twitter* and *Facebook* as news media, even if the growing demoticisation of everyday news practices on these platforms is contributing to the development of social media news literacies in an increasing share of the online population.)

Liveblogs have therefore also received some vocal criticism: commenting on *The Guardian*'s liveblog coverage of the aftermath of the devastating 2011 earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand, for instance, one critic complained that

> it's a mish-mash of baffling tweets, irrelevant musings from the Guardian's comments, contact details for those who want to find out about loved ones or make donations …, musings from a boffin at … Bristol University, and speculation on how the tragedy might affect the Rugby World Cup, due to kick-off [*sic*] in NZ in seven months' time. Scattered meagrely throughout … are bits of what you and I might call "hard news". (Symes 2011: n.p.)

The net result, he continued, was that "there is no structure and therefore no sense, and the effect is of being in the middle of a room full of loud, shouty and excitable people all yelling at once with all the phones ringing, the fire alarm going off and a drunken old boy slurring in your ear about 'what it all means'" (Symes 2011: n.p.).

Such responses are unlikely to be unique; further, it is demonstrably true that due to their very design liveblogs have tended to be less accurate than other forms of journalistic coverage, and this is acknowledged by liveblogging journalists themselves (Thurman and Schapals 2016: 288). Livebloggers and news media strategists have therefore also adopted a self-critical stance towards their own practices. Charman-Anderson, for instance, worries "that some of the aggregation that we're doing is really difficult to navigate unless you're a news junkie. We have to make sure that a stream of news aggregation doesn't feel like a maddening stream of consciousness" (2011: n.p.). He also points to the sometimes immense volumes of content that liveblogging can produce: during the 2010 U.K. general election, for example, *Guardian* liveblogs editor Andrew Sparrow at times generated some 14,000 words per day in his liveblog—"how does the average reader easily navigate this" (n.p.)?

The answer may well be that *average* readers do not navigate these liveblogs—that it takes users with a particularly strong interest in a given topic to commit to following the liveblog. Other, more casual readers may well

find the detail in which topics are covered in liveblogs "self-indulgent", and the tone of their coverage "ill-considered", as some of Thurman and Walters's respondents put it (2013: 97). But liveblogs do not replace more conventional forms of news coverage any more than newssharing on social media does; rather, both contribute to the rapid circulation of breaking news reports and related information from which later, more fully formed news articles now increasingly source their information. Those news audiences who are reluctant to engage directly with liveblogs can always wait for the full stories to be published in more conventional news channels (and for those stories to be disseminated again in turn via social media), much as those TV viewers who found 24-hour cable news channels to be confusing or overwhelming still had the opportunity to wait for the evening's prime time news broadcast or the next morning's newspaper.

As a result, then, it appears likely that liveblogs will for now remain a format that attracts a specific segment of the overall news audience: a userbase that is interested in tracking unfolding news events as unruly and sometimes confusingly dynamic live stories, rather than being prepared to wait until the dust has settled and the first draft of the present has turned into a first draft of history. In a sense, then, liveblogs constitute a particularly 'journalismic' format that is still of particular interest in the first place to news junkies and other media elites.

At the same time, in spite of these criticisms (many of which, it should be noted, now date back several years and may no longer be as prevalent), it has also become evident that liveblogs have become popular with increasingly substantial audiences. Thurman and Walters cite a number of recent statistics from *The Guardian* that document this success: as of 2013, its liveblogs attract well over twice the median number of unique visitors, and three times as many page views, as conventional articles, and these visitors also spend more time engaging with the liveblog content (2013: 85). Exploiting such favourable usage patterns, "Guardian.co.uk alone publishes an average of 146 Live Blogs a month" (82). Amongst journalists, the liveblog format's measurable successes in both harnessing social media content and attracting readers back to the flagship site have even contributed to "a fundamental change in attitudes towards social media because of their proven value in telling better stories": as former Website editor of *The Guardian* Janine Gibson noted in 2011,

a year ago, there were maybe 30–40 [Guardian journalists] on Twitter. There are over 200 now. It's everywhere, every desk, every department. It's been in tech [the Media

and Technology section] for some time but now it is feature writers and production editors. Everybody is engaging with social media. (qtd. in Newman 2011: 47)

Similarly, news users are "more than twice as likely to participate in Live Blogs compared with other article types", as Thurman and Walters have found, and journalists also report the quality of user contributions to be comparatively high. This may be due at least in part to the fact that—like social media, and here especially like *Twitter*—liveblogs turn the Web into a medium for synchronous engagement: "you know that other people are on at the same time so you get that sense that there might be some response to what you write" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 97).

Notably, these pages "are accessed primarily during office hours, their popularity peaking at 11 am" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 85). While this may be related to the nature and dynamics of the news stories now commonly covered by the liveblog format—such as current developments in politics and parliament, which typically take place over the course of the working day—, it may also be an indication that the liveblog format "is uniquely suited to readers' at-work news consumption patterns and … provides journalists with a means to manage the competing demands of their elite and mass publics" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 82). In this, then, liveblogs would tap into the broader trend towards an increasing level of news consumption at work (not least also via personal mobile devices)—another factor turning liveblogs into an attractive format for mainstream news organisations.

Amongst the factors driving this popularity of liveblogs is, unsurprisingly, the very 'liveness' of the format. Notwithstanding the more critical views that readers like Symes have expressed, many users feel a "sense of immediacy and urgency" when following liveblogs, and this also heightens their level of interest in and engagement with the topics being addressed by the liveblog; for some, in fact, this is experienced as an addictive experience resulting in a constant re-checking of the liveblog for new updates (Thurman and Walters 2013: 96). This experience is likely to be similar to that felt by heavy social media users, who will similarly check their *Facebook* or *Twitter* timelines every few minutes to see their connections' latest posts. Importantly, too, the frontstage transparency created by the liveblogging approach—though possibly confusing and overwhelming, given the volume of potentially contradictory updates posted—is largely appreciated by news consumers, who describe liveblogs as "more factual", "less opinion based", and "more balanced" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 98).

It is somewhat surprising in this context that the generally more personal-ised and opinionated stance adopted by most liveblogging journalists does not appear to undermine this perception; indeed, one of Thurman and Walters's informants stated:

> I trust it more than I would some articles, in the sense that most of it is not opinion, it's more factual … and leaves you to make your own opinion, whereas a lot of articles [are the] opinions of journalists—their take on what's happening. (Thurman and Walters 2013: 96)

This is explained, perhaps, by the greater distinction between original source content and journalistic interpretation and framing that the liveblog format offers. Where in a conventional, fully formed article the journalist's voice is suppressed in favour of a standard objective tone, thus backgrounding the sourcing and framing decisions made in the production of the article, in the more episodic and unfinished liveblog format verbatim selections from a va-riety of original sources sit side by side with, yet clearly separated from, the liveblogger's instant commentary. This indicates that, given the choice, it is not necessarily the journalist's voice that generates trust in readers, but the transparency with which the journalist presents news content to their readers. Though not specifically addressing the liveblog format, Groenhart's research suggests that this may also increase news users' satisfaction with the news they consume: "some participants mentioned 'enjoying' seeing what goes on behind the scenes, without the intention of understanding or controlling the news medium" (2012: 197).

Between Mainstream and Social Media

For journalists and news outlets, then, liveblogs can be seen as one of the premier "means of letting those who make up that market finally see how the sausage is made—how we do our work and what informs our decisions"—that Kovach and Rosenstiel called for at the start of the millennium (2001: 192). Indeed, that metaphor may be even more apt than its authors intended it to be: in butchery as in journalism, not everybody wants to see how the end results come about, and such insights into the messy professional practices of content selection and processing may well altogether put off some consumers. Further, the greater transparency resulting from this public exposure of previ-ously unobservable processes is also likely to lead some consumers to adopt a

considerably more critical stance towards the content they consume: as Deuze points out, "more shared control over newsgathering and storytelling increases opportunities for surveillance and processual criticism" (Deuze 2005: 455).

As Liu puts it, "a common interpretation of curated content … is to find the 'best' content. However, the 'best' can be defined in qualitatively different ways. … The value of curated content will be in determining ahead of time what kind of content is considered 'the best stuff' (e.g., the most popular, most viewed, most relevant, most reputable, etc.)" (Liu 2010: 21). To perform this task in a way that is acceptable to their liveblog audiences, they must cater to their audiences' needs and interests more directly than they have perhaps been required to do in other, more conventional formats, and they must also be receptive to the audience feedback they will receive in the very process of liveblogging itself. Not all journalists will be able to adjust to this task and become successful, trusted liveblog curators; further, even with the best intentions, their sensitivity to audience interests may not be able to compete with the organic emergence of aggregate expressions of user interests and interpretations through collective social media curation processes within the platforms of *Twitter* and *Facebook* themselves.

As Hermida *et al.* report, for instance,

> we asked consumers if they would trust user-generated content more or less if edited by a professional journalist for a news organization. Overall, 37 per cent of news consumers expressed a preference for curation by a trained journalist …. But 44 per cent of news consumers said they were unsure. (2012: 820–21)

This may indicate a continuing popular mistrust of the gatekeeping, and now curation, choices made by professional journalists, and by extension of the established news values and professional routines that influence such choices; indeed, such mistrust may only be heightened by the fact that these choices are now more publicly exposed, and therefore also open to criticism.

And yet, this willing exposure to greater audience scrutiny was nonetheless necessary in the contemporary mediasphere. In an environment where so much source information already circulates beyond the control of journalists and news organisations, and where—as we have seen—conventional gatekeeping practices are therefore no longer effective, the fact that mainstream news coverage is socially constructed by journalists has been plainly evident for some time; to continue to treat news reports as finished products emerging fully-formed from an impartial, perfectly objective process free from human factors—as slogans such as 'all the news that's fit to print' imply—would insult

audiences' intelligence, and ignore their growing sophistication in processing news, and in understanding news processes. By contrast, the approach taken by liveblogs and similar formats "gives people a flavour of what is being fed at the time through the newsroom … and treats the reader as more grown up and more complicit and more sophisticated", as *BBC News Online*'s Russell Smith has put it (qtd. in Beckett 2010: 4).

The emergence of liveblogging both as a widespread practice in major news organisations, and as a format that is also notably very popular with important sections of the userbase for online news, is of wider significance for journalism as an institution, therefore. As Beckett suggests, "the way it changes reporting is typical of networked journalism. It is a concentrated dose of participatory, interactive and connected news media, facilitated by a professional, mainstream media journalist or team. It could become the new online 'front page'" (Beckett 2010: 3)—and while in an atomised, social media-driven news environment the need for outlets to offer a general institutional front page may be questionable, liveblogs can certainly be seen to serve as central spaces for the rolling coverage of particular events and issues: they are the front pages to these topics.

In doing so, they are consciously positioning themselves in between—and as active intermediaries between—mainstream and social media spaces, and this could thus be understood as another attempt to normalise social media into journalistic processes. But the approach here is markedly different from the gradual and sometimes grudging acceptance and adoption of social media as tools of the trade, and the development of individual and institutional social media presences and brands by news workers and their outlets: rather than, or in addition to participating in such tertiary spaces outside of the direct control of the news organisation, in the case of liveblogs social media elements, practices, and content are embedded back into the primary spaces operated by the news outlets themselves. Much like the use of social media by journalists and news outlets, liveblogs constitute a case of media convergence, "where textual forms and cultural practices are coming together in new ways," (Thurman and Schapals 2016: 285)—but much unlike the former, liveblogs represent a form of media convergence on the mainstream news media's terms, rather than a convergent process that is primarily driven by changing user practices.

Liveblogs, then, are a means for the news industry to reassert its difference from the more decentralised, probabilistic news dissemination and evaluation processes that take place in social media proper: for their users, they perform the service of making news discovery processes less ambient and less serendip-

itous again, even while they continue to embrace key social media affordances such as the frequently updated stream of diverse updates and the ability to click through directly to the sources being cited and shared. This curation of social media and other sources performs a key service especially for audience members who are unwilling or unable to track the topic at hand directly through social media themselves, for instance because of time constraints or limited social media literacy, as *The Guardian*'s Andrew Sparrow has pointed out: He describes "links and aggregation [as] being 'crucial', 'what it's all about', because readers are 'busy' and 'you don't want to waste their time'" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 93).

If liveblogs are thus catering at least in part especially to news audiences that are somewhat reluctant to rely entirely on their social media networks for the news, but still want something other than conventional mainstream industry news products, they may similarly also serve as important stepping-stones for journalists who are still cautious about fully engaging with their followers in the open and sometimes wild tertiary spaces of social media platforms. In operating liveblogs, such journalists must use social media as one of the channels through which they source information, to be sure, but they do not necessarily need to communicate with readers through these channels; they can instead fall back on the liveblog itself, which inherently maintains the more privileged position of communicative control that journalists have traditionally enjoyed. Operating a liveblog, the journalist remains fully in control of the processes of curating, interpreting, and publishing the available information; working directly within social media, they are merely one content curator, commentator, and disseminator amongst many (professional and non-professional) others.

This enhanced position as liveblog editor also affords journalists a greater opportunity to showcase their professional craft (and therefore also the contribution that the profession as such can still make, even in the contemporary media ecology), by demonstrating that "traditional journalistic skills are still necessary in order to glue the curated pieces of information [into] a story" (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 29). In this way, if executed successfully, "the faster, more informal, hypertextual, and networked journalism that results is doing more than engaging the public—it may also be … going some way towards rebuilding faith in journalistic objectivity" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 98). But the extent to which such faith (or trust) can be rebuilt will crucially depend on the transparency and sensibility of the curatorial choices made by the liveblogger that are now taking place in public, which users can

observe and compare against the collective news evaluation processes that are playing out in their social media networks at the same time; in this new context, news users' trust remains conditional upon consistent performance and will never again become blind faith.

It is therefore crucial that professional news livebloggers fully understand the communicative environments in which they operate. "Journalists have to start reinventing their role and place in the knowledge society of the future", as Servaes suggests (2009: 372); in the present context, this means in particular that "curators have to be trained in the assessment of stories and the curation of information" (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 29) in a way that is appropriate to the liveblog format and its intermediary placement between mainstream and social media. The liveblog cannot and must not serve as an excuse for journalists to withdraw from direct engagement with social media users *within* social media spaces, using those spaces only as a ready source of information and colour; effective sourcing and curation, let alone authentication and verification, of information in liveblogs can only occur fully when the liveblogging journalist is also thoroughly connected with the wilder flows of information that occur in the tertiary spaces of social media.

This is also important in light of the fact that, as Thurman and Walters point out, "Live Blogging is predominantly conducted from the office. Although reporting from journalists in the field is often included, the author of the Live Blog, whose responsibility it is to pull everything together into a narrative, tends to be office-bound" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 92). Many journalists are concerned about this relative distance from the scene of current developments that is common for liveblogging (and considerably less characteristic for conventional news reporting); because, as Andrew Sparrow has put it, "you can pick up atmosphere from actually being in the room that you can't from watching it" (qtd. in Thurman and Walters 2013: 93), the liveblogger therefore crucially relies on their correspondents to gain a more visceral feeling for the events that are currently unfolding. Such correspondents include journalists covering developments from the scene, but—especially in the case of major, complex, multi-sited breaking news stories—increasingly also a much larger range of more or less ordinary other social media participants who are able to add observations and insights, fill in the gaps or identify misinformation. As *Guardian* Special Projects Editor Paul Lewis has put it, "with Live Blogging … you have this view that there are lots of other people out there who are your eyes and ears" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 93).

Liveblogs as Public Journalism?

As a journalistically controlled format that is considerably more transparent about its story curation and development processes than conventional news, liveblogs arguably realise some of the ambitions of public journalism—an idea that, as Deuze defines it, "can be understood as a way to bridge the gap between [the] oppositional expectations of reporters and editors: it maintains its primacy on storytelling while cautiously embracing the wants and needs of an audience" (2005: 456). Such ambitions have been expressed in the journalism literature for several decades by now, but have rarely been realised in ongoing professional practice; they have been projected onto a wide range of news formats and platforms. Anderson *et al.*, for instance, have suggested that even in spite of the inherent limitations of its format, even "newspaper journalism could provide a forum coordinated by professional communicators sensitive to the fullest possible range of community content and public argument" (1997: 98–99).

It is not difficult to see well-run liveblogs as finally meeting these goals, while mitigating some of the possible unruliness, unpredictability, and information overload that users might experience in standard social media environments. To do so would be a major contribution especially in present sociopolitical environments: in many nations, "society needs the kind of forum in which citizens could be vulnerable to each other's cultural voices and political arguments" (Anderson *et al.* 1997: 98), without such arguments breaking down into irresolvable polarisation and dysfunctionality. Here, then, the liveblogging journalist is called upon to serve as an even-handed moderator between opposing voices, and we must note cautionary tales from other formats where contributions from audience members and other sources are curated by journalists into an unfolding live stream of content: journalists may also exploit this position of intermediary and moderator to pursue their own agendas by imposing strongly partisan source selections and story frames. Turner has famously outlined this decline into demagoguery for talk radio:

> the development of talk radio in the USA and Australia has radio current affairs programs turned over to the audience, moderated (to use the word loosely) in most cases by a host who is primarily responsible for making the program entertaining rather than informative, and who depends upon ordinary people phoning in for the content and for much of the entertainment. The caller's voice draws its validity from its demotic origins—it is a signifier of the common sense of the public—while the host establishes his (and it is usually his) legitimacy in the classic tradition of political

populism by privileging the validity of that voice against any other, particularly more institutionalized or elite, forms of authority. (2009: 391)

The liveblog format could easily be abused in much the same way; undoubtedly there will have been journalistic livebloggers in a number of news organisations who have made deliberately tendentious selection and framing choices. However, the increased transparency of the liveblogging process, not least also against the backdrop of open social media platforms addressing the same topics through collective social news curation, makes such partisan approaches considerably more difficult to uphold without widespread public criticism: where in talk radio nobody other than the host and producers are able to observe whether the audience calls selected for broadcast fairly represent the range of views expressed by callers to the switchboard (or wider public opinion), selections in liveblogs can be compared with the content circulating freely through social media spaces, and discrepancies can be highlighted at least through social media. As Turner correctly points out, talk radio trades on its *appearance* of demoticity; by contrast, newssharing and engagement via social media is now *actually* a demotic practice, as we have seen in Chapter 4, and its patterns represent public views at least to the extent that the userbases of *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and other social media platforms are representative for the overall public. "News organizations and journalists have always had the opportunity to explain the rationale behind the news and to invite the audiences to discuss and influence the content. However, digital publishing provides opportunities for a kind of transparency that was very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in the past" (Hedman 2016: 2)—if liveblogs intransparently deviate from a balanced representation of public debates, there is a strong chance that this can and will be noticed and criticised by their audiences.

It therefore seems unlikely that liveblogs will be subverted to their own ends by political ideologues and demagogues in the same way that talk radio has been, even though at least in principle they share some of the same journalistic practices. As "one of the few Web-native news artefacts" (Thurman and Walters 2013: 88), the attractiveness of liveblogs to their audiences stems from their transparency, rather than from the deliberately intransparent molding of various contributions into a populist political narrative that talk radio excels in. In this, the liveblogging approach can be seen as a deliberate move to combat the challenges posed by social media news engagement and claw back a greater role for professional journalism in news coverage and cu-

ration: in importing some of the affordances of social media into their own branded spaces, news organisations "try to make some of their loyal audience stay longer by creating special content" (Olmstead *et al.* 2011: 2). In the ideal case, from the perspective of the news industry, this returns some of the news audiences from social media to their home news imprint, and generates a greater sense of loyalty and belonging through routine news engagement practices; recurring liveblogs—from those tracking debates in parliament to those covering the weekend's football—encourage audiences to incorporate such sources into their routine news diets.

Similarly, as we have already seen, liveblogging practices retain at least some of the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists; "newsrooms are adapting their characterization of gatekeepers to include concepts of both quality control and sense-making" (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 7). But if the term 'gatekeeping' is still appropriate at all for practices that in fact are probably better described as 'curation', then such gatekeeping takes place in a new, irretrievably transformed and hybridised news environment "that privileges contribution, conversation, community and connectivity, compared to the hierarchical structures within established news organizations that set the parameters for most news work" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 495). In this news environment, with its abundance of source gates through which information can pass directly into unfettered public circulation, it is once again *gatewatching* that emerges as the foundational practice which feeds into the curation processes involved both in journalistic liveblogging and in social media-based news engagement. For journalists working as livebloggers, who now have "instant access to the output of nearly any news organization around the world that maintains a website, it is an absolutely earthshaking transformation of what resources can be assembled in putting a story together" (Schudson 2013: 198).

Social media themselves serve as an important source of input to this process; as Molyneux puts it, "where Mr Gates observed a stream of information coming across the wires and selected which bits to pass on to his audience, today's journalists treat Twitter as the news wire" (Molyneux 2015: 921–22), and in doing so inevitably also draw already on the distributed social news curation processes that predate their own curation of social media content for the liveblog. By incorporating such social media content into the liveblog itself, and linking from there back to the social media spaces where that content originated, the journalists are essentially also directing their audiences' attention to the substantial source diversity that exists in the wilder tertiary spaces of social media beyond the conventional news brand; this ultimate-

ly undermines the liveblogging journalist's own authority as gatekeeper, and opens up the news discourse to new voices who may not be present on the liveblog itself but are just a click-through away. Overall, this improves the quality of mainstream news coverage, as former *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger has suggested: "if you can open your site up and allow other voices in, you get something that's more engaged, more involved, and actually … journalistically better" (Rusbridger 2010: n.p.).

Ultimately, then, liveblogs neither belong fully to the primary spaces of conventional news reporting, nor to the secondary spaces of alternative news sites or the tertiary spaces of social media; they connect and circulate elements drawn from all of these spaces using their distinctive, hybrid publishing format and processes. In this sense, "live blogging exemplifies an interesting merger of tradition and novelty in news reporting" (Tereszkiewicz 2014: 299), and may point the way for other forms of format, process, and content innovation that are possible in the news industry. "In particular, the curation of professional and social media content, such as aggregating, selecting, organizing …, and presenting news according to the criteria for high quality journalism from professional and user generated content, results in new types of editorial content and experience for users" (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 12). As Papacharissi points out, these types almost inevitably represent a hybrid of established mass media and emerging social media logics: "the internet reorganizes the flows of time and space in ways that promise greater autonomy but also conform to the habitus of practices, hierarchies, and structures that form its historical context" (Papacharissi 2014: 7).

Liveblogs and Beyond

Although we have so far discussed liveblogs almost exclusively as a new model of rapid and continuous news publication within the mainstream industry, it must also be noted that their use is not limited to professional journalistic contexts. Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* note the emergence of "new social media curation platforms enabling story creation based on social media" (2012: 3) well beyond the sites of mainstream news outlets: platforms which "support … [the] watching of social media and other gates and the creation of curated stories based on the combination of own contribution[s] and selected original sources" (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 13). Most prominent amongst such platforms and tools is *Storify*, which is now widely used by journalists and

other users to create a curated collection of diverse content items relating to specific topics:

> Storify allows [the] watching of social media gates and aggregating of Facebook content, Flicker photos, YouTube videos, Google search, RSS feed[s] and other users' Storify stories. It also supports the process of publishing by enabling users to gather curated contributions into a single story and to add context and/or comments to it. (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 16)

While in journalistic contexts such tools are largely used in the ways we have explored in this chapter, it should be noted that non-journalistic users have explored a much broader range of applications (Heinrich 2012: 60), following very different temporal dynamics and organisational logics. Although the real-time curation of social and other media content is crucial in the context of current news stories, for instance, *Storify* and similar tools can also be used for the more *post hoc*, longer-term documentation and preservation of news stories and social media discussions. For instance, the *Quakebook* project has sought to collect and curate tweets and user-generated video showing and reflecting on the widespread devastation following the 2011 tsunami that struck large swathes of the Japanese east coast, in order to preserve these impressions for posterity (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 13); here, the focus is squarely on presenting this collection as a draft of history.

Other such platforms pursue somewhat different organisational philosophies. Rather than presenting topical updates from a variety of sources in a blog- and social media-inspired reverse chronological format, for instance, several crisis mapping platforms—and especially the most prominent of these initiatives, *Ushahidi*—take a geographic approach. Here, incoming updates are placed on geo-maps according to their relevance to specific locations (or, where available, by processing embedded GPS data) in order to be able to identify specific hotspots for particular types of activity. Initially created to track eyewitness reports of vote-tampering and post-election violence in the controversial 2007 presidential election in Kenya, it has been used to track similar political and law and order events and issues around the world, from being "instrumental in crowd sourcing content and mapping human rights abuses by the police in Maputo", Mozambique (anonymous respondent qtd. in Mare 2013: 94) to documenting incidents of racist abuse and violence following Donald Trump's win in the U.S. presidential election in November 2016 (Kuo 2016). Most prominently, it has played an important role in the multi-agency crisis response to major natural disasters including the 2010 Haiti

earthquake (Meier 2012). *Ushahidi* and similar crisis mapping platforms still draw on the same curated social media content approaches employed by conventional liveblogs; they merely display the results of their curation processes in a different fashion. Importantly—and crucially so especially when they are being used to help coordinate emergency responses—they too enable the live coverage (or here, the live mapping) of unfolding events, and usually provide the functionality to retrace the dynamics of an event by applying a sequence of different timeframe selections to the map display.

Further, as Liu reported in 2010, "what we are beginning to see is the development of web services like Publish2 and Curata to support 'human-aided algorithmic curation' where algorithms are used to search through massive information streams and then humans are given editorial control as to what content to publish and how to display it" (Liu 2010: 22). In our present context, we might understand such services as pre-curation tools that simplify the eventual manual curation work of journalists and others by making a preliminary content selection based on a range of social media metrics and other available information. Such tools are far from unproblematic, of course, especially if they fail to transparently document the assumptions built into their selection algorithms; at the same time, however, it is also easy to see why such computational assistance would be very welcome to liveblogging journalists faced with tracking a substantial volume of social and other media activities relating to a major breaking news story.

Although such tools—from *Storify* to *Ushahidi* and beyond—are now also readily (and often also freely, at least to a point) available to non-professional content curators, their use outside of the news industry or coordinated emergence response efforts has nonetheless remained comparatively limited. This has a number of reasons. First, by facilitating a move from social news curation to the curation of social media content they reintroduce a number of barriers to participation: rather than contributing more randomly and habitually to social news curation efforts as part of a much larger collective of social media users, the curators of social media content who use these tools are once again separate from the crowd, so that the entire effort becomes their personal responsibility and the barriers to participation are again significantly high; in this sense, these curation tools are not unlike the news blogs and citizen journalism sites of the first wave of citizen media, and will similarly attract sustained commitment only from a smaller self-selecting group of news and political junkies.

Second, because the liveblogs operated by journalists in news organisations and by non-professionals outside the industry would both draw freely on a broad combination of available content in mainstream and social media as well as other original sources, there is less inherent distinction between the two. In the first wave of citizen media, alternative sites with their gatewatching-based, promiscuous sourcing practices emerged as a distinct counter-model to the gatekept, exclusive news production processes of conventional news media; they became popular to the extent that they did because they clearly worked differently from the old guard. In this second wave, however, even professionally operated liveblogs have comprehensively embraced the gatewatching ethos and are freely incorporating and linking to external content that once would have been deemed out of bounds; having normalised gatewatching practices in this way, there is now no obvious reason why liveblogs by citizen journalists should be inherently different from (and better than) liveblogs by professional journalists.

Finally, then, with such attitudinal and processual differences eliminated (or even favouring professional journalists), the liveblogs operated by mainstream news outlets may also benefit from these organisations' ability to draw on customised, optimised systems rather than rely on standard consumer-grade tools like *Storify*. As Thurman and Walters report, for instance,

> Guardian.co.uk's bespoke content management system (CMS) is used both to file conventional stories and create Live Blogs. The interface that Live Bloggers use is very similar to that used to file regular articles, but with some added functionality. It allows journalists to publish content a block at a time, and the chronology can be reversed once the Live Blog has finished running. Journalists are also able to add web markup and scripting code, making it possible to embed external tools and widgets …. Most Live Blogging journalists interviewed said they wrote directly into the CMS themselves. (2013: 92)

Through such platforms, livebloggers in news organisations will also be able to gain privileged access to the related news stories currently being developed by their colleagues, of course; this provides them with a competitive advantage over possible competitors outside the industry.

Overall, then, this explains why liveblogging has been embraced so enthusiastically by a substantial number of leading news organisations: it is one of the few emerging news formats where professional journalists again enjoy a clear advantage, even in an evolving mediasphere where access to the news is now facilitated to an increasing degree by circulation via social media. Live-

blogs are clearly and undeniably inspired by social news curation practices, and draw extensively on social media content—they are a hybrid format *par excellence*, but emerge as distinct and influential spaces that are news destinations in their own right and draw visitors back to the Websites of conventional news organisations, at least for the duration of the issues and events they cover.

As *New York Times* CEO Mark Thompson has outlined, "the audience which publishers will need to find will not be super-light users, the one-and-dones who spend a few seconds on many different sites, but truly engaged readers and viewers who are prepared to devote real time to content of real quality and relevance" (Thompson 2016: 108–9). For some time, liveblogs have been recognised as attracting such audiences; for instance, in the aftermath of its extensive liveblogging of the Arab Spring uprisings as well as the Japanese tsunami, *The Guardian* reported that "in March 2011" their liveblogging, "which involved curating live events with the backchannel in Twitter and Facebook, accounted for over 9 per cent of total page views for the entire website" (Newman 2011: 47). Such returns on investment make the liveblog format highly attractive to the news industry.

Situating Liveblogs in the News Ecology

Liveblogs are thus a comparatively rare example of successful product and process innovation within the mainstream news industry, drawing considerably from social media logic and combining this with more conventional news values and practices, addressing news junkies and live news enthusiasts but also doing so in sufficient numbers to emerge as important drivers of traffic to mainstream news sites. How then should we situate them within the current news ecology, and within the history of journalism in its current phase of existence—well after the passing of its period of "high modernism" (Hallin 1992)?

First, by their very nature liveblogs appear best suited to being used as tools for addressing and engaging with specific pre-existing communities of interest. It is difficult to envision a generic 'news of the day' liveblog; rather, liveblogs are usually confined at least to a specific news beat, or even to a particular, clearly defined subset of that beat (for instance, the coverage of parliamentary procedure and debate rather than simply of domestic politics in general), or to distinct events of clearly delimited duration (where

such events extend for multiple days and weeks, liveblogs are usually separated into daily instalments). Such distinct liveblogs, then, usually correspond either to communities of interest that are already well-established (football fans, political junkies) or to interest publics that form more *ad hoc* in response to acute events (but may overlap with communities of interest whose topics are relevant to the event). Such correspondence—also in the active sense of that term—is most immediately evident as the liveblogger engages with, and sources content from, that part of such communities of interest which is active on the major social media platforms; in doing so, in turn, the liveblogger may also be able to attract some of the members of these communities to the news organisation's own site, at least for a time.

This, then, might point to a journalistic future where news outlets are increasingly moving away from all-purpose coverage of general news, and towards a concentration on specific beats and topics (or where such a concentration at least takes place as an extension of current coverage activities, in order to attract communities of interest with quality liveblog coverage of their themes and topics and keep them on-site by providing additional, general news content). At the same time, it could also foreshadow an environment in which the news landscape is considerably more diversified, and where born-niche (and likely also born-digital) outlets cater to distinct communities of interest while neglecting more general news coverage. As the 2016 *Digital News Report* points out, already "the majority of start-ups … employ relatively few journalists and tend to cover a subset of the news landscape. Some focus on serving specific niches, whilst others focus on the lighter or fun side of news or provide a different take or voice on the news" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 92).

Some of the earliest indicators of such developments may be visible in one of the best-established and most lucrative niches of all: sports reporting. As early as 2011, Olmstead *et al.* point out that the sports news market holds important clues for overall news industry trends; "it suggests that specialized sections or 'verticals' on specific topics could build loyalty if well enough executed. … It suggests that certain topics may be so deeply covered by specialists that general news sites would be best to devote their resources elsewhere" (Olmstead *et al.* 2011: 5). Their Exhibit A for these trends is the highly successful sports news site *ESPN.com*:

> fully 20% of ESPN.com's audience returns more than 10 times per month. And more than a quarter of visitors (26%) spend more than an hour on the site over the course of the month. That is nearly three times higher than the average percentage of power visitors at the top 25 [U.S.] general interest news sites (7%). (Olmstead *et al.* 2011: 5)

By pursuing the opportunities inherent in liveblogging, then, especially when it addresses pre-existing and well-defined communities of interest and attracts them to the Websites of established news outlets, such outlets may stand a chance to rebuild at least some of the user loyalty that has been lost in the wake of the emergence of social media platforms as widely used conduits for news dissemination. This rebuilding might take place particularly around specific niche topics for which individual news outlets can claim a demonstrably advanced level of expertise. This will not entirely reverse the loss of audiences to social media platforms, however, but instead harnesses these platforms in new ways as conduits to mainstream news sites, and utilises user activities in the tertiary spaces of social media more effectively as sources of content for liveblogged news coverage. In this way liveblogs are situated between the primary spaces of mainstream news proper, the secondary spaces of alternative news media, and the tertiary spaces of social media—and as frontpages decline in importance as primary entry points to news sites, liveblogs balance out this loss at least to some extent.

Finally, then, this brings us full circle to the arrival of news blogs and citizen journalism sites during the first wave of citizen media: these, too, were largely focussed on niche rather than general news topics, and tapped into (and were operated by members of) existing communities of interest. Now, however, the situation is reversed: general-purpose news across all and any imaginable news beats is freely circulating across social media platforms, driven by the habitual newssharing activities of millions of users that have made such everyday news engagement a demotic (if not democratic) process. By contrast, many of the remaining mainstream news outlets—which cannot compete with the volume and variety of general news thus circulated, and which no longer experience sufficient online audience loyalty for their own generic news offerings—are increasingly pushed towards a specialisation on particular news topics and issues for which they have a particular expertise, from thematic to local news beats. This diversification might see only a small number of major outlets, including major wire services such as *Reuters* and major news outlets such as *BBC News*, remain as generic news providers (that possibly *also* cater to niche audiences), while a greater range of other, previously general-purpose outlets reduce their generic coverage and focus on the most successful niche beats (if they are not themselves overtaken by born-digital, born-niche sites). For this latter group, in particular, liveblogs are likely to play an especially important role in building and retaining loyal, returning audiences.

Arguably, such transformative processes are already well underway in the global news industry. The present picture of the overall media ecology is one of reorganisation, diversification, and specialisation, across a wide range of online and offline publishing platforms and journalistic, para-journalistic, and quasi-journalistic practices. In this ecology, individual news outlets, their journalists, and other professional and non-professional participants interact in various constellations of competition and cooperation, and social media provide increasingly crucial services of networking individuals and institutions, disseminating information, and supporting communication. One crucial, pressing question that emerges from this picture, then, is how all of this must affect the process of public debate across what has traditionally been understood as a unified, society-wide public sphere—a question which we address in the following chapter.

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