

Social Media and Journalism:

How the Internet and Social Networking Have Changed Journalism's Workflow

A thesis project of the Department of English.

Gabrielle Levy

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I. Introduction

The crisis of journalism. The death of newspapers. The outlook, as they say, is grim.

Since the explosion of Internet and social media usage, journalists, and the professionals who study the field, have written extensively on what seemed to be the end of a form of journalism that has maintained a familiar format since the invention of the printing press. But in recent years, the discourse has taken on a hopeful timbre, and rather than lamenting the end of the form, began tentatively examining possible solutions, innovations, and celebrating the possible future of re-imagined news creation and delivery.

Social media, rather than heralded as the destructeur of journalism and journalistic integrity, has finally begun to play a substantial role in the daily activities of journalists. This is not only as an effective method of content promotion or a tool to drive traffic to traditional websites, but as a real, relevant or even necessary tool in a journalist's arsenal that has improved her ability to gather information, conduct research, and examine the context of her findings.

A. Question

This thesis examines the strategies employed by reporters, editors, and other news professionals to implement social media as an integral part of their workflow. It will explore journalists' habits and instincts in using the Internet as a resource, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of these tools. Ultimately, the research conducted throughout this study concludes that these tools are instrumental in maintaining the relevance of traditional media, recognizes the importance of integrating new methods with the skilled craft of journalism, and anticipates increased and increasingly successful implementation of social media into the cadre of news organizations.

The question asked is: how have the Internet and the prevalence of social media among Internet users forced reporters, editors, and news organizations to adapt the ways in which they work, in both news gathering and content creation?

Newspapers are struggling to maintain their dominance as the voices of reason in media. Studies show that the Internet and cable television, among all media forms, are experiencing the greatest amount of growth, but neither of these formats engenders widespread confidence in their accuracy, reliability, and depth of reporting. That role still belongs to newspapers – which is why many newspapers have begun to integrate new and social media forms, in conjunction with their traditional output, to bring themselves into the age of the Internet.

B. Literature Review

The academics who study journalism and working journalists (there is a substantial amount of categorical overlap) almost uniformly agree that the changes occurring within the news media industry are both overwhelming and an enormous opportunity for innovation and reinvention. Being as such, a large body of work studying both causes and effects of the so-called "crisis of journalism" has been established in the few years since the Internet became significantly integrated into the fabric of society. The existent literature takes a primarily reactive approach, focusing on problematic practices by journalists, rather than offering substantial explorations of successful innovations. Most of this literature becomes occupied with the reception of news content by consumers – on what platforms or websites they get news, how often, and so on – since that aspect is much easier to quantify. Problematically, a gap exists in academic examinations of the issue of altered journalistic workflow. In other words, plenty of journalism

faculty, most of whom publish content to news organizations (rather than academic papers), offer opinion and essays on the subject, but few have taken a substantive look at relevant trends and outcomes.

Internet culture creates unique challenges to traditional news organizations

A large portion of this writing on the current news media climate consists of non-academic journal articles lamenting the overwhelming volume of information available to the news consumer. Thousands of traditional news websites – counterparts to newspapers, magazines, television channels and programs, or radio – compete for attention with content sharing sites such as YouTube, user-generated (non-journalistic) content including blogs and other forms of personal websites, and the endless other distractions of the Internet. Social networks, led by Facebook and Twitter and social bookmarking sites such as Digg or Delicious, have developed into extremely powerful content-sharing tools that allow users to trade information with their friends – sources they trust. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's sister, Randi Zuckerberg an employee of the social networking giant, said in an interview with Rory O'Connor "people will always want to consume content from experts... but the market has become so oversaturated that it is now just as important to rely on one's friends to filter the news"¹.

But in content production, journalists and the organizations for which they work have been slow to adopt these new forms of communication, and unlike their audience, still primarily operate under the traditional assumptions and "eternal verities" of reporting news. Even those

¹ O'Connor, Rory. "Facebook and Twitter Are Reshaping Journalism As We Know It." *Alternet*. 20 Jan. 2009. Web. 26 Feb. 2010.

who primarily work online "are still influenced by the remnants of past traditions, such as the prioritization of information-gathering and provision orientation and a distrust of the internet as a source of knowledge"². The attachment to older strategies, according to Boczkowski, has been a backwards approach to a changing environment: "newspapers developed online news operations as a reaction to prior moves by new competitors rather than proactively seeking new horizons. They also did so in a way that defended their existing territory rather than conquered new ones. Moreover, their actions were pragmatically centered on making a profit in the short term rather than more idealistically pursuing opportunities that could only pan out in the longer term"³. In hindsight, it seems that these companies' and individuals' resistance to the new technologies and skepticism about the veracity and of content available from the Internet, has been limiting to potential innovation.

Missed opportunities of social media

While the same journalistic principles of accuracy, proportionality and fairness are compatible with the use of social media tools⁴ most journalists and news organizations ignored them and the communities they represented, rather than establishing relationships with readers. "We ignored evidence right in front of us – our own behavior as online users – that the most powerful and persistent driver of Internet usage was the value of connecting with other people"⁵.

As Internet users became increasingly adept at navigating the Web and its rapid growth,

² Michelstein, Eugenia and Pablo J. Boczkowski. "Between Tradition and Change: A review of recent research in online news production." *Journalism* 10 (2009): 562-578.

³ Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 564.

⁴ Overholser, Geneva. "What is Journalism's Place in Social Media?" *Nieman Reports* Fall 2009: 5-6.

⁵ Gordon, Richard. "Social Media: The Ground Shifts." *Nieman Reports* Fall 2009: 7-9.

traditional journalism failed to make much of an attempt to grow and change with it. "The old journalism, with its over-reliance on the same experts and analysts [was] out of touch with a culture of information sharing, connection and the collective wisdom of diverse voices passing along direct experience"⁶. As a result, it is widely agreed, the traditional gatekeepers of news fell quickly behind, resulting in decreased circulation and usage of standard platforms for content distribution.

Shaping factors of new journalism: users demand personalized -- and personalizable -- content

The Internet has reduced the cost of creating and distributing content to almost nothing. Prior to widespread connectivity, the cost of publishing material was prohibitive to the average citizen; the Web, especially free and simple blogging platforms such as Wordpress, Blogger, or LiveJournal, turned everyone into a potential citizen journalist capable of reaching the ears and eyes of anyone, anywhere in the world⁷. Users, who are both producers and consumers of content⁸ are not only capable of, but demand the ability to tailor their online news experience to understand global events while maintaining a desire for quality reporting and reliable information⁹.

Users create content as well as consume it

A commonly used description of the shift in journalist-audience relationship is that the Internet has changed the relative position of journalists to their audiences from "one-to-many" to

⁶ Skoler, Michael. "Why the News Media Became Irrelevant – And How Social Media Can Help." *Nieman Reports* Fall 2009: 38-39.

⁷ Shirkey, Clay. *Here Comes Everybody*. New York: The Penguin Press (2007): 64-66.

⁸ Cerf, Vinton. "An Information Avalanche." *Computer Magazine* Jan. 2007: 104-105.

⁹ Nordenstreng, Kaarle. "A Renaissance on the Horizon!" *Journalism* 10 (2009): 356-357.

"many-to-many"^{10,11}. This kind of collective endeavor, news by the masses, falls into the category of crowdsourcing. Especially as the traditional media struggle to pay their staffs and downsize newsrooms, citizen journalists have emerged ready to fill the void left by those established news organizations who can no longer leverage the kind of widespread coverage readers demand¹².

Users not only demand this kind of information but also insist on adding their voices to the conversation. Newspaper websites gradually opened stories to comments immediately following the text of the articles themselves – a common enough sight now, but initially, a radical move¹³. Unlike the traditional letters-to-the-editor sections of newspapers, which were filtered strenuously through the editorial staff, most online comment boards are unmoderated or at least open, but subject to review. Aside from the professional sites, bloggers can opine unchecked, sourcing articles from the traditional media websites, rarely doing original reporting, but instead aggregating the reporting of others and commenting freely on the news¹⁴.

A shorter news cycle adds new pressures on journalists

The demand for a constant flow of up-to-the-minute information puts a pressure on journalists to publish content more quickly than ever before. Some evidence shows that reporters working on a shortened timeframe are susceptible to misinformation, especially when using the

¹⁰ Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 573.

¹¹ Shirkey 71.

¹² Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 573.

¹³ “The Use of the Internet by America’s Newspapers.” *The Bivings Group* (1 Aug 2006); “American Newspapers and the Internet: Threat or Opportunity?” *The Bivings Group* (19 July 2007); “The Use of the Internet by America’s Newspapers.” *The Bivings Group* (18 Dec 2008).

¹⁴ Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 573.

Internet for quick reporting¹⁵. Additionally, since content can be updated throughout the day (creating, as Klineberg described it, a "news cyclone"¹⁶), competing organizations will often post mimicked material so that they are not seen as behind the story. "Scooping" the story is no longer as important – newsmakers will often break their own news on their Twitter or Facebook pages – but traditional media place heavy emphasis on delivering information to consumers as quickly as possible¹⁷.

Twitter in particular has become a breaking news platform. As it reaches a critical mass of adoption, it becomes increasingly likely that information about news events in progress will first surface on the microblogging tool. This is largely due to Twitter's popularity as a mobile application, meaning that members of the site (or any of the separate platforms through which users can access the service) can instantaneously upload a photo or tweet to the network using their cell phones. The famous example of this was in January 2009, when a US Airways plane landed in the Hudson River in New York. The first coverage of the event, and accompanying photo, were a tweet and an image captured using an iPhone, uploaded to the user Janis Krums's TwitPic account. More than 40 thousand people saw the photo and tweet within four hours, and Krums got credit for breaking the story before rescue boats even arrived (Krums was himself aboard one of the ferries), despite a number of major news networks located practically at the river's edge. In another example, a tweet about an earthquake in California surfaced nine minutes before the Associated Press story hit the newswires¹⁸.

¹⁵ Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 569.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ O'Connor.

Twitter – and the Internet as a whole – has been accused of aiding the quick spread of false information. But Scott Rosenberg points to a larger journalistic mistrust of the Internet stemming from early errors by reporters who failed to verify claims in the ways they might have done offline. Rosenberg also argues that, as fast as the Internet can spread misinformation, it is also that much quicker at debunking rumors¹⁹.

The mistrust of the web held journalism back from innovation

Even as individual journalists have become more tech and Web savvy with the rest of the population, newsrooms and news organizations are still stuck with mistrust of the Internet in their institutional memories. Past mistakes did nothing to encourage innovation and adaptation; in other cases, a desire to maintain certain qualities of so-called journalistic integrity kept large news organizations from assimilating with Internet culture. "Newsroom traditions of impersonality and aspirations to objectivity mean that most newspaper bylines remain opaque in comparison with the full profiles we have for our favorite bloggers. Newsroom culture remains committed to delivering a finished product to readers, so the Wikipedia-style "discussion" and "history" pages aren't an option"²⁰. The hallmark of traditional journalism online has been that it was by in large, left behind.

¹⁹ Rosenberg, Scott. "Closing the Credibility Gap." *Nieman Reports* Fall 2009: 44-46.

²⁰ Every Wikipedia entry is editable by any registered Wikipedia user. Not only does this make the crowdsourced encyclopedia self-correcting (and thus more accurate), but since each page also includes a "History" tab [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edit_history], anyone can check the validity of the changes made (Ibid. 46).

Journalism is not dying.

Considering the dire state of traditional news organizations' finances, journalists are remarkably optimistic about the future of the profession. Overall, the literature agrees that the work done by journalists (by which they refer to professionals, trained in the craft and ethics of in-depth, investigative reporting) is necessary to maintain the balance of society.

Journalists are using the Internet as a newsgathering tool

Even if journalists have shown some resistance to using – and trusting – the Internet in their work, as early as 1999, 92 percent of American journalists surveyed were already gathering news online (as news consumers). But in the United Kingdom, a third of journalists in 2000 said they had no access to the Internet, and "the idea that journalists spent their time surfing the Internet 'looking for story ideas' was laughed at by more than one journalist"²¹. Yet as journalists began to become regular users of the Internet themselves, they neglected to implement these tools into their professional lives. Rich Gordon, the Director of Digital Innovation and an associate professor at the Medill School of Journalism, noted that journalists "didn't think that cultivating community or moderating discussions were appropriate or necessary roles for a journalist. And [journalists] ignored evidence right in front of us—our own behavior as online users—that the most powerful and persistent driver of Internet usage was the value of connecting with other people"²².

Twitter has gotten the most attention, as a tool specifically useful to journalists. Early in

²¹ Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 568.

²² Gordon 7.

its existence, established news organizations did realize and take advantage of some of the information Twitter's trend-tracking programs provided; according to Twitter founder Biz Stone, Reuters began watching trends and noticed that they were a good indicator of news interest; CNN acknowledged using Twitter to access information and find and create stories²³.

Challenges to journalist's traditional role as "gatekeepers" of news

Since a landmark study in 1949, gatekeeping has been the most prominent indicator of the journalist's occupational jurisdiction – the role of the news professional is to gather, prioritize, and then contextualize the flow of information to consumers. But as content online becomes increasingly user-generated, journalists are under pressure to reexamine this role. Some members of the media participated instead in "gate opening" – fostering user participation – rather than content selection, to a degree of success²⁴.

But even as bloggers gain significant attention from the online audience, research has shown that they and other citizen journalists rely heavily on the traditional shoe-leather (or otherwise) journalism of the news professional. An overview of blog content shows that "not only do few weblogs engage in any independent news reporting, most weblog writers cover the same topics as mainstream news media and, perhaps more significantly, rely on them for information about these topics"²⁵. Blogs tend to lean toward commentary over content, but most often function as personal journals rather than news sources. Mitchelstein and Boczkowski interpret their findings to suggest that since "citizen reporters have limited access to news

²³ O'Connor.

²⁴ Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 571.

²⁵ Ibid. 573.

sources and thus, 'are hampered by a set of undeniable weaknesses', and that the organization of production is the most fundamental distinction between journalism and blogging, differences in content, work process, tone, values, and format are symptoms of this underlying structural difference"²⁶. Social media sites, too, and their members, rely as heavily on news coverage from mainstream media organizations, and with the exception of the occasional breaking story, serve best as pointers for relevancy²⁷.

Prescriptions for journalism's future

Several theories recur throughout this literature that indicate the strongest strategies for journalism to regain its dominant position as trusted provider of media.

Journalists need to be literate in all forms of content production

A journalist's time and energy now must be split between longstanding workflows and novel demands: online news has increased the pressure on journalists to carry out multiple tasks and combine newsgathering and story-telling techniques across media formats. The Web's multimedia potential, especially the integration of high-quality audio and visual capabilities, requires journalists to rethink the most effective methods of storytelling²⁸.

Content comes in many forms; context, aggregation and quality are crucial

Users now expect their news to come in a variety of forms, be delivered on multiple

²⁶ Ibid. 574.

²⁷ Skoler 39.

²⁸ Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 568.

platforms, and include additional resources that allow them to tailor their online news experience to their exact needs and preferences. Consumers regularly rely on mobile device browsers and applications to access news wherever they are, so media companies must provide content for use on cell phones or readers such as the newly introduced iPad. They expect to share and receive shared stories from peers on their social networks, sort news using RSS feeds or blog readers, embed images and video into their own blogs and add commentary, and easily access related information about any item of news²⁹.

In addition to the user experience, and likely more important, will be the quality, depth, and variety of content. Organizations that see success will be those that "invest in making their brands synonymous with quality in the globalized information marketplace"³⁰.

Gaps in Existent Literature

Despite all this, despite the many prescriptions and suggestions, few if any of these reports take an in-depth look at what journalists do on a daily basis, how this has changed, and what impact those changes have had not only on the journalist herself, but on the news organization as a whole. This study will examine exactly that, by looking at the larger picture – newspapers struggling to adjust to an Internet-saturated media market – and specifically placing it within the context of the individual journalist and newsroom.

²⁹ Overholser 6.

³⁰ McNair, Brian. "Journalism in the 21st Century – evolution, not extinction." *Journalism* 10 (2009): 347-349.

C. Methodology

The methodology involved in the research of this paper is threefold: first, the author has gained a significant practical familiarity with the Internet and social media tools through both personal and professional usage, as an intern and a member of the Web team of a public radio station's website; second, through scholarly research of articles, essays, and studies published in recent years on the topic of the use of social media in journalism (discussed in Section I.B); and third, through conversations with working reporters, editors, and other staff of operating news organizations who use and implement social media tools as part of their publication strategy.

Each of these three approaches contributes to a well-rounded understanding of the issues facing journalistic practice today. Of the first, a working knowledge of tools such as Twitter, YouTube, and blog systems like Wordpress is essential to understanding their purpose in a journalistic setting (see Section III for specific descriptions of the tools). While their use will be detailed more fully in the body of this paper, it is important to note that these tools are each utilized as networking tools (between journalist and journalist, between journalist and reader, between reader and reader), as knowledge-sharing platforms, as content-promotion tools (from news organization or journalist to reader), and as content-sharing tools (from reader to reader). The articles and studies published in scholarly journals tend to be written not by academics, but by working members of the press, who also happen to study the field for which they work. Journalism, by its nature, is not an academic field, however analysis such as that outlined by this paper and the studies it sources are critical to a deeper understanding of the problems facing the industry and the ways in which it can best overcome those problems. Similarly, speaking to active reporters and editors, who work with the tools in question every day, is essential to

accessing the latest, most accurate, and most practical information about how the tools are best being used and areas in which they could better be utilized.

Terms defined

“Consumer”, “Reader” and “Audience”

Scholars and researchers writing on media that span text, audio, and visual platforms struggle with a way to define and address the members of the audience. This paper may simply refer to all "consumers" of any type of media. It may also use "readers" to mean the general audience, unless speaking specifically about television ("viewers") or radio ("listeners"), not limited to one format or another without specific differentiation.

“Social Media”

Broadly, social media are primarily Internet- and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information among human beings. These media include blogs and online citizen journalism, social networking sites, and social bookmarking and news aggregators. All of these platforms place the process of information dissemination into the hands of people who may or may not write or report professionally. The Cision survey defines: "Social media is defined as blogs, social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, microblogging sites such as Twitter, photo/video sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr, and review sites or web discussion forums such as eopinions.com."³¹ Essentially, social networks are tools by which individuals and groups can gather through shared interests and ideas, and journalists and news organizations can tap into

³¹ 2009 *Social Media & Online Usage Study*. George Washington and Cision, December 2009.

these networks by using them to target their promotional behaviors towards groups that have already expressed interest in what that organization offers.

“Citizen Journalism”

"Citizen journalism" and "citizen journalist" are terms used to distinguish professional, paid members of the media from individuals who post user-created content -- text, photos, video, links to traditional media sites -- on the web for publication. This distinction has grown increasingly difficult to pinpoint, as online platforms such as blogging software and YouTube allow so-called citizen journalists to reach an audience as large or occasionally larger than similar content published by a member of the traditional press. For example, is a blogger, whose blog is supported by advertising, considered a journalist because his site has an income? Is a reporter, employed by the *Los Angeles Times*, still acting as a reporter if she writes on a personal blog set up on a free account at Wordpress, or posts on Twitter? These are questions that communication scholars struggle to answer.

Restrictions on the study

In researching this subject, I have intentionally left out the examination of freelance workers and independent bloggers in favor of focusing on members of established news organizations.

Independent journalists work under a very different set of economic realities, in that their reporting lacks locational permanence and have a number of additional concerns that effect their methods and motivations - essentially financial - that would unreasonably expand the scope of this examination. Additionally, I have carefully kept the examination narrow and focused on

specifically journalists' workflow, although I have attempted to make clear when other issues are relevant.

D. Sources

1. The *New York Times*

- a. Terry Schwadron, Editor, Information and Technology
- b. Barbara Gray, Director of News Research

2. The *Los Angeles Times*

- a. Jerry Hirsch, Staff Writer, Food Business, Automotive
- b. Michael Hiltzik, Business Columnist

3. Jeremy Caplan, *TIME Magazine*, freelance journalist, Columbia University fellow and CUNY Journalism faculty

II. Context: The Genesis of the Interactive Web and Social Media

Social media's intersection with journalism has roots that extend far back into the early days of print media. Thus, to understand the value of its position today, one must examine its past for context. After all, is positioning Associated Press (first founded in 1846) reporters around the world *so* different than unaffiliated individuals, who happen to live near the location of breaking news, sending in their local images and text messages to CNN's I-Report citizen journalism initiative (launched in 2006, and online in 2008)? Both AP reporter, embedded at a certain location, and citizen journalist, are ideally suited to find and break local stories quickly and accurately.

What is now known as the Internet had its origins in technologies called videotex and teletext, which were computerized, interactive systems that used a telephone, a modified television, and a keyboard. First tested by the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) in 1969, videotex, while ultimately unsuccessful, was a first step towards realizing interactive computing technologies³². Computers, which were extremely new and often unwieldy, first began to be integrated into newsrooms in the early 1970s – an AP story transmitted in 1970 from a computer terminal in Columbia, SC to another computer in Atlanta, GA was reportedly the first use of a computer for this purpose – and became increasingly used for newspaper productions throughout the decade. By 1973, the AP began to develop electronic darkrooms, which sped up the processing of photos to match the increasingly streamlined production of text.

Newspapers' next step was to establish databases of their full archives, made available to the public for the first time by the Toronto *Globe and Mail* with its "Info-Globe" in 1977. The *New York Times* followed shortly, in 1980, with Infobank database system. This step was of critical importance: the kind of informed commentary provided by the social media tools to come rely on access to as much historical information as possible, which before these archives made this information publicly-available, were much more difficult for investigative journalists to obtain.

Meanwhile, the first interactive media services began to surface. In 1977, Warner Communications introduced a cable television system, called QUBE, in Columbus, OH in which viewers could provide instantaneous feedback to what they were watching. And in 1978, a service called The Source (or, Source Telecomputing Corporation) went online, available to the

³² Shedden, David. "New Media Timeline (1969-2010)." *PoynterOnline*. 15 Mar. 2010.

general public, that provided news, stock quotes, weather and hosted a computer conferencing tool called PARTICIPATE. Additionally, British Telecom introduced a crude form of email, using videotex technology, in 1981.

In 1980, eleven AP newspapers became the first to go online – in a partnership with dial-up service CompuServe – starting with the *Dispatch* of Columbus, OH, on July 1. Although the AP and CompuServe ended their exclusive partnership only two years later, by 1985, fifty newspapers had established full-text databases of their stories, and by 1995, more than sixty newspapers in North America had launched their own websites. And in 1986, the *Hamilton Spectator* in Ontario, Canada launched its Bulletin Board System (BBS) site, called CompuSpec, which operated as a message board online. Four years later, the *Albuquerque Tribune* launched the first multi-line PC-based electronic newspaper system using a more complex version of BBS software. Still, it was a far cry from the elegant websites of today³³.

An online service, first developed in 1985 and would become America On Line (AOL) in 1991, began both electronic mail and instant messaging in 1991. AOL began as an online gaming system, but would ultimately reshape the way Internet users interact on the Internet. At its peak, AOL had as many as 30 million members world wide, it's popularity greatly due to its simplicity (whereas its predecessors were aimed at tech-literate users)³⁴. And in 1992, a dial-up service called Delphi offered full access to the Internet.

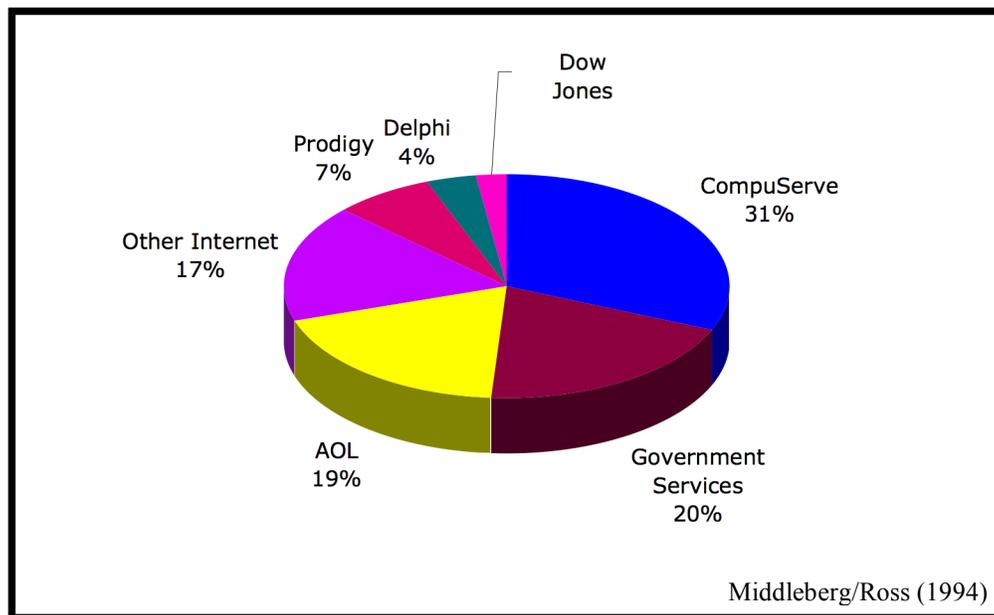
³³ Carlson, David. "The Online Timeline." *David Carlson's Virtual World*. 2009. Web.

³⁴ "AOL Timeline." *AOL Corporate*. 2010. Web. 18 Mar. 2010.



The Electronic Trib, first multi-line, PC-based electronic newspaper system, is launched by *The Albuquerque Tribune* using BBS software and a 286-12 PC.

The online services used by reporters in 1994³⁵:



³⁵ Middleberg, Don and Steve Ross. "Survey of Media in the Wired World." Middleberg Euro RSCG and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. 1994.

Mid-decade, the Internet grew rapidly, and with it, the number of newspapers with online components. According to the Newspaper Association of America, there were 230 newspapers with websites in 1996, up from 60 just the year before.

In 1996, a Stanford University student named Larry Page decided to rethink the way Internet search engines ranked their findings. Until that point, the existing engines listed web pages and documents by counting the relevant search terms. But Page, and his eventual partner Sergey Brin, figured that by building an algorithm that would rank sites by identifying the number and relevance of the pages that linked back to them (the more links leading to a page, the more important it was) they could get more relevant results. They called this system BackRub, referencing its use of back-links, and set it loose from the Stanford servers. They found that PageRank got more effective as the Internet grew, and adapting it into a working search engine, in 1997, they gave it the name that has come to dominate the Web: Google³⁶.



A screenshot of Google! in 1998.

³⁶ Battelle, John. "The Birth of Google." *Wired* 13.08 (2005).

By 1997, the World Wide Web had become substantially more accessible to individuals in their homes. Weblogs – or "blogs" as the more commonly referred, doubled in number over a year. Jorn Barger coined the term "weblog" on his site Robot Wisdom, a page he used to share personal opinions with an online audience³⁷. But it was in 1998, when a political blog maintained by Matt Drudge, *The Drudge Report*, broke the story of President Clinton's alleged affair with White House intern Monica Lewinski, that marked the first time that a major news story appeared first online.

This kind of breaking news trajectory would continue to occur more and more often as the Web grew larger, gained more users, and subsequently their trust: a survey by Jupiter Communications in November 1998 reported that more than 80 percent of U.S. online consumers trusted online news as much as they trusted traditional forms of media; a December report from the Pew Center stated that the number of people getting news online grew significantly³⁸.

The year 1999 brought several technological breakthroughs that made the Internet even more user-friendly: blogger and online innovator Dave Winer wrote the program for the first RSS ("Really Simple Syndication") news aggregator, which are then collected into a reader program for easy access, and Blogger, a free blogging tool based on simple, clean templates, which was acquired by Google in 2003³⁹. The final year of the millennium also saw over 2,200 radio stations broadcasting online, and more than 950 daily newspapers in North America with websites.

³⁷ Barger, Jorn. "Weblog Resources FAQ." *RobotWisdom.com*. 1997.

³⁸ People getting news online grew from 4 percent in 1995 to between 15% to 26% in 1998; 74 million Internet users in the United States alone (of 270 million*, or approximately 31% of the population) ("The Internet Audience Goes Ordinary." *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*. 14 Jan. 1999. *source US Census Bureau)

³⁹ Glaser, Mark. "Online News Pioneers See Lots of Changes in the First 10 Years." *USC Annenberg Online Journalism Review*. 9 Sept. 2003.

By 2000, digital media began to gain a real foothold – digital photography became the format of choice for press photographers at the Summer Olympics in Sydney, and an Annenberg Public Policy survey reported more families subscribing to Internet services than to traditional newspapers. Additionally, traditional newspaper websites increased to over 1,200, up from 950 in just one year, and beginning in 2001, newspapers began offering wireless content for PDAs. At this time, the first signs appeared that Internet and digital forms of news dissemination would pose a problem to the traditional media, as evidenced by a constriction of several newspapers' technology sections, due to a shortage of advertising funds⁴⁰.

The attacks on September 11, 2001, by far the biggest national story to break since the Internet became a mainstream tool, presented a new testing ground for online media. In the days following the event, news websites stripped ads from their home pages, collaborated on content, and dropped paywalls to relevant information, but perhaps most importantly, saw reporting by citizen journalists appear on the websites of large media companies⁴¹.

When *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl was kidnapped in Pakistan in January, 2002, the video of his decapitation circulated online, becoming one of the first instances of a news video to “go viral”. And when the space shuttle *Columbia* disintegrated as it attempted to land in February 2003, the *Dallas Morning News* put out a call to its readers for eyewitness photos and accounts. Confirming the growing importance of citizen journalists, for the first time, bloggers received press passes to both the Democratic and Republican conventions during the election campaign of 2004. Later that year, bloggers would discover discrepancies in documents examined

⁴⁰ Carlson.

⁴¹ Outing, Steve. “Crisis Notes from the Online Media.” *PoynterOnline*. 12 Sept. 2001.

on a *60 Minutes* report about President George W. Bush's National Guard service, and the resulting controversy led to anchor Dan Rather's early retirement.

Recognizing the permanence of blogs, citizen reporting, and "podcasts" (a term first used in 2004⁴²), traditional media began to integrate these emerging tools into regular reporting. A number of newspapers began regular podcasts to attract readers⁴³, and NBC anchor Brian Williams debuted his own blog, *The Daily Nightly*, in 2005. In 2006, CNN introduced its I-Report citizen journalism video initiative, calling for breaking news video from its viewers, a program that was given its own website in 2008. Also in 2006, the new programs *CBS News With Katie Couric*, *ABC World News* and *NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams* each begin streaming either live or delayed versions of the televised content online, available on the networks' websites.

In 2005 and 2006, the Pew Internet and American Life Project released two studies, one that credited a rise in the number of home broadband connections with a notable increase in American Internet users, especially those who use the Web to get news, and another that showed news consumers willing to register to a news site, but not willing to pay for content online. The findings of these studies highlight the problems bemoaned by the industry: the news consumer still demands quality, in-depth reporting, but won't dig into his pockets to support it financially.

In recent years, politicians especially have recognized the power of the Internet and have begun to explore its implications for political campaigns. In 2007, CNN and YouTube worked together to produce a joint candidates debate prior to the 2008 Presidential election, in which

⁴² Dooley, Patricia L. *The Technology of Journalism*. Evanston, Northwestern University Press (2007): 52.

⁴³ Kesmodel, David. "Papers Turn to 'Podcasting' In Bid to Draw More Readers." *Wall Street Journal Online*. 13 May 2005.

citizens could upload questions for presidential hopefuls on the video-sharing site. Social networks paid rapt attention to the campaigns as the election season progressed, and a new political journalism site, PolitiFact, won a 2009 Pulitzer Prize for its fact-checking during the campaigns. ABC News and Facebook became the next traditional organization and social media platform to team up to produce a presidential debate, for the 2008 New Hampshire face-off. President Barack Obama is widely credited with leading an innovative Internet-based campaign that helped him to win the November elections, primarily by using social networking sites Facebook and YouTube to personally engage his voters on an unprecedented level and inspire them to volunteer for canvassing, phone calls, and campaign materials distributions.

America's top one hundred newspapers, according to two separate Bivings Group reports, continued to add interactive and social media components to their sites⁴⁴. Coverage of major news events regularly begins in social networking sites, such as when bloggers became the sole source of news when journalists were unable to enter Burma after a deadly military crackdown in 2007, or in November 2008, when traditional media relied on Facebook, Flickr, and Twitter to gather information about the terrorist attacks in Mumbai.

Examples are numerous -- NBC journalist Tim Russert's death posted first on Wikipedia (June 2008), a photo posted on Twitter of the U.S. Airways plane crashed in the Hudson River (January 2009), the news of Michael Jackson's death posted on the gossip site TMZ and spread

⁴⁴ Of the top 100 American newspapers, 80% offer reporter blogs, 76% offer RSS feeds, and 61% offer video, the most common form of multimedia (Bivings 2006). One-third allow comments on articles in 2007 -- up from just 19% in 2006 -- and 29% require registration to access content, a number that decreased to 11% in 2008 (Bivings 2007). By 2008, 58% published user-generated photos, 18% accepted user videos, and 15% user articles, whereas only 24% of newspapers accepted any kind of user-generated content. Integration of social bookmarking sites, like Digg and Del.icio.us increased from 7% in 2006 to a remarkable 92% in 2008 (Bivings 2008)

on Twitter (June 2009) -- suggesting that traditional media has been left behind, at least in terms of quick-fire reporting, by the social media sphere.

And this development is not without a cost: in March of 2009, the *Christian Science Monitor* ceased producing a print edition to go purely online. While certainly a recognition of the trends in news publishing, the shuttering of the presses at *CSM* was a result of decreased



(Previous page: photo sent by Janis Krums on January 15, 2009; below, his original tweet.)



circulation and lack of advertising – a decision made with one eye on the bottom line. But traditional journalism is finding a way to earn accolades as it transforms into an online-capable industry: in 2009, the *St. Petersburg Times* won a Pulitzer Prize for its Politifact Website during the 2008 presidential election -- the first time online-only pieces were included in Pulitzer recognition.

As 2010 progresses, social media has become increasingly legitimized – one poll reported six in ten Americans getting the news online daily, and the Library of Congress announced April 14 that it would begin to archive the collective works of Twitter⁴⁵.

III. Findings and Results

In examining the ways in which journalists and editors employ social media tools to aid in reporting, content creation and distribution of news, this report will first overview some of the crucially related general uses of the Internet in these practices, the shifting culture of newsrooms

⁴⁵ “Online.” *The State of the News Media*. Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Pew Internet and American Life Project. 2010.

as a result of cuts and new pressures on the remaining staff, and the extent to which the Internet, as a mechanism for interactivity with the audience, has shaped news production.

Using the World Wide Web as a resource

In 2008, a Pew Research Center for the People & the Press study unearthed a remarkable moment in news consumerism history. For the first time ever, more people surveyed said they got their news primarily from the Internet, rather than newspapers, at 40 percent, up 25 percent from 2007⁴⁶.

Not that newspapers had missed the signs - Bruce Garrison's 2001 survey found 92% of journalists themselves using the internet as a source of news. Today's journalists regularly turn to the Internet as a source of preliminary information, to access data, locate sources – its usefulness, while not universal, seems limitless. Anecdotally, people, especially those who have grown up with the Internet as a regular part of their lives, have grown accustomed to using it to find out just about anything they want to know – it becomes the first step in any kind of research, formal or otherwise, and almost prohibitively so.

As a tool for journalistic research, the Internet makes the process faster, simpler, and more cost effective. *Los Angeles Times* business columnist Michael Hiltzik pointed out the ease of scanning through large amounts of information, starting with other newspapers, as one of the greatest timesavers. "I can mine newspapers all over the state or country for column ideas; as recently as two or three years ago, I had to subscribe, and of course the papers would pile up,

⁴⁶ *Internet Overtakes Newspapers as News Outlet*. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. 23 Dec. 2008.

unread. Now I can scan almost every newspaper in California on a daily basis through a single website”⁴⁷.

So much information is literally "at the fingertips" of any journalist with a connection to the Web that the culture has shifted in favor of accessibility and transparency and "an agency or company that doesn't put most of its important public papers online is rightfully seen as hiding something. To force any member of the public to wait for a paper copy of a public document is now widely considered a sin." Hiltzik adds that, with the Internet, reporting on public institutions is immeasurably faster, as the expense and days spent waiting for public documents to arrive by mail from the Securities and Exchange Commission is now free and nearly instantaneous⁴⁸.

Jeremy Caplan, a New York-based contributor to *TIME Magazine*, agrees with Hiltzik: previously, information might have been difficult to access, whereas now, so much material is available online that "rather than having to go down and spend hours going through documents in some library, or flying to another city to comb through police records"⁴⁹, it can be downloaded from public records in a matter of seconds.

Los Angeles Times staff writer Jerry Hirsch credits the Internet with the ability to locate people and companies, but warns that such information is not moderated and not necessarily accurate. "[The Internet] has a great reservoir of information from reliable sources and has far more bad information. So you have to learn how to sort that all out"⁵⁰. Terry Schwadron, the

⁴⁷ Hiltzik, Michael. Personal interview. 25 Mar. 2010.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Caplan, Jeremy. Personal interview. 26 Apr. 2010.

⁵⁰ Hirsch, Jerry. Personal interview. 2 Mar. 2010.

Editor of Information and Technology at the *New York Times* used the example of former New York governor Eliot Spitzer and the "Client 9" scandal that drove him from office: members of the *Times* were only able to locate Ashley Alexandra Dupré, the young woman involved in the affair with the governor, using Internet searches and ultimately locating Dupré on the social network Myspace. Essentially, the Internet has created an environment in which any information can likely be tracked down by anyone with Internet search skills⁵¹.

The Internet as a communication tool

Reporters now use email – digital communication – to conduct research and interviews. "Although most reporters still rely on personal interviews and observations, they also often use the Internet for material when meeting deadlines, working on weekends, or doing follow-up work, including fact checking," writes Rutgers Professor John V. Pavlik⁵². Many journalists eye this kind of information gathering with skepticism, but especially with smaller newsroom staffs and pressure to turn over more content in a shorter time means that research must be conducted with absolute efficiency.

Pavlik warns against replacing phone or in-person interviews solely with email⁵³, but email and Skype, the video- or voice-over-internet software, are not only efficient but cheap (or free) and often make difficult communication, such as that with busy sources, or sources living in a different time zone or country possible.

Hirsch, anecdotally, points out another, perhaps unexpected benefit of this kind of

⁵¹ Schwadron, Terry. Personal interview. 4 Apr. 2010.

⁵² Pavlik, John V. *Media in the Digital Age*. New York, Columbia University Press (2008): 77.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 90.

communication: recently, he said, "I was sick and had absolutely no voice. I reported and wrote an entire story based on interviews conducted through IM and Email. I would not have been able to do that otherwise"⁵⁴. This kind of reporting would have been impossible – or would have taken days or weeks if conducted by letter – before email.

Changes in newsroom culture

The newspaper industry's ongoing struggle has been well documented: circulation is almost universally down, newsrooms are downsizing staff, and those who are allowed to stay face pay cuts, longer hours, and larger workloads.

Hirsch blames the changes in his daily responsibilities on a much smaller staff expected to cover the same number of stories. "[The *Los Angeles Times* has] cut more than half of our news positions, so that I have to cover more. When I first started writing about food issues maybe six years ago, I only covered agriculture and some food safety. But then we laid off our restaurant reporter, so that industry was added to my beat. A couple of years later, supermarkets were added in another cutback. So I actually had a beat that three people covered previously. As of [January 2010] I switched to auto industry news. We had two people doing that, but we are condensing that to just me over the next eight months or so." Fewer reporters means having to produce more stories each, and Hirsch says his job is now "much more like a wire service reporter. I am expected to file stories very quickly, often in 60 minutes or less... My workday has become very compressed. I am expected to work at a much faster pace"⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ Hirsch.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

These reporters have adapted to greater responsibilities in a number of ways: by reducing attention to each story, making the reporting process more efficient, and by "multiskilling". A 2008 nationwide survey of newspaper executives, "editors lamented the attendant loss of time to organize a thoughtful attack on a story, to think through precisely why a story is being done or how to make the story more meaningful. 'There is a huge pressure to rush to publish,' one editor added in a comment on the survey". Yet, "a plurality (43%) of responding editors thinks 'web technology offers the potential for greater-than-ever journalism and will be the savior of what we once thought of as newspaper newsrooms'"⁵⁶.

Barbara Gray, the *New York Times* Director of News Research, pointed out that a recent round of layoffs at ABC highlighted a priority on staff that had a wide range of skills. "People are going to have to be everything now," she said, though noted that the *New York Times* has a staff that includes a number of specialists, including approximately twenty videographers⁵⁷.

Not all newsroom staff are adopting the responsibility of creating multimedia content, and not all that are taking on additional roles find them a comfortable fit. Hirsch says he so far hasn't used either a still or video camera as part of his reporting, but his coworkers do, and he feels he ought to do so⁵⁸. In the newsroom at (NPR radio affiliate) WBUR, the Executive Editor of New Media John Davidow encourages the radio staff to take camera equipment with them whenever possible, or alternately, to bring a producer along to capture visual content as well as audio.

Schwadron says that the *New York Times* has yet to institutionalize encouraging its reporting staff to add visual elements to its stories, but that some individuals have taken it upon

⁵⁶ *The Changing Newsroom*. Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism. 21 Jul 2008.

⁵⁷ Gray, Barbara. Personal interview. 24 Mar 2010.

⁵⁸ Hirsch.

themselves to do so. "Reporters are the easiest group to make changes – more resistant to adaptations are the editors. Now they are responsible for reports going on the web and in the paper, but they want to know, how do they run a correction in video? How do they run a second edition? Their world has been turned upside down and they're expected to integrate their skills into new media"⁵⁹.

Video in particular is of increasing priority, but consumers, and thus editors demand captivating photography and smart graphics to accompany any published story. News organizations have particularly reached out to their audiences for "user created content", specifically photos and video, to accompany the professionally generated stories. In 2006 and 2007, respectively, *Yahoo! News* and Reuters.com began collecting and posting citizen video as part of their own services, with Reuters going so far as to distribute user-generated content to its wire service clients⁶⁰.

The focus on creating and hosting additional forms of content, intended to be consumed by users on computers or on mobile devices (cell phones, wireless readers, or netbooks), is indicative of a new mindset in journalism, highlighted by a comment made by Kevin McGeever, the City Editor at Tampabay.com (the online component of the *St. Petersburg Times* in Florida). "We [now] think of ourselves more as a journalism company than a newspaper company," he said⁶¹. Such changes are the result of both the demand by the consumers and the necessity for staff to own a broad skill set and act in a number of content-generating roles.

⁵⁹ Schwadron.

⁶⁰ Pavlik 81.

⁶¹ Ibid. 86.

Interactivity with readers

The Internet has facilitated simple methods for immediate feedback from the audience and communication between journalist and audience. Most journalists -- at least those regularly employed by a major media organization -- own an email account on the company server (for example, glevy@nytimes.com, should this aspiring journalist ever be so fortunate), which is publicly available either on a dedicated biography page or in a staff directory. Gray explains that, as part of their online and social media strategy, the *New York Times* asks reporters to give up anonymity, have a presence on the web⁶². Part of that presence includes an accessible email address.

Reporters vary in their commitment to responding to reader emails: some treat these emails very much like traditional letters to the editor (only directly to the reporter, and private), while others attempt to respond to each. Hiltzik finds that his interactions with readers via email are far more valuable than responses left on the unmoderated comment boards on every *LA Times* column⁶³. Hirsch similarly interacts with readers using email, estimating that these conversations occur almost every day⁶⁴.

Reporting using email, while many journalists still prefer in-person interviews, can be very useful, allowing for scheduling flexibility, accuracy in detail and error prevention. Additionally, a reporter can easily send portions of in-progress stories to verify appropriate use of the source's information.

⁶² Gray.

⁶³ Hiltzik.

⁶⁴ Hirsch.

A mystery called "social media"

Journalists are conflicted on how – and whether – to use social media tools in their work. "They are concerned about [social media] taking over a big piece of their life," said Gray, who trained as a professional researcher, and spends much of her time learning how to maximize social media platforms. "Social media is invading everything; it's part of the way people live now. I have to know what's going on on social media sites so I can make sure that [journalists at the *New York Times*] are up to speed using them, using them optimally to get information, to do reporting, to interact and engage people."

"People want to engage and participate"⁶⁵.

A George Washington University/Cision report in late 2009 found that more than half -- 56 percent – of journalists now consider social media "important" or "somewhat important" to the stories they write⁶⁶. But skeptics, like Hiltzik wonder at its true value: "Thus far, it seems mostly to be used as a publicity tool. I'd bet nearly half the people following me on Twitter are public relations firms, following me with the hope of pitching me a story⁶⁷."

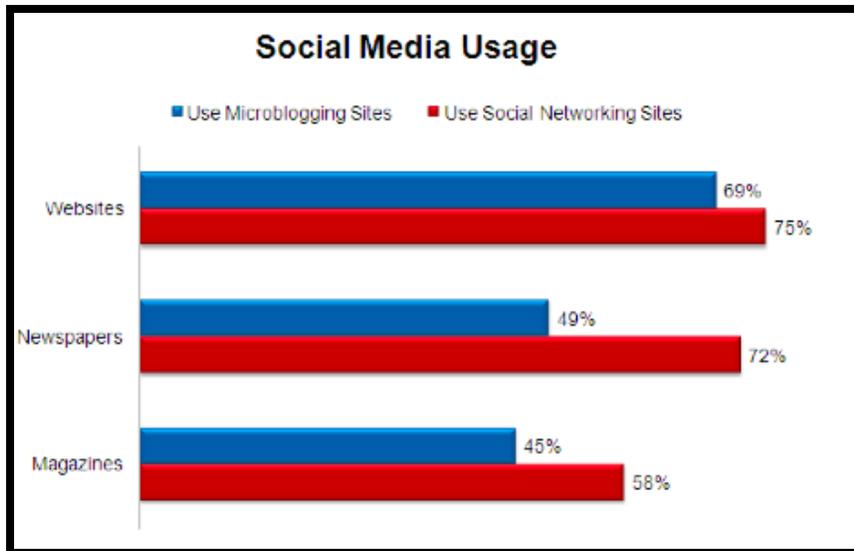
And Information and Technology Editor Terry Schwadron emphasizes that, despite the pervasiveness of social media online, "It's way too early to go out and measure this as a substantial method of change, or of doing reporting." But, he said, "It could play a part"⁶⁸.

⁶⁵ Gray.

⁶⁶ This number is higher (69%) for those journalists who write primarily for websites, rather than magazines (48%). Eighty-nine percent of journalists report using blogs for research; 96% say that count on corporate websites. Seventy-two and 75% of newspaper and website journalists respectively report using social networking tools, over 58% at magazines (Cision 2009).

⁶⁷ Hiltzik.

⁶⁸ Schwadron.



Most journalists – 56% - said social media was important or somewhat important for reporting and producing the stories they wrote.

Hirsch delineates the uses of social media into three categories: story tips and ideas, sourcing, and content promotion. For the first, reporters can often use social media platforms to identify trends, catch breaking news, and discover stories as they begin to generate public interest. But as reporters turn to the internet to seek out stories and issues of collective interest, it is conceivable that segments of the population who are less likely to be online – the elderly, non-English speakers or immigrants, and the poor – are underrepresented because they have limited or no access to the internet and by extension, social networks.

Jeremy Caplan explains that this kind of limited-demographic scope has been brought to the attention of major publications in the past⁶⁹. While the Internet has by in large reduced

⁶⁹ In the 1990s, concerns arose that, as so many major newspapers and magazines were based in midtown Manhattan, in New York City, stories relating to a massive portion of America, particularly in Midwestern or southern parts of the country, were drastically underrepresented in national publications. He used the example of NASCAR -- despite widespread popularity, the sport got little attention in most national papers because its epicenter was so far geographically removed from New York (Caplan).

geographical constraints, age and economic status are still likely underrepresented⁷⁰.

When seeking sources, journalists now have available to them massive information resources on people that, prior to social networks, were nonexistent. Gray puts it simply: "You can find out a lot about a person by their Internet presence, and use it to gather information that [once was] much more difficult to find"⁷¹. Journalists can use social media both actively and passively to find sources for specific stories. One method is to search for profiles of users who talk about subjects related to the story, name themselves as experts or enthusiasts in a particular field, or have joined groups or lists to identify potential sources. Another, though only useful if the reporter's or news organization's profile has a large enough following, is to post, tweet, or otherwise indicate the need for people to volunteer to talk about their relationship to a story topic. This, of course, is hardly a new way to gather information – turn on any news radio station or television channel to hear calls for listeners and viewers to share their related experiences – only with social media, it is possible to put out such requests while the story is still in progress.

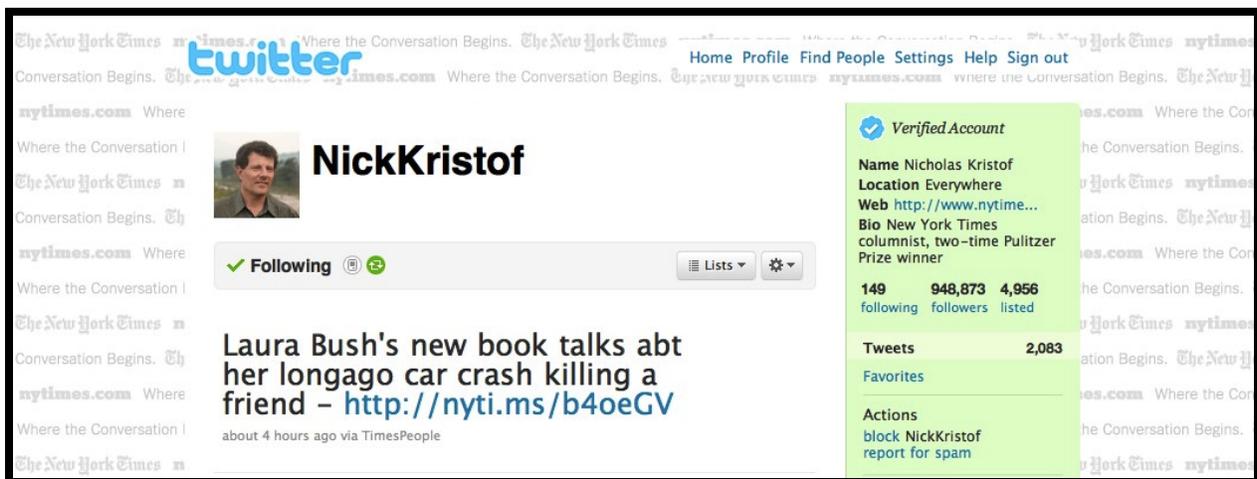
Finally, content promotion is likely the most visible of uses for social media is in content promotion: reporters and news services look to Twitter and Facebook to alert fans and followers of breaking news, featured articles, and are generally used to drive traffic to the main website.

Like sourcing, this is only particularly useful if the account has a significant following: these sites are so busy, with so much content added all the time, that a post might easily be missed.

⁷⁰This, however, is extremely complicated to quantify, especially as it relates to story conception: these demographic groups' participation in social media would need to be compared to journalists' use of those same tools to find stories, but even then, the results could only be speculative

⁷¹ Gray.

New York Times columnist Nick Kristof is one of the most successful adaptors of social media -- almost 160,000 users have "liked" his Facebook page (Facebook no longer uses "become a fan"), and nearly a million people follow him on Twitter. He regularly posts tweets or updates his Facebook from remote locations as he travels the globe, often posing questions to his followers. Ta-Nehisi Coates, a senior editor at *The Atlantic Monthly*, makes a habit of participating in the discussions taking place in the comments sections following his posts, which occasionally influence his subjects or encourage him to add to a previous column.



*Nick Kristof's Twitter page – with 948,873 followers as of April 2010.*⁷²

While Kristof and Coates are examples of journalists whose adoption of social media have been particularly successful, many in the field, especially older reporters, are less technologically savvy. Caplan says the culture at *TIME Magazine*, or even TIME.com has been slow to adopt social media tools. He suggests that magazine culture, and the slower speed of content turnover may be one reason why the staff often choose more traditional methods of communication with sources and readers⁷³. Contrast that impression with the pro-web culture at the *New York Times*,

⁷² Kristof, Nick. Twitter account (@NickKristof). <http://www.twitter.com/nickkristof>.

⁷³ Caplan.

who hired Jennifer Preston as the company's first Social Media Editor in May of 2009⁷⁴; she has been working diligently to incorporate social media into the newsroom culture. Preston encourages reporters to create Twitter lists (of high-profile or related users) connected to their published stories, and the use of TimesPeople, the newspaper's own online network for content-sharing.

Twitter

For those who don't use it, Twitter is difficult to explain. "Why would anyone want to see what I'm doing all day long?" they ask. "No one cares!" And to a certain degree they have a point.

The newest of the tools examined in this study, the power of Twitter is goes far beyond the personal "microblogging" function, as it is often narrowly defined. Each post ("tweet") is limited to 140 characters - enough for a brief sentence or two and a shortened-URL. Twitterers either use the home site Twitter.com⁷⁵ or an aggregate tool such as Hootsuite, Tweetdeck, or Seesmic⁷⁶.

Caplan describes the tool: "The internet is a personalized news source. There's traditional media on one side, which is totally impersonal, and Facebook on the other, which is completely

⁷⁴ Landman, Jon. "Jennifer Preston to be Social Media Editor." Memo to *New York Times* newsroom. 26 May 2009.

⁷⁵ The website Twitter.com encompasses a news feed of the tweets posted by the people that the user "follows", and has sections for "mentions" (when one user includes the "handle", or user name of another in a tweet), and direct messages, which are privately sent.

⁷⁶ These operate as applications for mobile (cellular smartphone) browsing or as desktop (non-browser) applications, and often combine Twitter with other social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or blogging platforms

personal. Twitter falls somewhere in between, since it can be customized to include more friends or bigger news sources and public figures," such as @nytimes or @BarackObama⁷⁷.

Twitter, according to Caplan, is extremely useful not only as a way for journalists to "be our own brand", but a huge source of content⁷⁸. Twitter is open API, meaning anyone can develop programs to integrate with it, and the result, in addition to the many desktop and mobile platforms for basic Twitter functions, has been the creation of numerous tools that track users and their topics and produce all kinds of information that journalists can access. This information is rich for both story mining and source locating, as described above.

In its current state, Twitter has some limitations. An oft-heard complaint about Twitter is its propensity to spread false or faulty information, and several well-documented cases prove the veracity of this point. The events of June 25, 2009 is a particularly salient example: while Michael Jackson's death, as well as that of actress Farrah Fawcett the same day and television personality Ed McMahon's two days before, turned out to be true, rumors circulated wildly, erroneously reporting the passing of Britney Spears, Jeff Goldblum, Rick Astley, and others⁷⁹.

Similarly, while the famous tweet and accompanying photo of the US Airways flight that had landed in the Hudson was notably the first to mention the news, the topic that emerged trending on Twitter was #planecrash -- which was obviously a faulty descriptor, seeing as the event was actually a landing and rescue. Schwadron suggests that this mislabeling of events is one of the fatal limitations of Twitter as a news source, even as it was initially useful for the spread

⁷⁷ Caplan.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Sutter, John D. "Celebrity Death Rumors Spread Online." CNN.com. 1 Jul 2009.

of the news⁸⁰.

Facebook



Facebook Analytics image from Alexa as of April 2010.

Facebook is a social networking platform that began as a way for college students to connect with one another, share events and photos, and now is the second most-visited site on the Internet⁸¹ with over 400 million members⁸². Open to anyone with an active email address, in addition to personal profiles, Facebook has template pages for public figures such as politicians, musicians, products or companies, whom users can "like", as well as a content-sharing ability that allows users to post links to their own profile (and thus, the newsfeed that appears on the profiles of each of their friends) or sent as messages to specific users. Facebook has also developed Facebook Connect, a powerful tool that links other websites such as YouTube or CNN.com by allowing users to login to those sites through their Facebook profiles, rather than creating a separate login for each website they visit. Facebook Connect allows preference sharing

⁸⁰ Schwadron.

⁸¹ "Facebook.com" *Alexa*. 2010.

⁸² "Press Room" *Facebook.com*.

and engagement, meaning that posting a news story or a video from CNN or YouTube to the user's Facebook profile is a seamless, secure process.

Similar to Twitter, Facebook is an extraordinarily useful source for finding people and information about them. Individuals' profiles, and the various methods of intra-site communication ("wall" posts, personal messages, chat), create an often well-rounded snapshot of a person's interests. Journalists can use Facebook for broad indications of public interest, or search more narrowly for groups or who have indicated that they "like" an individual or a company. Caplan describes Facebook as "a measure of the zeitgeist" that helps point to "what people are chatting about: people discovering a new pop personality together, or upset about a legal change or healthcare issues. Facebook helps me keep a finger on the pulse of what people are interested in, and more importantly, is a network of people I know"⁸³.

LinkedIn

A network that focuses primarily on business and professional relationships, LinkedIn has 65 million members worldwide. Users create profiles that include their professional résumés, job histories, skill sets, and interests, but the network's real value is in its ability to connect people in ways that are specifically job-related. The site works as a job-search tool, and is especially informative for companies, as they can read and seek recommendations for potential employees.

Journalists, especially those on business beats, can use LinkedIn to find sources and circumvent public relations persons, whose job is to deliberately shape a favorable of their

⁸³ Caplan.

employers. Particularly useful are former employees, who can often speak more freely about the internal workings of an organization once they've left the payroll.

Caplan credits LinkedIn for helping him connect with sources that are mutual friends, since LinkedIn has a simple mechanism that searches connections with several degrees of separation. The site also includes discussion boards, which can be helpful in pointing to news within an industry, but is somewhat limited to fields with greater technological connectivity⁸⁴.

Blogs

With the widespread availability of tools such as Blogger (the Google-owned blog publishing tool), Wordpress, and a number of other free, open-source blog publishing tools, anyone can start and maintain their own open diary or commentary online. Collectively, blogs are still the most frequently used social media tool by journalists at 89 percent⁸⁵. News organizations have appropriated this style into their website content, using blogs written by reporters, editors, specialized blogging staff, or any combination of staff to publish content that is not news but rather news-related. Blogs regularly offer partisan commentary and push boundaries of acceptable-to-print content, since they are not promoted as "news" but rather a "blog" which implies a kind of informality⁸⁶.

Blogs are widely reported as lacking in original reporting. While journalists themselves use

⁸⁴ Caplan.

⁸⁵ Cision 2009.

⁸⁶ Journalists who have become bloggers -under a pseudonym- have occasionally found themselves reprimanded or even fired for things they've written in their blogs, raising questions of ethics, journalistic impartiality. Steve Olafson, a reporter for the *Houston Chronicle*, was fired when a colleague exposed him as "Banjo Jones", a blogger who criticized local politicians. (Dooley 179)

them, and occasionally write them, they exist in somewhat of a grey area with respect to accuracy, reliability, and value. Michael Hiltzik, who blogs biweekly for the *Los Angeles Times*, "on usefulness of information [gives] them a B" grade because "often they link to each other, and none does any original reporting -- it's all commenting on stories generated mostly by newspapers, or bringing together stories reported by newspapers." Some, he says, can be useful if they are specialized blogs – like California Stem Cell Report⁸⁷ – but most of them "take an inordinate amount of time to write and post in relation to the information contained in them, which is why most of them are thin, very thin"⁸⁸.

In judging which blogs to read and trust, Jerry Hirsch points to indicators of integrity and expertise. "For example, if I were blogging, it would be important that everyone know that I am on the *LA Times* payroll and not someone else's. You don't know who is paying Jane or Joe Blogger or what their vested interest in an issue is. I did a story about giant food companies hosting food bloggers on very expensive 'educational' vacations where those bloggers were writing glowing things about the companies' products without disclosing the relationship." He also points out that bloggers, or "citizen journalists", lack the ability to distill large quantities of information into concise and clear explanations⁸⁹.

IV. Conclusions

Ultimately, the essential practices of journalism remain as important to the work as they ever have been – if not more so. Those journalists who are able to maintain their roles as

⁸⁷ californiastemcellreport.blogspot.com

⁸⁸ Hiltzik.

⁸⁹ Hirsch.

contextualizers and interpreters of news will be able to best do so by fully adopting and understanding the new Internet-based social media tools now available to them.

Prescriptions for journalists in a new media environment

Occupational jurisdiction

In order for journalists to become and stay successful in a new media environment, shaped by the internet, citizen journalism, and the overwhelming availability of new (and sometimes misleading information), each must be the consummate professional, with attention to accuracy, depth of reporting, integrity, originality, and trustworthiness.

"I've always thought that journalism is very much a citizens' endeavor," Hiltzik says. "I've been against shield laws and anything else that allows the government or an official body to define a journalist. But most bloggers are not journalists"⁹⁰.

One of the major effects of the Internet is that the realm of journalism, at least in theory, is now within reach of anyone with access to a computer. Publication to anyone willing to read is free and fairly simple, and the culture created by social networks online has driven interest in casual commentators and enthusiasts writing as experts. The field of journalism has struggled, not only for that reason but certainly in part, and news professionals are scrambling to set themselves above and apart from the fray.

Each of the working journalists interviewed for this study may be considered successful in establishing him or herself as an expert in journalism. Their experiences and advice should be considered models for other news professionals, although their methods are certainly not the only

⁹⁰ Hiltzik.

means to surviving.

Excellence in journalism is no longer simply a goal, but an absolute necessity. Journalists and the organizations for whom they work must experiment in new ways to deliver news that is informative, accessible, personalizable, and most importantly, high-quality reporting to maintain the loyalty of news consumers who will otherwise turn to more entertaining platforms.

The issue of trust

When telephones first became commonplace, journalists were hesitant to adopt them as a tool for professional communication. But as the telephone, then email and now social networks become integral parts of daily life, journalists must develop alternative skills to judge honesty and gather information that before they might have drawn from non-verbal cues in conversation. If online communication removes some in-person observations, it opens up a realm of new possibilities for fact checking, validation, and triangulation of sources. Reading through Twitter feeds, browsing through profiles, and exploring online friends are all simple and informative methods of validation.

Journalists can continue to build credibility with readers and sources by many of the same skills they might have used before online news, but the Internet provides other avenues to trust. Relationships with an audience are simple, if sometimes laborious to maintain, with social networks. Establishing a transparent, conversational online presence is not only preferred by today's news consumers but also demanded in order to create a relationship of trust between journalist and audience. Similarly, social media have fostered an expectation that public figures are accessible -- readers expect and appreciate responsiveness to comments and questions.

Once established as communicative, accessible, and honest, while continuing to provide thorough reporting across new media and traditional platforms, a journalist is best prepared to maintain the loyalty of the audience that will help support quality journalism into the future.

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