

The Future is Not Black and White:

**A Study of a Twitter-Based Community of Practice
on the Future of Newspapers**

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Abstract

Social media has created a two-pronged dilemma for the journalism world. On one side is an attack of the basic notions of identity and authority for an age-old profession while on the other side supporting journalists by making available an endless amount of new tools and resources for them to work with. This thesis establishes and examines the online community of practice that has formed in the crosshair of the two sides, where the future of newspapers is a hotly debated subject. Using innovative data collection, the conversations of 20 experts is studied qualitatively through computer mediated discourse analysis to examine and explore the debate while providing consideration of the key issues to allow for an in-depth study.

Tags: journalism, Twitter, community of practice, qualitative, future of newspapers, computer mediated discourse analysis, online news, identity

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Chapter One: Introduction

On February 18, 2010, Ottawa-based biologist Rebecca Flemming killed Gordon Lightfoot. It was not your usual run of the mill murder. She did not use a knife or gun. Her weapon of choice was Twitter. On that fateful day, Rebecca tweeted the simple sentiment “RIP Gordon Lightfoot”. Through Twitter, this information was rebroadcast over and over, spreading like wildfire. The mainstream media, namely Canwest News Service, also picked up this piece of information separately and put it out on their wire service as an alert. A few minutes after Rebecca’s tweet, one of the Canwest political reporters, David Akin, also tweeted the news. After it went out on the wire service, many of the Canwest newspapers posted the news to their websites. It was amplified from there – blogs, radio stations, and television outlets all picked up the story. There was an outpouring of support, wishes for Lightfoot to rest in peace, much discussion around Twitter users’ favourite tunes. He was widely declared a great Canadian and people were genuinely sad that he was gone. After about 30 minutes it was discovered that it was a hoax. Lightfoot’s manager was tracked down for a quote, and to the reporter’s surprise they discovered that none of the story was true. Mr. Lightfoot was indeed alive and well and none the worse for wear. He heard the news of his own death while driving to a dentist appointment and called into a television station to do an interview¹.

The false story of Mr. Lightfoot’s untimely demise is one of many where the Internet, and more specifically Twitter, have been at the centre of widespread

¹ http://www.cp24.com/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20100218/100218_lightfoot_hoax?hub=CP24Home

misinformation. People were quick to blame Twitter for the rumor. One blogger tracked the tweets and reported that there were nearly 3,000 tweets in two hours.² Once the dust settled, questions were asked about who was to blame for the uproar. The interesting footnote to the story that came out in the aftermath was that the hoax actually stemmed from a fraudulent phone call to the management company of Ronnie Hawkins, a close friend of Mr. Lightfoot's. After the call Hawkins' wife phoned, faxed and posted to Facebook the news to close friends. In turn, Rebecca re-posted the information she saw on Facebook to Twitter.

This story illustrates the new world of information sharing and news dissemination. It exemplifies the new obstacles that face journalism and news in the age of the Internet. It is a news system that has never before been paralleled in terms of speed or breadth of diffusion. It highlights the way in which technology is disrupting the traditional newspaper industry providing an incomparable network for information sharing with low barriers to participation. It requires lightning fast response time and gives the audience the opportunity to play a major role in breaking news. Another lesson this event demonstrates is the value of journalistic skills like fact checking. Mistakes can happen, especially when information is not double, or triple checked. Mainstream media still hold the bulk of the clout – were it just an unsubstantiated tweet from an unknown user, would the information have

² <http://mediastyle.ca/2010/02/the-real-story-behind-the-lightfoot-hoax/>

spread as quickly or as far as it did? David Akin and Canwest put their journalistic weight behind the story and made it an internet meme³ within an hour.

The Internet has changed many things for the newspaper industry. Already hurting from a declining readership, an economic downturn has caused panic in the ranks. This thesis will tackle a large question that haunts the minds of not only the media but all of those involved with the functioning of a healthy open society: if newspapers are indeed dying, what will take the place of the important news gathering and sharing functions that they represent?

Historically newspapers have played an instrumental role in society by creating forums for important public discussions, by acting as watchdogs, as active collectors and disseminators of information, journalists perform a public service, while remaining objective, autonomous and ethical (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001). The watchdog function is one that journalists take very seriously. It is one of their main functions of a free press, reporting that is aggressive and reliable enough to instill the fear of being caught, thereby putting governments and big business on their best behavior to avoid loss of employment, economic sanctions or even criminal prosecution (Downie and Schudson, 2009). The traditional newspaper, though always in flux and evolving, is staffed with journalists that carry an ideology of journalism that allows for a professionalization of the practice over a continuously refined and reproduced consensus of who is a 'real' journalist (Deuze, 2005). With no official accreditation process or barriers for participation, journalists

³ A meme is an idea that has propagated through the web broadly and is based on the term 'meme' coined by biologist Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976) to refer to small cultural units of transmission, which like genes, are spread by copying or imitation (Shifman, 2011).

thus construct boundaries of participation based on notions of collective knowledge employed in their daily work (Zelizer, 2004).

The traditional press model – the journalism of verification – where the first priority is to try and substantiate facts, has lost ground first to talk shows and now online metamorphosing into a journalism of assertion, where information is offered with little effort given to verifying the truth (Edmonds, 2005). The journalism of verification has also been described as “fortress journalism” where in the past journalists battled journalists from other fortresses each day from within their powerful, walled institutions, to create strong, skillful and expensive news stories (Horrocks, 2009). Journalists act as the gatekeepers – in the traditional news model they are the ones who decide what becomes news (Enli, 2007). But these institutions are crumbling and a large concern remains is that non-professional journalists cannot replace the role that newspapers play. This thesis will discuss the fact that due to social, economic and technical advances online news and its associated processes are shifting some of the onus for news gathering and disseminating away from the press toward a more accessible and participatory media focusing on examples based on Canada and the United States of America. But what are the ramifications of this movement? In this time of reported upheaval, what does a computer-mediated analysis of on-going discourse around the future of the newspaper tell us about how those who are involved in the affected industry are viewing the shift? Those inextricably involved in the situation, who spend much of their days thinking about and living journalism, newspapers and the news, have a specific set of opinions, thoughts and hopes for the future of their craft. Being able to

look at what some of Canada's and the United States top journalism and technology experts are tweeting about, seeing what themes surface will give insight into the current state of the newspaper industry.

In the short term things appear to be stabilizing but the 24/7 news cycle, higher levels of engagement, social media and new expectations remain. These shifts have undoubtedly many lasting effects on the traditional newspaper industry. They also raise questions about the links between boundaries of participation and professional identity within the journalism world. Will traditional journalists adapt? Interestingly, these tools can be seen as a double-edge sword because on the one hand they can be seen as attacking the very core of what journalists do but on the other hand the tools are being leveraged to help reporters write stories that are "more extensively sourced, more accurate, and more widely read than ever before," (Lynch, 2010). How are journalists using these tools? Do they interact with each other or is it simply a tool for the strict reporting of stories, where they find sources and story ideas online? Are they moving their communities online?

This thesis addresses these questions in several ways. It will draw upon the communities of practice literature to examine how journalists are engaging through Twitter with not just their sources and audiences, but also with each other to build online communities to nurture learning as a group, in which knowing is an act of participation – Wenger defines these as social learning systems (Wenger, 2000). It will also look at the discourse happening on Twitter about the future of the newspaper within the online community to try to shed some light on the key issues.

To give background and ensure the reader understands fully this new and ever-changing news industry, Chapter 2, 3 and 4 have been written to give both context and to act as a literature review for three major themes: first, the changing nature of journalism, specifically the effects on newspapers; second, Twitter from the point of view a new technology as well as a research tool; and third, a look at communities of practice as a theoretical construct. Each chapter contextualizes the current situation by explaining what is going on but also reviews the pertinent literature in each area to explore the breadth of knowledge that exists about each topic.

More specifically, in Chapter 2, I briefly look at the historical developments that have led the newspaper industry to its current situation. I shall highlight the challenges faced by the industry as well as some of the opportunities that the new systems offer. The new news ecosystem includes an increasing number of players, platforms and formats. Over the years the mass media ecosystem has expanded from newspapers to include radio, television and now the Internet.

In Chapter 3, the idea of the new news ecosystem will be explored from the point of view of social media and Twitter. The mechanics of Twitter will be explained and discussed from the point of view of journalism. A relatively new addition to the Internet world, Twitter has been embraced by journalists and has become an extremely successful news-sharing platform.

Some academic work exists that examines social media, and more specifically Twitter as a new communication platform. These studies primarily describe how the tool works, and how people are using it to connect with others and form online

communities. Knowledge of both how the platform works and how users use it are important for understanding the parameters within which discourse occurs. Social media are still a relatively new phenomenon and this study specifically focuses on Twitter as a platform for both breaking news and as a focal point for the formation of a community of practice. The online world is another important axis of this study from the point of view of new media vis-a-vis computer-mediated communication. It is vital to understand how and where the discourse is taking place and under what limitations.

In Chapter 4, I present some of the current literature around communities of practice. Communities of practice will drive the bulk of theoretical thinking for the study by drawing on Wenger's framework of how groups form around learning through community, identity, practice and meaning. Though most studies that apply a community of practice framework are education or workplace based, I will apply it to the online journalism world, as the definition is broad enough to encompass this milieu.

Journalism and communication scholars have been writing about the Internet's effect on newsgathering since the early 1990s. I shall highlight a few studies from each major topic area to give a sense of both the breadth as well as the complexity of the issue while utilizing the communities of practice framework. For example, there is a broad range of literature surrounding the question of who is a journalist which touches on issues of identity, boundary, authority, negotiation of meaning and participation, all of which are major components of Wenger's framework.

In Chapter 5, I establish the rationale driving this research exploring two sides of the debate in the future of the newspaper. Through this dichotomy I set up the main research question that will guide this study. As a popular platform for communication and dissemination, Twitter has quickly evolved into a global channel of conversation. While many groups are embracing these new technologies, media experts, journalists, and academics have in their own way embraced Twitter. The research questions will explore the key issues and themes discussed on the future of the newspaper through Twitter and if and how this platform has affected participation within the news system. It will also explore Wenger's community of practice theory and attempt to apply this theory to the experts in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the discourse surrounding the future of the newspaper.

In Chapter 6, I explore the methodological approaches used in this study, including how the qualitative data was collected through Twitter and then coded using a grounded theory method approach (Glasser and Strauss, 1967). Twitter is discussed as a platform for computer-mediated discourse analysis and within this data collection method there are some challenges that stem from its character limited status updates as well as the process by which people experience the content as it flows by. As an asynchronous system, it has been often described as a stream of information that you just dip your cup into (Pick, 2011). This has direct ramifications to the way in which information is shared, received and consumed.

In Chapter 7, I present the findings from the data collection, explaining the ways in which the community of practice is formed and how it functions by extracting relevant tweets from the dataset to illustrate and highlight some of the

specific types of interactions. After establishing the community of practice, I then delve into a computer-mediated discourse analysis of the interrelated conversations surrounding the future of the newspaper. The major themes are fleshed out through a series of conversations, and the results are discussed in light of the research question.

Ultimately, in Chapter 8, I suggest that newspaper journalists have indeed transitioned and strengthened an existing community of practice surrounding the future of their craft. As early adopters of Twitter, these experts are more likely to recognize the opportunities that the Internet poses as a tool for the future of news gathering and disseminating unlike many who decry it as a threat to the entire newspaper system. These experts are experiencing a major shift in their professional lives. Their daily work routines are being altered. Suddenly reporters are expected to incorporate not only new tools, but also the audience into what has traditionally been a very closed process. Needless to say, it is an interesting time in the journalism world and this thesis will strive to give an in-depth snapshot of a specific period of time.

Chapter Two: Transformation of the News Ecosystem

“At the heart of journalism today is a great paradox: the industry is in the midst of uncertainty caused by the very same technologies that allow journalism to reach far broader audiences, more quickly, and with greater input, feedback, and resources than ever before. We feel strongly that journalism’s future is very bright. Technology is changing journalism forever, but the core techniques of quality journalism are more important than they have ever been.” (Benedetti, Currie and Kierans, 2010)

The social history of American⁴ newspapers has been thoroughly chronicled by Michael Shudson (1978). He examines the development of the penny press, and the eventual move to the family-owned, small community newspapers giving way to the larger corporations and chains recognizing the possibility for major profits. For many decades, the business of newspapers has been supported by advertising dollars. This meant that corporations like Sears and Ford were footing the bill for foreign correspondents in Afghanistan. Not because they felt that reporting on the war was important but because they believed that the best way to reach their potential customers was by buying newspaper ads. Access to readers was bought and in exchange newspapers were able to bank roll the costs of reporting the news. The cover price of a newspaper – ranging from free to about \$3 – has never covered the costs associated with its printing. The business models on which newspapers were run, depended on the money from advertising. This shifted first with the advent of the radio and then the television as alternative ways to reach audience. It has been further shifted, by the Internet as there are now new platforms, like

⁴ As much as possible this thesis will use Canadian data and Canadian examples, but where not possible, US data and authors will be used. The American newspaper is also in much more trouble than the Canadian industry for a variety of reasons, but a major one being that their economy is quite unstable.

Craigslist, which traditional advertisers can use for free. This has undermined the base of newspapers' economic structure.

In addition to the economic and business changes that the newspaper industry has undergone over the years, there has also been much change in technology and delivery platforms for the news. There has been a common repetitious pattern in the discourse surrounding new technologies in journalism vying for attention. This "...has often led to arguments over who ought to be in control of the process of disseminating news and editorial opinion. Debates over control of the news erupted in the 1920s and 1930s between newspaper and radio journalists," (Dooley, 2007: 176). Parallels can be traced in the discourse surrounding the introduction of television and its effects on newspapers as well. Fidler (1997) points to both instances where the new technology posed a disruptive threat to the dominant medium and as a result publishers felt pressure to revamp their formats and content to broaden their newspapers' appeal. There are similar parallels with the impact of the internet on the newspaper.

The first online news service was launched by the Chicago Tribune in 1992, through the then-popular Internet provider, America Online (Krumsvik, 2006). In a survey of Norwegian newspaper executives, Krumsvik found there was a general lack of strategy involved in their decisions and that they were experiencing "fear, uncertainty and doubt" about their online digital newspaper (Krumsvik, 2006:295). These sentiments are strongly echoed in the North American market, where the Internet is regarded as a disruptive technology (Meyer, 2009). It has not been an easy, or smooth, road for an industry that is known to be resistant to change (Jones,

2009), slow to react (Franklin, 2009) and equally slow to innovate (Boczkowski, 2004). In the 1970s and 80s there were attempts to try alternative distribution methods from the newspaper, such as the LEXIS network⁵ (Dizard, 2000), while most others like the teletext and audiotext were highly unsuccessful and cost the different industry players both time and money (Boczkowski, 2004). As early as the 1990s the industry had identified the Internet as having the potential to develop into a major a source of trouble (Shirky, 2009). Circulation was also in major decline as the new generations were “failing to develop a newspaper reading habit” (Edmonds, 2004). The first decade of the new century was not kind to the newspaper industry and by 2010, the state of the newspaper industry could be typified by plunging print readership numbers, economic instability and an influx of new actors. In fact, the years 2007 - 2010 were extremely lean years for the newspaper industry as a whole. The 2011 PEW State of the News Report examines the previous decade and reported that from 2000 to 2010 newsrooms at newspapers across the US were 30% smaller due to job cuts. *Harper's* ran a lead story in November 2009 titled “Final Edition: Twilight of the American Newspaper”, while other headlines exclaim “print is dead,” predicting an oncoming fall of the newspaper industry as a “dead tree medium.” With a large sweeping wave of layoffs in the journalism industry and closures of a few American newspapers of

⁵ The LEXIS data network was introduced by the publishing industry in 1973 to give lawyers quick online access to court decisions and it was one of the only successful electronic publishing systems that did not fail (Dizard, 2000).

record⁶, suffice it to say that the media is spending considerable time looking internally wondering if perhaps those decrying the end may have a valid point.

The traditional late 20th century newspaper combines the work of a publisher, editors, reporters, copy editors, photographers, headline writers and printers to produce on a daily or weekly basis a product that offers not just news, but advertisement, event listings, birth, death, wedding and graduation announcements, items for sale, job listings, and entertainment, sports and opinion pieces. Newspapers acted as the public record for cities and towns (Rodriguez, 2009). Many factors play a role in the instability that is reverberating through the journalism community but the main culpability can be laid at the feet of the Internet as it offers a platform on which society can function in a collective, collaborative and transformative way through a global, interlinking system. The Internet offers its users new ways of sharing information, working together, publishing opinions, shopping for products, and networking with others. These new ways of collaboration and dissemination also include a delivery system for news that is not only faster and cheaper than the traditional means of production, but it both provides a far broader audience as well as a diversification of niche media that generally has smaller but more engaged audiences.

Compounding these issues is the fact that the newspaper industry has regarded the burgeoning Internet news industry with increasing trepidation (Jones,

⁶ Sites like Newspaper Death Watch have cropped up since 2007 to track the closing of US-owned publications such as the Rocky Mountain News, as well as papers that are considered “works in progress” as papers that have moved operations online-only in an attempt to survive: <http://newspaperdeathwatch.com/>. There is also Paper Cuts (<http://newspaperlayoffs.com/>), which is a US-based site that tracks newspaper closures and lay-offs since 2007. The worst year for lay-offs according to the site was 2008 with 15,993+ and 14,825 in 2009. By comparison, 2010 displayed some improvement with less than 3,000 job losses and 4,111 in 2011.

2009). In an attempt to slow or reverse the financial problems of the industry, newspaper owners, editors and journalists are trying to reinvent the newspaper both online and offline. Online versions are proving to be extremely popular, but their successes are compounded with their offline problems by pulling paying readership away from their print editions. As readership online continues to climb without any efficient way to monetize the relationship, the print version's advertising revenue has fallen 48% from 2006 to the end of 2010⁷. Currently, revenues from online advertising do not come close to matching the money generated by print products. A move is being made toward implementing pay walls, a system to monetize online news that require the reader to pay a subscription fee for full access the content of the newspaper. This move has been met with limited success.

This is a transformational period for newspapers and journalism. Increased choice, customized consumption and instant availability allow news to be consumed through what has been dubbed "The Daily Me" (Negroponte, 1995). There has been a long standing divide between mass media and the audience that was created by the process of news gathering and dissemination. Reporters are taught what is "news" and they make a gatekeeping judgment on what will be in tomorrow newspapers. They then research, interview subjects and compile the news that is then presented as a final product to the reader. But this wall between news producer and news consumer has started to crack due to the increasing use of new interactive tools, for example: online commenting, live chats and live blogs. Mass

⁷ Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2011/newspapers-essay/data-page-6/>

media audiences have typically been perceived as massive, passive, anonymous, heterogeneous and primarily assembled as eyeballs for advertisers (Pavlik, 2008), Negroponte's daily me can be seen as an always-on, fulltime online news cycle in which the user can easily personalize their news consumption to match their interests or likes and avoid what they are not interested in or even what they do not agree with. This ability to circumvent the traditional gatekeepers is thought to be a radical change in the balance of power between the news producer and the news consumer (Lasica, 2002; Shirky, 2009; Jenkins, 2006). Gatekeeping is the role that journalists have long played in news production, where they decide what material is worthy of inclusion as news (Enli, 2007).

Some journalists view this increased audience participation as an attack on the very notion of journalistic ideals of objectivity, professionalism and truth. It is not only the sense that the audience can now pick and choose their news sources and thereby make their own decision about consumption but it goes a step further than that. The audience member can now participate in the creation of news through the availability of the necessary tools online that were traditionally reserved for the journalists. When anyone can broadcast himself or herself and thus act as a journalist, where does that leave the profession? It may mean quite simply that journalism is ceasing to be a professional profession and is becoming an activity (Shirky, 2009). As a profession, journalism has widely discussed and debated the existence or absence of a universal professional identity and ideology (Deuze, 2005). That is to say, that part of the problem lies in the concept of journalism; it is not clear even within the profession who is or is not a journalist.

In a time when social participation in organizations and politics is declining at a dizzying rate (Putnam, 2000) there are many who are of the opinion that a newfound passion for taking part in the dissemination and writing of news should be considered a positive change. A variety of terms have been used to describe this: participatory journalism (Vuljnovic et al., 2009), citizen journalism (Thurman, 2008), ambient journalism (Hermida, 2009), interactive journalism (Matheson, 2004), network journalism (Jarvis, 2006), mindcasting (Rosen, 2009), and user-generated content (Ornebring, 2008). Citizen journalists can be found across the Web writing blogs, breaking news through Twitter, shooting videos of protests in Tehran and uploading them to YouTube for the world to see, and sometimes poking holes in stories published by professional journalists⁸. The audience is now able to engage with the news in new ways and some are taking a proactive role not only in newsgathering but in watching the watchdog (Cooper, 2006). This has in part attributed to an identity shift from the traditional newspaper journalism to online journalism.

The rise of social networking tools have not solely given the audience a louder voice and the opportunity to build their own audience, it has also enabled journalists to use these same tools to create and to grow their own networks

⁸ The Killian documents controversy is an example of the pressure the audience can now exert on the mainstream media and the power of organizing through the web. On September 8, 2004 CBS's *60 Minutes* aired a piece that featured six documents critical to then-President George W Bush's service in the Air National Guard. CBS claimed they authenticated the documents. Within hours the internet had raised concern (see comment #47 <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1210662/posts>) and many credited Powerlineblog.com for breaking the story: <http://www.powerlineblog.com/archives/2004/09/007699.php>) CBS and Dan Rather eventually apologized for the documents in the months after CBS fired many of the producer and several senior news executives. (Retrieved June 25, 2012 from http://www.usatoday.com/news/politicselections/nation/president/2004-09-21-guard-scoops-skepticism_x.htm)

broadening their impact as journalists. These online spaces have created new ways for reporters to join together and to leverage the tools to help each other to learn from each other at a time when the ground is shifting underneath them. These networks are fluid in the sense of traditional understandings of community, time and space which are now more accessible due to the growing popularity of not just the internet but also mobile phones (smartphones). As Howard Rheingold discusses in *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (2003), mobile technology falls into the category of a cultural innovation that reorganizes social interactions. This concept in connection with communities of practice, highlights the importance of the evolution of how news gathering and learning has become less of an individual endeavour. What was once produced solely by newspaper reporters and editors, is now becoming more inclusive, participatory, and collaborative as those taking part in the news process has expanded to include freelancer reporters, university faculty, student and citizens armed with smart phones - that is not to say that there is less competition, but increased cooperation and a willingness to share resources and reporting (Downie and Schudson, 2009). What is being framed as the social production of news is a hotly debated topic that can be understood more fully by a deeper examination of the discourse surrounding these institutional and cultural shifts within the newspaper industry and journalism more generally.

Chapter Three: Twitter and the News

In this new news ecosystem, the Internet but more specifically social media is a driver of change for journalists. Social media are a relatively new communication platform. Its most famous brand is currently Facebook with over 800 million active users⁹. Within social media, a prevalent way of communication is through social network sites (SNS) which are defined as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system,” (boyd and Ellison, 2007). There are hundreds of different social network sites with various technical provisions, that attract different demographics and have different applications. For a variety of reasons discussed in this chapter, Twitter will be the focus of this thesis.

An Introduction to Twitter

Nearing its sixth birthday, Twitter’s first tweet was sent on March 21, 2006 and it was launched to the public in August 2006¹⁰. It is a web-based, microblogging service that allows users to post updates, called tweets, 140 characters at a time. Twitter continues to grow in popularity with 200 million users as of July 2011¹¹. Although the total users are much lower in number than the ever-popular social networking giant, Facebook, Twitter differs greatly in a few ways. On Twitter users

⁹ According to Facebook statistics, retrieved November, 2011:

<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>

¹⁰ <http://blog.twitter.com/2011/03/happy-birthday-twitter.html>

¹¹ <http://www.blogherald.com/2011/07/17/twitter-infographic-zero-to-200-million-users-in-five-years/>

post updates in answer to the prompt “What is happening?”¹² Twitter users follow and are followed instead of friending like on Facebook and, the etiquette is much more open to following people that are not acquaintances in real life. It is important to note the relationships do not need to be reciprocal. These user accounts are set to “public” as a default and the privacy settings are simple and straightforward. Unlike Facebook, which offers users a set of complex privacy settings, a Twitter account is either public or private. Twitter is commonly used to engage in discussions and act in collaborative ways by posting links to external articles, blogs and other websites of interest. Twitter also has the benefit of archiving the conversation for three weeks.

Twitter as a News Platform

It can be argued that one of the other major differences between Facebook and Twitter is how much more “newsy” the latter has become. Major events are now regularly reported first on Twitter, as seen in the G20 riots in Toronto in June 2010 and the emergency landing of US Airway Flight 1549 on New York’s Hudson River in January 2009. In both cases, Twitter played an instrumental role in disseminating information. During the events, both mainstream media and citizens used the service to post real time text updates and images. Larger traditional media outlets like CNN or CBC TV were unable to respond as quickly as the people on the ground equipped with smartphones. This was illustrated by the images of the police car burning that ran for hours on all the major Canadian television networks in June 2010 symbolizing the G20 protests, while Twitter had long moved on in coverage

¹² The original question was “What are you doing?” but the question was changed to reflect how Twitter users were using the service: <http://blog.twitter.com/2009/11/whats-happening.html>

giving second by second updates on what was happening on the ground. This included tweets from TVO news anchor Steve Paikin who was caught in a group of peaceful protestors who were cornered by riot police. He was threatened with arrest as he witnessed another journalist get assaulted by police officers. He then tweeted the story and raised awareness in real time of what was happening in the streets of downtown Toronto. Other Twitter users and many journalists lauded his actions as demonstrating the “powerful use of Twitter” and that Twitter is “the media of record” (Silverman, 2010). Twitter is an on-the-ground application that gives readers colour commentary about events as they unfold in a way that cannot be contested by traditional media platforms.

One group of researchers poses the question of whether Twitter is a social network or a news media (Kwak et al, 2010). They approach this by completing the first quantitative study on the entire “Twittersphere” to try to show how information diffuses within the network. Their dataset included 41.7 million user accounts, 1.47 billion social relations, 4,262 trending topics and 106 million tweets. In their study they found that only 22.1 % of relationships on Twitter are reciprocal in the sense that two user accounts follow each other and that compared to Stanley Milgram’s famous ‘six degrees of separation’ experiment Twitter relationships are actually give 4.12 degrees of separation between each user on average (Kwak et al, 2010). These two data points are interesting as the authors note that it is opposite to their expectations as they expected to find more reciprocity in the relationships on Twitter and a more diffuse network. They also note that as Twitter relations do not require both accounts to agree to form a relationship it may partially account for

why it is often used as a tool for information sharing. This is important when considering Twitter as a platform for news dissemination as it in part explains the speed in which news can diffuse through networks. Also of importance is Kwak et al.'s (2010) conclusion that the strength of Twitter as a medium is that information diffusion stands out by the speed of retweets even in comparison to another social networking platform like Flickr¹³ (Cha et al, 2009) although in another study Lerman and Ghosh (2010) found that information diffused faster through Digg¹⁴. Although the Twitter social network is less dense, "stories spread slower than Digg stories do initially, but they continue spreading at this rate as the story ages and generally penetrate the network farther," (2010, n.p). This is important when thinking about the use of Twitter as a platform for news diffusion as the speed and breadth of coverage are two important factors in dissemination through nodes in a network. Twitter has the ability to spread information further and faster than any traditional means, but what really sets it apart from its predecessors is how nimble it is to report the minutiae of events as they are happening. Without the requirement of reciprocity, information can flow freely.

Twitter as Research Subject

Twitter offers the researcher access to unedited, real time data, and has been referred to as a "collective intelligence system" by Dan Gillmor, a journalism professor at Arizona State University, veteran blogger and author of *We the Media* (Farhi, 2009:29). It can be seen as a way to find the pulse of what people are talking

¹³ <http://www.flickr.com> is a social networking site built on photography.

¹⁴ <http://www.digg.com> is a social bookmarking site that allows users to vote on their favourite links thus the most popular stories rise to the top and the unpopular ones get buried.

about at any given time, which offers both advantages and limitations depending on what the hot topic of the hour may be – it can range from Canadian pop star Justin Bieber to breaking news of an earthquake in Japan to users leveraging the platform to compile lists of missing and found people in the wake of the Mumbai bombings.

As a new phenomenon there is a modest, but ever-growing tome of academic research around different aspects of Twitter. This research covers a broad scope of issues ranging from imagined audience (Marwick and boyd, 2011), conversation and collaboration (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009), and the use of Twitter as a backchannel to negotiate meaning (McNely, 2009). An example of Twitter existing as a backchannel is how during television shows and conferences people post important pieces of information, commentary, links and opinions for their followers and others watching the same event. Twitter can be viewed as a social awareness stream, differentiated from other forms of communication by both the public and personal nature of the communication (Hermida, 2009). It is also notable for the brevity of its content and the highly connected nature of the space where most of the information is enabled and driven by the online network (Naaman, Boase, and Lai, 2010). It has also been explained as a peripheral awareness system as it allows people to be knowledgeable of what's going on without directly participating (boyd et al, 2010). If people are not always directly participating why are they using Twitter?

Twitter Use and Users

One study found that the main categories for intention of use were daily chatter, sharing information or URLs, reporting news and conversation (Java et al,

2007). Conversations can be traced by the use of the @ in front of someone's handle¹⁵; this is a user-formed functionality that allows for one user to notify another that they want their attention. By tracking the @, users can be seen to be using Twitter "for informal collaborative purposes, and conversation is an essential component of collaboration," (Honeycutt and Herring, 2009). Twitter was not created with the purpose of news dissemination in mind according to its inventors but has rapidly grown to play an important role in the news ecosystem¹⁶.

In a separate usage study, Naaman, Boase, and Lai (2010) examined the content of 350 Twitter users' streams and coded each with a descriptive evaluation of the message content. They found that the dominant categories were information sharing, opinions/complaints, statements and 'me now' with the latter dominating the dataset. Naaman et al (2010) split these users into two categories – *informers*, for the group that were dominantly information sharers which made up of 20% of their sample set and *meformers*, which represented 80% of their users and were those prone to using 'me now' statements. This extends the network-based observations of Java et al. (2007) splitting the users into two content camps where the majority of the users focus on themselves (for example, tweeting about what they were doing or what they were thinking) while a smaller set are driven to share information. These studies are both limited as there are more than two types of users. They both discount the large subsection of Twitter accounts that fall into the category of non-user. One Nielsen study found that 60 percent of people who sign

¹⁵ A handle is a nickname or moniker used on the internet, for example on Twitter talk show host Oprah Winfrey is @oprah and actor Ashton Kutcher is @aplusk.

¹⁶ <http://blog.twitter.com/2009/11/whats-happening.html>

up for Twitter do not return the following month (Farhi, 2009). Another study that examined 11.5 million Twitter accounts found that 21 percent of the accounts had never posted a tweet (Cheng and Evans, 2009). This can be explained as Twitter is not the most user-friendly platform and requires some time and effort for its usefulness to become apparent.

When considering Twitter as a tool, it is important to recognize that its benefits are not immediately obvious for new users. First a user must establish a network of contacts; otherwise it acts mostly as a search engine. Conversely, it has been confirmed by research that there has been a quick adoption of Twitter by media professionals, with many outlets considering it is an essential part of a journalist's tools to disseminate information, gather story ideas and find sources (Hermida, 2009). With over 30% of Canadian journalists using Twitter (CNW Group, 2010), it has obviously earned a spot in many reporters' toolkits to complement and expand the way they gather and disseminate news. Twitter's brevity of messages allows them to be produced, consumed and shared quickly without significant amounts of energy and thus a fast paced sphere of conversation and information spreading occurs. This has a number of different effects on the current discourse of the journalism industry surrounding the future of the newspaper that will be discussed later in the thesis.

Twitter and Journalism

This real-time news is described as "para-journalism" and is "enabling citizens to maintain a mental model of news and events around them giving rise to ... ambient journalism," (Hermida, 2009: 2). This always-on system is different than

mass media in many ways but one way in which it has an overlap in similarity is the way in which the audience is perceived. The similarity lies in the fact that it is an asynchronous system and it does not offer the user any feedback in terms of whether a message is received. Research has shown that only 6% of all tweets receive direct feedback (Sysymos, 2010). Without feedback there is no way to know who has received your message or even who the audience is. Content producers thus tend to navigate through “imagined audiences” where “participants take cues from the social media environment to imagine the community,” (boyd, 2007: 131). The potential diversity of readership on Twitter “ruptures the ability to vary self-presentation based on audience, and thus manage discrete impressions,” (Marwick and boyd, 2010: 3). This means that like mainstream media the networked audience must be navigated and the author is thus filtering and framing their messaging based on numerous different factors (friendships, bosses, strangers, etc...). But unlike traditional media, there exists the possibility of instantaneous feedback by way of immediate responses from other journalists and the public. As it is a potentially interactive audience, often the user will try and cope by speaking directly to the imagined audience, targeting their messages to specific audience members, and asking their followers questions all the while managing their stream through monitoring and responding to feedback (ibid.)

Twitter and the Future of the Newspaper

The importance of Twitter to journalism has been described by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010) as one of the “three central elements of today’s news ecosystem” alongside the mainstream media and

blogs (Lynch, 2010). Twitter is mostly used by adults, according to Nielsen Online, which reported in February 2009 that people aged 35-49 were the largest single group of tweeters at 42 percent of users (Farhi, 2009). In addition to the age group, these users are two to three times more engaged with the news than a non-user; for example, ComScore reported that eight percent of all Twitter users went to LATimes.com in March 2009 versus the 2.7 percent of all Web users (Farhi, 2009). As Twitter's users are highly engaged with the news, it seemingly the platform to a high number of tweets that are news or information based.

This could be one reason that journalists are flocking to Twitter; in one estimation it was stated that 52 percent of all journalists used the service (Cheng and Evans, 2010). They use it for research, to find eyewitnesses, to break news, to interview people, to link to their articles, to recommend reading and to keep their finger on the pulse of their respective beats (Lynch, 2010). Twitter also increasingly seems to be a tool for journalists to communicate with each other. It is for all intents and purposes another tool in their arsenal; yet, perhaps most importantly, they use it to network with other reporters.

An important question that Arceneaux and Schmitz Weiss (2010) ask but do not answer is whether media practitioners and journalists have a 'pro-microblogging' bias as they are devoted to acquiring and disseminating information. In their study of press coverage of Twitter they use the grounded theory method to code 237 items from newspapers, news wires, magazines and blogs. Brevity, speed, new form of social awareness, civic and commercial use were all themes identified in their data while they were most struck by the lack of negative stories about the

platform (Arceneaux and Schmitz Weiss, 2010). Bad Twitter etiquette, information overload, unreliable servers and no real business model were the main negative commentaries offered but the authors surmised that the latter two would be resolved if the service continued to grow (Arceneaux and Schmitz Weiss, 2010). The former two issues are behavioural and not directly related to the platform.

As has been presented in this chapter, Twitter as a platform, works quite well for journalists. It's "newsy" and enables them to disseminate short bursts of information, quickly. It encourages sharing, participation, engagement and extends communities. Interestingly, it exists in a paradox as reporters continue to use the platform that is helping to undermine their employers' business models. As newspapers struggle with an industrial model of production in the new digital age, news is thriving in the online world.

Chapter Four: Communities of Practice

In order to understand the progressively more complex topography surrounding the continued development of the digital world and the effect this is having on the printed word, specifically the newspaper, traditional media must take factors like business and economic models, skills development, brand and professional identity into account. In a time of great change and uncertainty, flexibility and adaptation are needed to face the unknown. One of the basic concepts to understand is how a digitally-connected community differs from an offline community. It is also necessary to comprehend where similarities exist. With the ever-increasing accessibility of the Internet, the resultant reduced relevance of locality and the opportunity for instantaneous communication, people are increasingly gravitating online to form communities around a wide variety of niche topics. Etienne Wenger's conception of the community of practice (1999) is particularly helpful in considering the way in which groups, professional or otherwise, have begun to implement some of the tools available on the Internet to create spaces for social learning. This chapter explores the community of practice framework and expands upon it to include the online world. It will split relevant scholarly work into Wenger's four pillars: community, practice, identity and meaning. This chapter also establishes the framework in which the discourse about the future of the newspaper will be analyzed through computer-mediated discourse analysis.

Communities of practice are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis,” (Wenger et al, 2002, p. 4). Wenger allows for a social theory of learning that integrates social participation as part of the process of learning and knowing, and thus defines a community of practice as one that is “formed over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise” (1998, p. 45). The community of practice approach enables an examination of how, in the face of change and innovation, an online group can come together to learn and to gain knowledge from each other as an example of social learning. “Using CoP as a theoretical concept renders community and identity non-essentialist, situated, and practice-oriented, as well as intricately connected and mutually constitutive,” (Stommel, 2008: 14). These technological innovations may have other impacts on the group’s dynamics as well. This thesis explores if Twitter extends and/or creates existing communities of practice of journalists who are coping with the changing nature of news. Such changes are happening between the printed word and the new online world by journalists (reluctantly) embracing the tools which are simultaneously attacking and saving their livelihoods.

Community

As the Internet proliferates, so do online communities. The possibilities for these communities seem endless, from political debates to self-help forums for those with eating disorders, from anti-poverty movements to teenage fan clubs, from car sharing to couch surfing. These diverse communities may differ in content but in process and description they share many features. Feenberg and Bakardjieva

(2004) consider these communities to be relatively stable, long-term online group associations mediated by the Internet and approach the topic in an attempt to answer whether the web contributes to or undermines non-virtual community. Many attributes that limit non-virtual communities like locale are not at issue online. In addition, non-virtual communities are defined with attributes that parallel the online world: first is an identification with symbols and ritual practices; second, acceptance of common rules; third, mutual aid; fourth, mutual respect and fifth, authentic communication (Feenberg and Bakardjieva, 2004). Online communities can vary along a number of dimensions including membership, social norms and platform including but not limited to web-based forums, social networking sites and email discussion lists (Millen and Dray, 2000). Yochai Benkler (2006) has a network-focused way of defining the concept as an “interlinking that would identify a ‘community’ as one in which the nodes were more densely connected to each other than they were to nodes outside the cluster by some amount,” (p. 248). Online networks, technologically speaking, are the first form of electronic mediation that allows for many-to-many communications as what came before were one-to-one (like the telephone) and one-to-many (like the newspaper, radio and television). The impact of this technology has been studied widely but as a relatively new medium the true effects will be better understood as time passes. For the purpose of this thesis a more specific type of community will be defined and applied.

Wenger (1999) posits that social learning is the end game and defines community as “a way of talking about social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence,”

(p. 5). Wenger considers the coherence of a community as predicated on a mutual engagement of participants as the source of its practice through joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. He warns that a community of practice is not to be considered as being synonymous with the more vague notions of group, team or network. For example, two people reading the same newspaper can be seen as belonging to a kind of community but because it does not require the joint development of a shared practice it does not qualify as a community of practice. This is an important detail to note as not all journalists who use Twitter are necessarily acting as a member of an online community of practice. It is possible to be heavily involved in pushing information out or broadcasting content while not interacting or learning in the process.

A study of online communities of practice in which journalists represent the majority of members found that they were “founded on a commitment to helping others and collecting and sharing information... This community provides a valuable service to its members by announcing shared information resources, and creates a valuable collective good,” (Millen and Dray, 2000: 173). This is especially important in the ever-shifting world of modern day journalism. As the discourses surrounding the future of the newspaper and the effects of the Internet call for a revolution in journalism (Shirky, 2009) and innovation is touted as a way to survive, the role of community in supporting these changes is important. With rapid changes to form and function, journalists have new expectations pushed on them. Community can help them cope as well as learn the new required skills. In a study of innovation in journalism, Schmitz Weiss and Domingo (2010) point to the community of practice

approach as a way to help explain the relationship between technology and journalists and as a way to look at how these processes create boundaries and new forms of participation as innovation is adopted into the newsroom. This contrasts with Boczkowski's (2004) view that newspapers portray a culture of innovation that is "marked by reactive, defensive, and pragmatic traits" (p. 173). Boczkowski (2004) also asserts that technical practices and considerations constitute a main focus for editorial decisions in the building of information for online news. These editorial decisions would be made offline in the newsroom to shape the artifacts for steering the online user experience. This can present difficulties as it is possible that the offline editorial decision-making process does not take into account the online news world.

Identity

Issues of identity are inherently interrelated to larger themes of community, practice and meaning, but by focusing on it, we can spotlight the individual rather than the wider community of practice. A narrower focus also facilitates the exploration of the broader processes of identification and social structures (Wenger, 1999). Reflecting upon the state of media before the networked society became prevalent, Benkler wrote that, "much of the function of journalistic professional norms is to create and preserve the credibility of the professional press as a source of accreditation for the public at large," (Benkler, 2006: 183). By recognizing who was not a member, the professional journalist was able to negotiate the meaning of what it meant to participate and thus construct specific boundaries for participation in the profession. This is not a simple individual versus professional dichotomy as

identity is constantly under negotiation through practice, artifacts, worldviews, languages and social relations (Wenger, 1999).

Through a complex negotiation with the public and through constructing their identity and boundaries, journalists were thus able to define themselves as information hunters and gatherers. In addition to this, the journalists acted as gatekeepers, comfortably playing the role of mediator. This allowed the journalists to construct the audience as passive in consuming whatever information the journalist deemed to be timely, relevant, and newsworthy.

Complicating the idea of identity amongst journalists is the fact that it is not like other professions with clearly delineated rules and an accreditation process. The American National Press Club has an adage in The Journalist's Creed that begins with "I believe in the profession of journalism. I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of a lesser service than the public service is betrayal of this trust"¹⁷. This creed acts as a call to all who are performing the function of journalism to adhere to a set of ideals. It outlines that journalism is a public service and that truth, accuracy and fairness are fundamental to "good journalism". It creates a set of rules or standards by which journalists should conform but it does not set up a formal process for entry into the profession. At its most basic, this means that anyone can lay claim to being a journalist.

There are scholars who view it not as an industry, profession, social system or genre but as an ideology to which the journalist subscribes (Deuze, 2005). In this

¹⁷ Written by the first dean of the Missouri School of Journalism, Walter Williams, in 1906. Retrieved on June 10, 2010 from <http://journalism.missouri.edu/about/creed.html>

time of uncertainty, Deuze suggests the operationalization of journalism as an “occupational ideology” as a way to analyze emerging social, cultural and economic issues that are transforming thoughts and practice around journalism (p. 443). As an ideology it allows journalistic ideals to be used as a rallying call. Journalists carry an ideology of journalism that allows for a professionalization of the practice over a continuously refined and reproduced consensus of who is a ‘real’ journalist (Deuze, 2005). Competition between journalists and between outlets has always been the driving force in newsgathering and dissemination – being the first to “break” a story is rewarded with awards like the Pulitzer Prize in “breaking news” and “breaking news photography”.¹⁸ The “primary purpose of journalism is to provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing,” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001: 12). In his book *What are Journalists For?* Jay Rosen agrees with the classic journalist creed by Williams (1906) that, although there is no licensing procedure or standardized training, performing acts of journalism amounts to public service, that it is a craft and that it is part of the social structure (1999). So if newspaper reporting is a public service that provides people with information to function independently within the system, what happens when the last newspaper closes its doors? In the mass media model, the role of the journalist was inextricably linked to the industry which was based on the production of news by paid professionals (Hermida, 2010). In the web world the easy access to tools to break news has challenged all the current definitions of what it means to be a journalist. There are now bloggers who make a living as writers disseminating news and sharing

¹⁸ The Pulitzer Prize is the most recognize award given to journalists in the US, see <http://www.pulitzer.org/awards/2012> for a full list of the different awards distributed each year.

information, and by the definitions above, being paid to perform acts of journalism, qualifies you as a journalist. This shift has been at times a tough pill to swallow for many professional journalists who did not want to accept their online colleagues as part of their world, though over time this sentiment has dissipated. At first many viewed the online news being written by amateurs as lacking authority, because they did not possess skills, training or newspaper/broadcast experience. But this too is changing as the traditional mass media adapts. One such change occurs as journalists shift their roles to “managing complexity – in this case complex systems. The journalist becomes a monitor of the public, tending to a complex system and saving it from its worst natural instincts because a democratic public sphere is not a necessary product of a self-organized public” (Rutigliano, 2007: 235). This means that as their role shifts, journalists move away from strictly reporting, story telling and breaking news, to new roles like aggregating information from different sources online and filtering the masses of information coming over the many different platforms as well as managing these new networked, online communities. This results in different skill sets being prioritized and required by journalists.

This issue also extends into Wenger’s category of the negotiation of meaning as there is also the idea that journalism is no longer a profession and that the newspaper isn’t a product. Journalism shifts to become more of a service, a process and an organizing principle (Shirky, 2009; Jarvis, 2010). If we think of journalism not as a profession but as an organizing principle and process, do we then think of journalists as service providers and community managers? Jarvis (2010) argues that this is not really a large shift from pre-Internet traditional journalism as a

newspaper existed to help organize a community's knowledge to create an informed and effective society. "In this ... wired world, professional journalists have to share the field... Everybody is a journalist," (Bayuni, 2010: 69). If the definition of who a journalist is changes then how does that effect the definition of news? One noticeable change is that the news shifts from being "journalist-centered, communicated as a monologue, and primarily local, to also being increasingly audience-centered, part of multiple conversations, and micro-local," (Boczkowski, 2004: 183). This is also commonly discussed as a move to hyperlocal coverage through blogs and local online news sites (Jarvis, 2010; Kalra, 2010; Downie and Schudson, 2009; Logan and Korell, 2010). The move to hyperlocal raises numerous issues for the traditional newsroom and can be viewed as a return to the family-owned small newspapers that were prevalent mid-century.

In part the focus on hyperlocal is reflective of the way in which the audience is no longer massive, passive or homogenous. The web enables a platform to host the smallest minutiae of detail as long as someone wants to write them (with or without audience). This highlights a flaw in the mass media structure as it is impossible for a small number of professional reporters to produce stories on the wide scope of interests an audience would have. In the old system, the intake levels were too small and the synthesis stage was incapable of capturing all the things the public sphere could be interested in (Benkler, 2006). This results in the media framing the audience as passive recipients as they cannot possibly provide the resources to cover everything that people are interested in.

Practice

According to Wenger (1998) the notion of practice “highlights the social and negotiated character of both the explicit and the tacit in our lives” (p. 47). This gives the community of practice a way of discussing their shared resources, whether historical or social, as well as frameworks and perspectives to achieve sustained mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998). This can otherwise be explained as learning as doing. Journalists perform acts of journalism and thus become one step closer to being able to form a community of practice.

One of the most stable entities in the new digital world is the practice of journalism. Although the web has changed many of the external facets of news production like platform, speed, and diffusion, it has not entirely upended the basics. The information still needs to be researched, context needs to be added, people need to be interviewed and content must be crafted. While the practice remains similar, there is a potential major change in who, for example a trained professional journalist versus a citizen, is conducting the practice.

In the traditional newspaper model, content is produced prior to transmission to the audience. This was a major way in which professional journalists separated themselves from the media consumer. A non-transparent editorial process ensured newspaper production was a mysterious black box to most readers. The result of this basic structure was that discussion and analysis of issues of common concern became an “iconic representation of discussion, a choreographed enactment of public debate,” (Benkler, 2006: 290). For the majority of the population the only way to have your say in the newspaper was to write a

letter to the editor and hope it was selected for printing. There was a clear division between journalist and reader but today this is not always the case. A reader can now witness a major event, pick up their smartphone and report through social media what is happening around them and become the newsmaker. Citizen journalism is slowly becoming commonplace and is a generally accepted term within academia, journalism and the online world. This can be seen as eroding the practice of journalism, as often these citizen journalists are amateurs who do not have training or experience.

The first movement of citizen-journalism was an activist-run news website called Indymedia founded in 1999 around the Seattle protests against globalization as an alternative voice to the mainstream media's coverage of the events. The next major occurrence of citizen journalism undertaken can be traced to what is known as the blogosphere. It is a classical social network that has returned some power to the individual to affect public discourse (Tremayne, 2007). Cooper (2006) discusses the blogosphere as the fifth estate, meaning that it has grown into a powerful medium that can work both for and against the mainstream media as "the new, network-based media can exert a significant counterforce" (Benkler, 2006: 224). It has been dubbed the "new public sphere" (Rosenberg, 2009: 327). Writing for a blog gives the writer complete autonomy to cover whatever they choose but also provides a proximity to their readers that is unparalleled in the mainstream media. Typical blogs have what is called a blogroll, which is a series of links to other blogs that the blogger considers worth reading. Through this network of blogs pressure can be exerted on the mainstream media in terms of what they cover and how they

cover it; although just how much influence they have remains to be seen. One study of 260 blogs found that only five blogs were completely devoted to the discussion of news, while another 15 percent occasionally linked to news but the bulk of blogs, 70 percent, were personal (Papacharissi, 2009). There are many stories of blogs influencing mass media to cover a story. Generally, for a story to gain influence it still needs to appear in mainstream media to both be seen by the widest population possible as well as being considered as valid. Blogging began as a way for people to share and acted more as an online diary. Over the past few years, blogs have become far more mainstream and professionally driven. Most traditional newspapers have embraced blogging with their reporters and columnists blogging regularly on the newspaper's main website, which can be considered a model of professional negotiation and adaptation to the new online world. There is a duality of practice in that something that was not previously seen as being a journalistic requirement has now been added into their everyday tasks. The understanding of practice has been renegotiated to include blogging and micro-blogging¹⁹ to name just a few changes.

Although some of the control has shifted away from the professional journalist toward the audience, it remains to be seen if the scale will continue to tip. Although a lot of lip-service is paid to citizen journalism, user-generated content (UGC) and two-way channels of communication currently, if one looks at the major traditional media outlets, there remains a overwhelmingly strong emphasis on professional content. One can see small fissures where commenting is allowed, or where readers can upload video or photos or write their own blogs, but for the most

¹⁹ Micro-blogging is a small version of a blog that tends to be a picture, or a short video, with a few sentences. Twitter is an example of a microblog.

part most members of the traditional media have not yet truly made the changes that this thesis discusses²⁰. One study of participatory journalism, concluded that although there is the discourse around the audience becoming active participants in the news, journalists viewed them instead as active viewers (Hermida, 2011). Citizen participation, true community engagement as seen through two-way dialogue and transparency of the news gathering process still mostly exist in theory as part of the the dialogue on the future of the newspaper and less in every day practice.

Meaning

Meaning in the communities of practice sense encompasses an experience of everyday life where meaning is located in the process of negotiation and it is part of two processes – participation and reification (Wenger, 1998). Participation describes the act of living in the world as a social experience with membership in different social communities and active involvement in social enterprises (ibid.) Reification refers to the abstraction of concepts to give understanding based on experience (ibid). Participation and reification are not mutually exclusive from one another, in fact they function in duality to create who we are through the negotiation of meaning (Stommel, 2008). These two concepts are used together to form tools, rules, laws, and procedures in the negotiation of meaning.

The negotiation of meaning in Wenger's (1998) framework is not just about debating a definition of a word. It aims to be more all encompassing and more theoretical in the greatest sense of word, striving to reconcile the meaning of human

²⁰ It is worth noting that the experts being used in this thesis would be classified as early adopters in that they have already fully embraced this new technology.

existence. Participation in a community is a process of constructing our identities. That is to say that our participation in different communities allows us to understand and construct who we are as humans.

Newspapers and their reporters live in a major period of negotiation of meaning as the industry grapples with change. Writing acts as an essential mediator in the construction of meaning (McNely, 2009) and Twitter offers a platform not only to write but also to negotiate meaning with others through online debate. Through participation in a persistent channel like Twitter, meaning-making is built “through back and forth writing, editing, and revising, through periods of negotiation,” (Swarts, 2009: 2). These periods of negotiation can be observed without interaction through Twitter and offers a non-intrusive way to witness. It gives the observer a window into how those who are enacting parts of the future of the newspaper use their community as a sounding board for new ideas. They also use Twitter as a way to dissect and learn from past mistakes and to share, collaborate and teach.

Chapter Five: Research Question

Newspapers have long acted as the record of most towns and cities. In current discourse, there are at least two sides to the argument about the future of the newspaper. On the one side, is a group that argues that a free and open society cannot function properly without newspapers and the professional journalists they employ. In this camp's esteemed opinion, newspapers give a society more than news. They add value through giving context, history and an overall better understanding of our surroundings and place within the community and the world. Information gathered by newspaper reporters isn't just used by those who read the paper, but indirectly it is consumed through its use by policy makers, politicians, police, and often even by radio and television journalists. Journalists sit through the city council meetings to stay informed and to report on what they deem to be "newsy". Journalists go to the courthouse day in and day out to read the new dockets. The newspaper industry prides itself on digging into issues that big business and governments do not want to be public information – acting as a watchdog for the public good. As the fourth estate they have an important role to play in keeping society's forward momentum. They argue that non-professional journalists do not have the time or the resources to fill this role.

On the other side of the fence sit those who think that the networked public sphere should be given a chance to work itself out (Benkler, 2011). They believe that it is far too early to be calling for government subsidies and new regulations aimed at keeping the industrial news system afloat. They see the increasingly distributed network of actors, mixed between the professional and amateur,

working on a variety of niche products as a good alternative to the current model. A model they do not hesitate to argue that is not fulfilling its requirements as the fourth estate. They point to the many different models that are currently in play on the Internet as having potential for a reinvigorated system. New models like ProPublica, a non-profit foundation that focuses on public service investigative journalism²¹; Spot.us, a donation-based, story driven pro/am collaboration model²²; Open File, a series of hyperlocal Canadian news sites whose stories are community-driven²³; or The Mark News, online news and commentary that gives academics, politicians, environmentalists a platform for their views and opinions²⁴.

There are a few points that both sides of the debate seem to agree upon. One is the fact that newspapers currently carry a bulk of the news gathering load. Second, is that the question remains what will take newspaper's place in the long run. There are many paths ahead, and no one is sure of which will be the one taken. What is known is that a deeper understanding of the issues may help to shed some light on this problematic. By studying those using Twitter to debate the future of the newspaper as a community of practice their concerns, ideas and solutions for the changing news ecosystem will help illuminate this on-going debate. Twitter offers an unfettered front row seat to watch the conversation of some of the passionate people involved in the many on-going discussions. As experts within the subject matter they will have a deep understanding of the issues at hand. The future of the newspaper and news itself is a complex problem with no quick and easy

²¹ <http://www.propublica.org>

²² <http://spot.us>

²³ <http://www.openfile.ca>

²⁴ <http://www.themarknews.com/>

solution in sight. As with many fundamental changes in society, it will not be a quick process. It will take years before the ramifications will be fully known and understood. This topic needs to be examined from social, economic, historical, political and technical angles to get the full picture of what is happening. This thesis offers a way to look at the different facets of this problematic.

Whatever format the new models that support journalism in the future take, those actively involved in the discourse will likely have a role to play in the innovation and leadership surrounding these changes. While there are many studies looking at the state of journalism and the disruption the internet is causing there are few, if any, that look directly at the discourse and communities of practice in the debates on the future of the newspaper. This thesis fleshes out some of the major themes being discussed, explores the language in which it is discussed, examines who is participating in the debate as well as focuses on how these interactive practices constitute community. The web offers exciting new possibilities but also challenges in the form of sustainable business models, intellectual property and copyright to name a few of the issues often raised. This thesis does not propose to predict the future, but it sets out to map the debate as it currently stands.

The purpose of this research is to explore, describe and evaluate the scope of existing discourse in order to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the issues surrounding the debate on the future of newspapers. To guide a research project it is necessary to have a lens and scope to help in defining the work. As such a research question enables the researcher to focus their study. The question used to drive this thesis is:

As a popular platform for communication and dissemination, Twitter has quickly evolved into a global channel of conversation. While many groups are embracing these new technologies, media experts, journalists, and academics have in their own way embraced Twitter.

RQ 1: What are the key issues and themes discussed by journalists, media experts and academics on the future of the newspaper within Twitter?

RQ 2: How has Twitter affected the news ecosystem; specifically, how has it changed the nature of participation in news production?

RQ 3: Can Wenger's community of practice theory apply to these experts and what does it tell us about the future of the newspaper?

Chapter Six: Methodology

Introduction

On Twitter, the future of the news and newspaper is a contentious topic of debate. There are many alternatives in how to best approach this subject, and what is the best data to capture. The debate surrounding the future of the newspaper is multifaceted with many actors, conflicting overarching issues and very little consensus on what will actually happen in the long run. There are three main camps in the debate: first there are those who believe the newspaper is a dinosaur destined for extinction; second there are those who argue that there is a definite future that requires major innovation to find new solutions; and lastly there is the camp that thinks that there is no problem and that the crisis of the newspaper was simply a result of the economic downturn.

A Qualitative Approach

This particular study applies qualitative methods, more specifically grounded theory methodology and discourse analysis, to explore the debate taking place through Twitter on the future of the newspaper as a daily news medium. The goals of the study are threefold: first, to establish and identify this community of practice; second, to analyze their use of Twitter as a main conduit of the discussion; and third, to delineate the users' key issues in the debate about the future of newspapers. Qualitative research furnishes the researcher with the ability to interpret while maintaining sensitivity to the social-historical contexts. It also allows for a narrowing of the topic throughout the study (Neuman, 2007). As this study aims to summarize and analyze the discourse around the future of the newspaper, a

qualitative method is more effective in highlighting the concepts, players and issues underlying this dynamic, fast-paced, almost frenetic online conversation.

Research Design

Twitter was the chosen platform for data collection, because of the high rate of participation by journalists as well as the fact that news increasingly breaks through Twitter. The tweets of a group of 20 influential users were tracked in a database. Data was collected from February and March 2010 to obtain a broad variety of conversations and then a grounded theory method was used to sift through the initial data made up of thousands of tweets. The data was further refined through a computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) of the most relevant tweets. The 20 participants were chosen through non-random, handpicked sampling through a series of quantitative and qualitative measurements, which is described in this chapter. This section will discuss both the quantitative and qualitative measurements used in this study. The group dynamics were also examined through a community of practice lens to see what, if any, characteristics it possessed according to Wenger's theory that looks at the primary indicators of social learning through community, meaning, identity and practice.

The Experts on the Future of the Newspaper

There is a core group of current and ex-journalists, academics, bloggers and public intellectuals who regularly engage each other in debate about the future of news and newspapers. With perhaps a few exceptions this group of experts tweet many times a day about issues surrounding the state of journalism, technology and the newspaper industry more generally.

For the purpose of this study, the list of experts was narrowed down to the top twenty Twitter users who wrote about the future of news on a daily basis²⁵. Narrowing the list down to those who engaged with the subject material regularly ensured that the user was fully engaged in the debate. The users were chosen based on their influence²⁶ by quantitatively calculating their Klout²⁷, TweetLevel²⁸ and Topsy²⁹ rankings. Each of these platforms uses a different calculation to rank the user by influence. The Klout application program interface (API) assigns the user a score ranging from 1 to 100 that represents a person's overall influence by using semantic analysis to determine what a person talks about and then measures how influential they are on a topic. The higher the users' number the more influence their tweets can hold. The TweetLevel API is similar but takes into account many more factors than Klout - there are four result metrics: influence, which is the primary ranking metric; popularity; engagement; and trust. Each score is rated out of 100 and the higher the score the more impact the user has. Both Klout and Tweetlevel use a variety of factors such as total number of followers, following to follower ratio, and number of retweets to calculate someone's influence.³⁰ A blend of influence ranking websites were used to ensure the most representative number was calculated. The idea of calculating influence for social media is inherently problematic, as it is not something that can be measured concretely as it is more

²⁵ The end number is actually 18 as two of the users who were originally selected migrated to spending much more time discussing open data and government 2.0 than the future of the newspaper:

@cheeky_geeky and @daeaves were the two accounts dropped.

²⁶ Influence is loosely defined as an individual who disproportionately impacts the spread of information, they are generally subject matter experts, journalists, celebrities or government officials (Bakshy, 2011).

²⁷ <http://www.klout.com>

²⁸ <http://www.edelman.tweetlevel.com>

²⁹ <http://www.topsy.com>

³⁰ For the full calculation see appendix 1.

about the qualitative and less about the quantitative. In one quantitative study of influence, the authors discuss Twitter as presenting a “promising natural laboratory for the study of diffusion processes” in that it is devoted to disseminating information (Bakshy, 2011). But in the case of this study, influence is considered to work along the lines of what Topsy is looking at: the likelihood that each time a user says something, people will pay attention³¹.

Each user was also assessed qualitatively in two ways; first, to ensure they tweeted on a daily basis about the topic and secondly through an online tool called Topsy. Topsy is a Twitter powered search engine that tracks every tweet, and also counts the number of times a link is posted. It enables the user to see how influential someone’s posts are by seeing how many people “re-tweet” them. To be included in the study, each account had to have been dubbed as “highly influential” by Topsy meaning that their account is considered to be one of the most prominent on Twitter; power users like @barackobama with over five million followers are also dubbed high influential while lesser known users, such as this researcher are dubbed “influential” with approximately 1,300 followers and occasional users have no tag at all. In the data collection, one otherwise qualified Twitter user was omitted from the final list due to the lack of designation as “highly influential” by Topsy (@StKonrath). Although the website provides no explanation for why this is so, a qualitative exploration of the user’s tweets appears that his tweets do not often get re-broadcast.

³¹ <http://corp.topsy.com/about/influence/>

To ensure that no user was overlooked on the original list, a tweet and accompanying blog post was circulated to all the members of the list as well as to the general Twitter public asking if they believed anyone was missing from the aforementioned list. Through this crowdsourcing, a few suggestions were added and thus entered into the calculations. Crowdsourcing allowed the researcher to expand her reach by asking for input from the engaged journalism community; any input received was added to the list and their Klout, Tweetlevel and Topsy scores were calculated alongside the original list.³²

Suggestions received from crowdsourcing request for the leading experts on the future of newspapers:

• From Leems:	@jeffjarvis @buzzmachine @knightfdn
• From @memeticbrand :	@wemedia @the_standard
• From @CNWgroup :	@kirklapointe @mathewi
• From @laheadle :	@jayrosen_nyu @niemanlab @megangarber @jny2 @steveouting @howardweaver @chanders
• From @bxmx :	@david_eaves @cheeky_geeky @bxmx

³² For the full list see Appendix 1.

User	Klout Score	TweetLevel	Average	Media tweets (Y/N)
scobleizer	84	74	79	n
davewiner	80	72	76	y
jayrosen_nyu	79	70	74.5	y
jeffjarvis	75	69	72	y
mathewi	68	70	69	y
cheeky_geeky	66	67	66.5	y
cshirky	69	63	66	n
journalismnews	59	69	64	y
digiphile	57	67	62	y
ajkeen	59	64	61.5	y
dangillmor	60	58	59	y
jdlasica	54	60	57	y
poynter	49	64	56.5	y
themediasdying	53	60	56.5	y
mediatwit	50	61	55.5	y
journalistics	48	60	54	y
yelvington	50	58	54	y
knightfdn	50	55	52.5	y
harrisj	53	51	52	(yes but not daily)
iwantmedia	46	56	51	y
stevebuttry	42	58	50	y
kirklapointe	48	51	49.5	y
NYT_JenPreston	41	58	49.5	y
thefutureofnews	36	49	42.5	y
digidave	48	49	48.5	y
hermida	45	51	48	y
david_a_eaves	44	51	47.5	y
steveouting	41	52	46.5	y
bxmx	41	51	46	n
CodyBrown	42	50	46	y
howardweaver	37	55	46	y
scottros	34	54	44	n
chanders	36	49	42.5	y
adamwestbrook	28	54	41	y
jny2	30	47	38.5	n
billdinto	24	47	35.5	y
the_standard	17	50	33.5	y
megangarber	18	48	33	y
laheadle	14	31	22.5	y
amonck	15	41	28	n
jen_mcfadden	11	43	27	n
wemedia	7	37	22	y
neimanlab	27	14	20.5	y
buzzmachine	8	18	13	y

Table 4: Full list of possible experts with calculations (Retrieved Jan. 2010)

Twitter Handle*	Name*	Bio
@Ajkeen	Andrew Keen	Author, Internet entrepreneur, executive producer, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts
@cheeky_geeky	Mark Drapeau	Scientist, researcher, journalist, blogger
@codybrown	Cody Brown	Student, journalist, founder of kommons.com
@Daeaves	David Eaves	Public policy entrepreneur, open government activist and negotiation expert
@dangillmor	Dan Gillmor	Tech writer and columnist, author, director of a new Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at ASU, fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society
@davewiner	Dave Winer	Visiting scholar at NYU in Journalism, software developer responsible for RSS, blogs, and podcasting
@Digidave	Dave Cohn	Journalist, blogger, founder of spot.us
@Digiphile	Alex Howard	Freelance tech journalist
@Hermida	Alfred Hermida	Online news pioneer, digital media scholar and professor of journalism
@howardweaver	Howard Weaver	Journalist, editor, vice-president, News at McClatchy Company
@Jayrosen_nyu	Jay Rosen	Press critic, writer and professor of Journalism at NYU
@Jdlasica	JD Lasica	Social media strategist, technologist, author, journalist, blogger
@Jeffjarvis	Jeff Jarvis	Journalist, professor at CUNY in Journalism, author, blogger
@Jenpreston_NYT	Jen Preston	Adjunct faculty at Columbia, journalist, editor and newsroom manager at New York Times
@kirklapointe	Kirk Lapointe	Managing Editor, Vancouver Sun, adjunct faculty at UBC, blogger
@Mathewi	Mathew Ingram	Journalist, blogger, ex-Globe and Mail Communities Editor
@mediatwit	Mark Glaser	Freelance journalist, editor, expert on online media and blogs
@stevebuttry	Steve Buttry	Journalist, Director of Community Engagement for TBD.com, Online skill trainer
@steveouting	Steve Outling	Journalist, consultant, entrepreneur, blogger, Director at University of Colorado
@Yelvington	Steve Yelvington	Journalist, vice president of strategy and content for the interactive division of Morris Newspapers

Table 5: List of Top 20 experts (*data retrieved March 2010)³³

The specification of participants in the discourse limited the study to a non-representative sampling. It was important to pick those who were considered to be the opinion leaders in the debate as they are the ones that are most often heard and broadcast to a larger audience. Ensuring that the correct people are accessed for a study is paramount, as they ensure “the greatest possible insight into your topic” (Esterberg, 2002: 93).

³³ Many of the media experts have had changes in their bios since March 2010. For example, Cody Brown graduated from university; Steve Buttry moved to an online news venture and has since again changed employers and Kirk Lapointe moved to the CBC to become their ombudsman.

Handpicking the sample of those tracked offers some limitations as it does not include any amateurs or non-users on the list. The study picked experts intentionally as they are the ones who have a vested interest in finding a solution to the future of the newspapers to defend their livelihoods and their craft. It must be acknowledged that these experts are both early-adopters of Twitter as well as a small number of those who represent elite leadership in society as members of the media. It also must be stated that this group only included news experts that are using Twitter, there are many great thinkers on the future of the newspaper who are not active in the online discussion. While their opinions and thoughts are equally important and valid, a conscious decision was made to solely use Twitter as the platform to explore what was being said, but also to examine how the platform is affecting the discussion. The sample could have included amateurs if they were considered to be ultimately influential as the new class of citizen journalists but they did not make the list. This is indicative of one of the incongruities of the new news ecosystem and will be discussed further in the results analysis chapter, but the lack of highly regarded amateurs is part of the larger picture of Twitter and journalism.

Defining the Data

With over 16,000 tweets at the end of two months of collecting the 20 experts' tweets, a framework for filtering the data for the relevant tweets was required. The first read through of the entire set of tweets resulted in the cutting of two of the experts (@cheeky_geeky and @daeaves) as they no longer tweeted about the future of the newspaper on a regular basis. The remaining 18 users had a total of 14,567 tweets. Once entered in Excel the data was given a secondary read through

and each tweet was assigned a number, one for directly relevant, two for indirectly relevant, three for possibly relevant and left blank if it was deemed to be irrelevant. Relevant was defined as any tweet that was about the past, present or future of the newspaper, as well as online news. Indirectly relevant included tweets about changes in technology related to the news industry, the future of mass media other than newspapers (books, television, magazines, radio), and other policy issues that could have an effect on the future of online news like copyright, privacy and web standards. During the data collection there were numerous events that took a lot of airtime and tweets surrounded these events were discounted unless they were intrinsically linked to the future of the newspaper. The events were American health care reform, the release of the iPad, the Winter Olympics, the release of Google Buzz, a tsunami in Hawaii, March Madness, the Oscars, and the Superbowl. Data coded with the number three were tweets in which the meaning was not immediately obvious and to fully understand the tweet the link had to be clicked and was then recoded as a one, two, or omitted. This coding was established to eliminate content that had nothing to do with the future of the newspaper as the experts involved in the study use Twitter for a multiplicity of reasons. Irrelevant tweets ranged from personal reflections about friends and family to discussions about other unrelated interests.

In designing the study, the option existed to instead limit this study to an analysis of a single hashtag³⁴, as to only gather relevant information based on the hashtag. This was not done as the issue with hashtags is that anyone can use it as

³⁴ A hashtag is user-driven innovation that allows for wider conversations by establishing a keyword driven conversation denoted with the number sign symbol (#).

they see fit therefore there is a high rate of self-promotion and spamming that occurs. While the hashtagged conversations are conducted thematically as well as steered by a moderator, the 20 experts are left to their own devices and use Twitter to discuss that which they believe is of utmost importance. Hence, the conversations used for this analysis are more organic in nature and occurred without direction or provocation by any direct outside force unlike researcher-led discussion groups or interviews or moderated discussions. Although this means there is no way to ensure the expert stays on topic, it does, at the same time, provide completely raw data on which to draw. The nature of the language used on Twitter, constricted by the 140 characters, dictates more often than not, very concise, well-thought-out posts. As does the public nature of how the service is constructed thus offering a most useful research venue from which to observe the discussion of some of the important players within this debate.

Coding the Data

The online conversation was analyzed through qualitative coding. Qualitative coding entails three basic procedures: “noticing relevant data; collecting examples of those phenomena; and, analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures,” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 29). The data in this study was assessed using a grounded theory method. In the initial stage, the data was analyzed to identify recurring themes and categories that seemed of interest (Esterberg, 2002). This allowed for a more hands-on, neutral assessment of the data which avoided as much as possible subconscious or unconscious pigeonholing of the data. On the other hand, it is important during the

coding process, to acknowledge researcher's bias and as Strauss and Corbin (1998: 47) wrote:

Insights do not happen haphazardly; rather they happen to prepared minds during interplay with the data. Whether we want to admit it or not, we cannot completely divorce ourselves from what we know. The theories that we carry in our heads inform our research in multiple ways, even if we use them quite unselfconsciously.

The coding system was modeled on Bazeley's (2007) three step system that suggests the researcher first create free nodes to catch ideas while initially working through the data, second to sort and connect both existing and new nodes into a branching system of tree nodes into a taxonomy that replicates the structure of the data and finally to take a step back to provide a more meta-view to reflect overarching ideas, higher order concepts, and allow the researcher to identify broader, more complex themes running through the data. Coding is an important step in organizing principles within your data. It allows the researcher to think through the seemingly chaotic data collected. Coding categories "can be expanded, changed, or scrapped altogether as ideas develop through repeated interactions with the data," (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996: 32). Open coding was used to identify recurring themes, and from these the framework for analysis was structured (Esterberg, 2002). Coding is a step-by-step process that takes the raw text and then transforms it into a theoretical narrative (Auerback, 2003). Filtering and then coding such a large number of data points was quite time consuming and at some points difficult as there is a limited amount of information that can be held within 140 characters. Often it was not possible to discern what the user was talking about so they were discarded. Also, due to the sheer number of tweets, there is a broad

base of resultant categories based on the total amount of information. As coding progressed different themes started to become apparent. Economics and business models were discussed often as was technology and the future generally. Broad themes were created and the free nodes were moved into the appropriate container. Four themes were taken from Wenger's (1998) community of practice framework: community, identity, meaning and boundary to act as tree nodes as they best summarized the data as it was being coded.

The third step for coding, meta-analysis, applied computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) to explore the deeper meanings within the Twitter discussions as it offers a way to analyze interactions between humans "transmitting messages via networked computers" (Herring, 2001: 612). CMDA takes into account that the Internet is its own medium, a platform where the exchanges are faster than other types of written interactions. It allows multiple participants to communicate simultaneously and messages are distributed to an often unseen and unknown audience (Herring, 2001). CMDA allowed for a deeper understanding of the discussion, as it allowed for a more thorough unpacking of the situation and the discussion surrounding the future of the newspaper. CMDA's potential and power is that it allows for the assumption about online communication, in this specific case Twitter as the platform, that "computer-mediated discourse may be, but is not inevitably, shaped by the technological features of computer-mediated communication systems. It is a matter for empirical investigation in what ways, to what extent, and under what circumstances CMC technologies shape the communication that takes place through them" (Herring, 2004: 343). One can

consider whether terms contained within a discourse reflect a particular construction of the topic or of society; Bazeley (2007) suggests asking of the data what has led to these constructions and what are the implications of seeing the world in this way?

As discussed in an earlier chapter, the community of practice theory states that people form communities over time as they pursue shared enterprises (Wenger, 1999). To take the CoP framework one step further it will be extended to include a classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA). This will be done within the confines of the membership in the community of practice to capture and analyze the discussion of media experts on Twitter debating the future of the newspaper. Combining the community of practice framework with the CMDA allows for a deeper understanding of what is really going on by looking not only at the members but also by digging deeper into the meaning of what they are saying about the future of the newspaper on Twitter. CMDA was chosen as it best suited to provide a methodological toolkit and a set of theoretical lenses through which to make observations and interpret the results for online discourse analysis (Herring, 2004). It allows the researcher to take into consideration the role of computer-mediated communication which is invariably shaped by the platform on which it takes place. The rules of the platform thus shape the conversation and it is important especially with a new platform to understand how Twitter both enables and limits discourse. Understanding how Twitter affects the online community's discourse forms to produce meaning and negotiate change, will

ultimately allow the researcher a better understanding of the discourse surrounding the future of the newspaper.

Online community's discourse has been approached in many different ways with different methods for collecting data and performing the analysis (Androutsopoulos and Beisswender, 2007; Herring, 2007; Stommel, 2008). A leader in online discourse theory, Herring (2004) developed CMDA to deal with micro-level analysis of linguistic phenomena as well as at the macro-level of concepts such as community and identity. She operationalizes the concepts of virtual community as: (1) active participation with a core of regular participants; (2) shared history, purpose, culture, norms and values; (3) solidarity, support, reciprocity; (4) criticism, conflict, means of conflict resolution; (5) self-awareness of group as entity distinct from other groups; and (6) emergence of roles, hierarchy, governance, rituals (Stommel, 2008: 2). These overlay quite well with Wenger's Community of Practice which outlines his social theory of learning through a framework that includes (1) meaning through negotiation, participation and reification; (2) community through mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire; (3) learning including shared histories, improving enterprise, developing repertoire, style and discourse; (4) boundary of membership and belonging includes artifacts, documents, terms, concepts and other forms of reification that connect the community; (5) locality; and (6) identity (Wenger, 1999). He goes on to list indicators of a community of practice:

sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual; shared ways of engaging in doing things together; the rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation; absence of introductory preambles...; very quick setup of a problem to be discussed;

substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise; mutual defining identities; the ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products; specific tools, representations, and other artifacts; local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter; jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones; certain styles recognized as displaying membership; and a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world (Wenger, 1999: 125-126).

While this list in its entirety is important, it is the points about interaction, engagement and shared discourse upon which Herring's (2007) framing of computer-mediated discourse analysis can be focused. Computer-mediated discourse is influenced by both the technological medium and the social situation (Herring, 2007). In the online world of social networks, the medium does have specific ramifications on communications, for example with instant messaging both parties need to be signed in for the conversation to occur, whereas a user can send an email without the other person being logged in.

The tables below outline the classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse that will be applied to the data set in chapter 6. Table 6 addresses the technological medium's specifications while Table 7 looks at the situational social settings.

M1	Synchronicity
M2	Message transmission (1-way or 2-way)
M3	Persistence of transcript
M4	Size of message buffer
M5	Channels of communication
M6	Anonymous messaging
M7	Private messaging
M8	Filtering
M9	Quoting
M10	Message format

Table 6: Medium factors (Herring, 2007)

Synchronicity is related to participation and addresses whether both users need to be logged in at the same time to communicate. Message transmission is both about how the message is sent, for example character by character, message by message or line by line as well as how it is sent. Can one user see what the other person is typing character by character thus allowing them to give simultaneous input or do they have to wait until the message is sent before reacting? Persistence of transcript refers to how long a message exists and whether or not it is archived; this impacts how the user interacts with the information and how much attention they pay to the interactions. Size of message refers to the number of characters that is allowed per message, for example, email would have no limit while cellphone text messages (SMS) are limited to 160 characters and Twitter to 140 characters. Channels of communication refer to whether the communication is solely text-based or if images, video and audio are available. Anonymous messaging is whether or not users can use a nickname and have anonymous interactions or must they prove who they are. Private messaging refers to the ability to take a conversation out of the public domain, which enables users to say things they may not otherwise feel able to say in open forum. Filtering is the ability within the computer-mediated

communication system to ignore messages or topics. Quoting is also a technological affordance made available by some systems in which you can take parts or all of other people's messages and include them in your reply. Finally, message format is the determination of both the order in which the messages appear as well as what information is provided alongside the information; in most chat programs, like Internet Relay Chat (IRC), new messages are added at the bottom of the list whereas in blogs and microblogs new messages tend to be posted at the top.

S1	Participation structure	- one to one, one to many, many to many - public/private - degree of anonymity - size, number of active participants - amount, rate, balance of participation
S2	Participant characteristics	- demographics - proficiency - experience - role/status - pre-existing sociocultural knowledge and interactional norms - attitudes, beliefs, ideologies
S3	Purpose	- of group - goal of interaction
S4	Topic or Theme	- of group - of exchanges
S5	Tone	- serious/playful - formal/casual - contentious/friendly - cooperative/sarcastic etc..
S6	Activity	- debate/job announcement/information exchange/problem solving etc...
S7	Norms	- of organization - of social appropriateness - of language
S8	Code	- language, language variety - font/writing system

Table 8: Situational factors (Herring, 2007)

In Table 8, Herring (2007) lays out the various social and situational factors that impact CMC. Participation structure addresses the who of the communication: how many, who are they, do they choose to use their real name, whether it is public, private or somewhere in between and what the rate of participation is. Often in online communities the power law applies to participation where one percent of a community will provide 99 percent of the activity (Shirky, 2008; Rutigliano, 2007; Rosenberg, 2009). Participant characteristics refer to demographic information, skills, experience and general background. Purpose can be looked at from the group level as to what is the purpose of the group but there is also the individual participant's motivation for participation. Topic and tone are both fairly self-explanatory – what does the group discuss and how. Activity refers to what the content and context of the group is, for example debates, flame wars, information exchange, or problem solving to name a few. Norms refer to the established practices within a group in terms of organization, social appropriateness and behaviour, also known as netiquette, and of language, which includes things like inside jokes, acronyms and patterns of discourse. Finally, code deals with issues of language including dialect, level of complexity, but also in terms of writing systems such as font and alphabet.

Data collection

The tweets were collected through an online database programmed in C# and .Net frameworks to consume the data collected by a list built within Twitter.

The database was programmed to interact directly with Twitter's json³⁵ API, archiving each tweet by listing the user's name, nickname, tweet identification number, date, time, message and any links. The outputs were .CSV and .XML file types enabling the database to export to Microsoft Excel.

After the aforementioned filtering, the data was then imported into Nvivo for the purpose of coding. Nvivo is a qualitative software analysis program that allows for many different ways of working with data. Content used in an NVivo project is mostly text based – “the good stuff of social science” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000: 769). A powerful program, Nvivo acts as a tool that enables more complex coding, comparisons and modeling that would otherwise have to be done painstakingly by hand. It leverages the digital to allow for a higher number of broad searches, faster finding capabilities and the ability to compare and contrast much larger volumes of data. This is not to say that the analysis is done for the researcher; it still requires deep thinking and analysis. The program broadens the ability for tracking hunches, searching for linkages and conducting fast and effective searches.

While Twitter remains a new tool for mapping discussions, it offers a way for researchers to observe without impacting the conversation. While there are limitations imposed by the way Twitter conversations are distributed in what can be best described as a never pausing stream of information, its public nature and 140 character limitation means that generally the information that the user puts out is often very concise and to the point. This can lead to misunderstandings and

³⁵ Json (JavaScript Object Notation) is a lightweight data-interchange format that makes writing code easier for programmers. For more information please see: <http://www.json.org>

misinterpretations in discourse, as it does not lend itself to long or complex explanations.

The use of Twitter also required some researcher flexibility, as the original capture of data was too large for the purpose of a Master's level thesis. Culling the data for specific themes became necessary to allow for discourse analysis. Computer-mediated discourse analysis allowed the researcher to explore how the conversations that take place on Twitter do not receive the participant's full attention as they are often checking in from a smartphone while juggling many other responsibilities. This changes the dynamic of conversation, in addition to the fact that there is no real way to know if someone has read what has been written on Twitter unless they reply directly. Another limitation is that it does not allow for following conversations that move to DM (direct message), email, IM (instant message) or the telephone to discuss further for a variety of reasons – self-censoring, speed, frustration due to the 140 character limit to name a few. This offers many difficulties to analyzing discourse. In addition to this, is the issue of the flatness presented by an online conversation through which users have adopted symbols like the smiley to try and express feeling through text to combat the lack of simultaneous feedback that is usually provided in audiovisual cues (Herring, 2001).

Despite the limitations of the medium, the use of qualitative methods, grounded theory and computer mediated discourse analysis captured two months of rich discussion by some of the most engaged media experts discussing the future of the newspaper. This has led to some interesting data for analysis as will be seen in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: Results and Data Analysis³⁶

Introduction

This study uses the online Twitter conversations of 18 media experts for an exploration of the discussions surrounding the future of the newspaper, media and beyond. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the tweets of 20 users were archived into a database over a two-month period and two were subsequently omitted as they discontinued regular contributions to the debate. These tweets were filtered for relevancy and then coded through Nvivo using a grounded theory method, which resulted in a total of 151 coding categories. The initial categories reflect the wide array of topics attached to debates surrounding the future of newspapers and news generally, in what is often discussed as a transformational time. These initial categories were then grouped thematically into larger themes based on the future of the newspaper and the community that has formed around the topic. The full taxonomy that was developed through Nvivo can be seen in Appendix 2.

For purposes of analysis the results section will be broken into two parts, the first of which will be a discussion of how the experts in question act as a community of practice as defined by Etienne Wenger (1998, 2002). The second part provides a meta-analysis of the discourse used by this community in discussing the future of the newspaper, focusing in on the major themes that surfaced. Not surprisingly the largest overarching theme is best described generally as the future of media and can be broken down into the future of newspapers, journalism, radio, television, books and so on. There seems to be some confusion between the use of the term future of

³⁶ All tweets remain unaltered from how they appeared – typos, misspellings etc. were left as the expert posted it originally.

newspapers versus the future of news – they are obviously closely interrelated but not necessarily synonymous. Also of great importance are the discussions surrounding the effects of all this change on how journalism functions; this can be seen through many discussions that hint at deeper issues of identity, gatekeeping and boundaries. The shifts and adjustments to the state of journalism lead to a discussion around the socialization of news. And finally, the future of newspapers can be further refined into questions of innovation and business models. The economics of the new digital landscape is a contentious issue that seemingly has no easy answer to allow the news ecosystem to continue in its current form.

Community of practice

As discussed earlier, communities of practice are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis,” (Wenger et al, 2002, p. 4). These groups allow for social learning that integrates social participation as part of the process of learning and knowing. Within the data there are examples of each of these components to demonstrate the existence of a strong community of practice thinking on the future of newspapers on Twitter. It is worth noting that this was not an intended result of the research; rather it is a byproduct of studying the discourse of a group of people on the social network. Early in the research it became apparent that there was more happening than just a random handpicked subset of people using the microblogging platform to share information and chat amongst friends. By discussing the future of the newspaper and the ongoing shift in the profession of journalism, a community of practice has formed

online and formed publically. Participants are in regular contact with one another, sharing problems, successes, best practices and debating the issues of the day. The community of practice is a place for the experts to teach each other and to learn from each other. A large subset of the data touches on new tools, new skills and an exploration of what skills journalists need to develop. There is also an urgent sense that journalists need to learn and better understand how the business of newspapers work.

Characteristics of the group

Of the 18 experts there were 17 men and one woman; everyone lived in North America, three in Canada and the remainder in the United States of America. Without delving too deep into the geography of the users, there is a reason for the North American concentration. That is to say, the newspaper crisis has been felt most in the U.S with their economic downturn and its reverberations being felt across the border in Canada³⁷. Outside of the West the newspaper industry is alive and well as there has not been an equal proliferation of digital devices. In fact, print is thriving in many developing countries³⁸.

A scatterplot of the group's tweets shows that there is a concentration of tweets during more traditional work hours but that for the most part the experts are still tweeting in the evening and on the weekends, albeit less often. Some participants are more voracious Twitter users than others as demonstrated in the table below. There is a broad range of activity level among the different accounts.

³⁷ Some parts of Europe are also feeling this crisis, but this thesis focuses on North America.

³⁸ According to the 2011 State of the News Media report published by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism India has recorded a 13.1% growth over the past year. Retrieved on Jan. 1, 2012 <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2011/mobile-survey/international-newspaper-economics/>

Some users tweeted just once or twice a day while others tweeted an average of 40 tweets per day. There is also a wide range in how the experts are using their own accounts, for example whether they engage with others on the platform or just use it as a broadcast-only tool. The yellow bar in Table 9 represents the overall number of tweets, while the orange shows how many times they directly engage with another user. The purple bar shows how often they retweet and mention other users while the hot pink bar is the total number of individual accounts they engage with overall. Alex Howard was the more frequent tweeter with a total of 2500 tweets, while Jennifer Preston had under 500 in the same time period and Steve Outing had under 100. If you compare the yellow bar with the hot pink bar, you get a sense of how the user is engaging on Twitter and how big their network is. A user like Kirk Lapointe is using his account almost singularly for broadcasting information out and has very little interaction with other accounts.

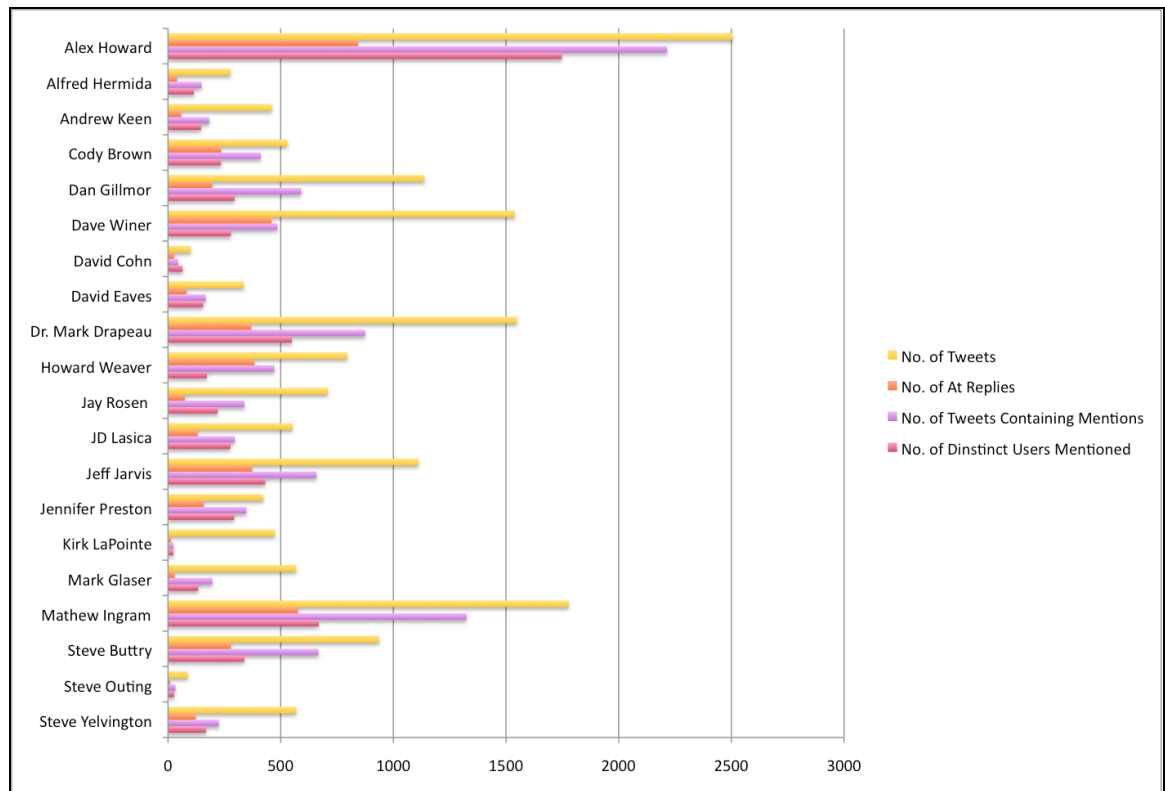


Table 9: Expert usage of Twitter broken down by type of tweet³⁹

All of the participants are writers of one kind or another, and the descriptors range from journalist to blogger and author to columnist. Of the 18 experts, seven have close ties to academia as a director, fellow, professor or adjunct faculty member. At the beginning of the data collection, there were five people publishing regularly in print form although one person did move from print to online during the two-month period and another has since moved on to become the ombudsman for CBC, the Canadian public broadcaster. The discussions on Twitter are not moderated and users can choose whether their accounts are public or private. All accounts for this study were public.

³⁹ Tables 9 to 14 were compiled by my colleague at the University of Ottawa in the Master of Computer Science program Cate Huston (Huston and Weiss, 2011). Huston used Adobe Many Eyes and Microsoft Excel to plot the datapoints in her own work.

The experts involved in this study do not represent the entire community of practice, as there are many others who appear throughout the data engaging and participating with the group. It is also worth noting that membership in this community of practice does not preclude participation in others; each person's own colleagues and newsrooms present the possibility of multiple memberships.

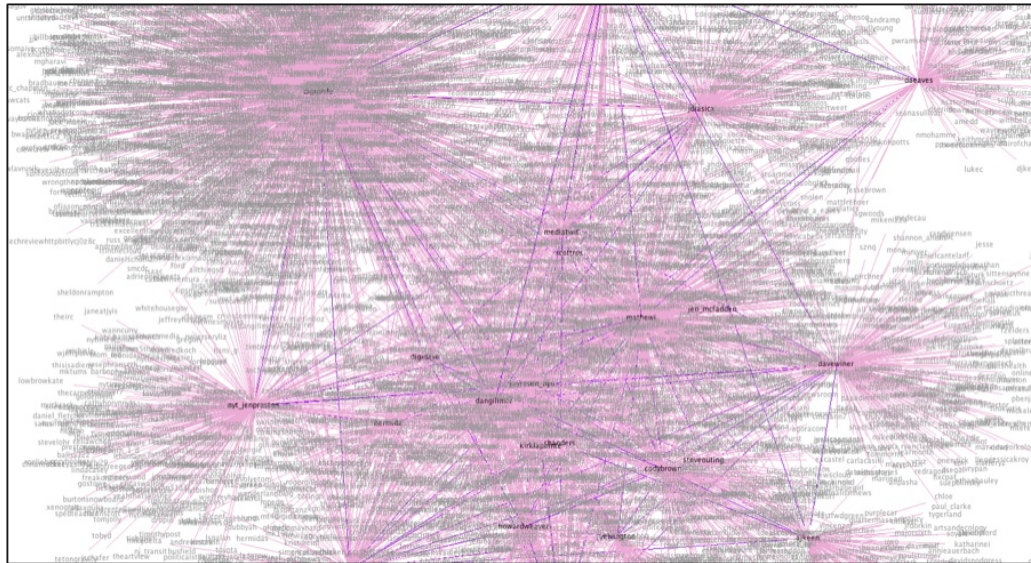


Table 10: Network graph of the experts

Table 10 is a graphical representation of the network of the full list of Twitter users discussing the future of the newspaper and their connections. The experts are joined to each other by a dark purple line and each of the users are at the centre of their own network as represented in grey and pink. The more followers a user has, the bigger the sphere around them. The closer together they are at the centre of the graph, the more dense their networks are, that is how much overlap there is among their followers. So a user like @digiphile, who is a journalist but is also heavily involved in debates on government and technology, has a lot of followers who are not linked to the other journalists and therefore his network has less overlap with

theirs. Each media expert has their own interests, style and way of using Twitter, and the range of content that they produce is very diverse.

Meaning

As a communicator there is nothing more important than properly conveying your point. Using words that provide the meaning that you intend is paramount and in the world of Twitter when there is just text and no intonation it becomes even more important. The construction of meaning within a community of practice, especially one that counts primarily wordsmiths as the majority of its population, requires constant participation and negotiation. Participation is used to refer to taking part or sharing with others and also to relationships with others that reflect this process in a way that suggests both connection and action (Wenger, 1999). Participation takes many forms including as a source of identity, as a way to shape and be shaped within the community, and as a way of acting both internally and externally to the community of practice. Journalists on Twitter are not just participating during work hours, in fact with a few exceptions, most of the experts are online at all hours, so much so that you can graph to a close estimation the hours that they spend asleep each night over the two month period⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ All data pulled from Twitter was in Coordinated Universal Time, which is the main time standard used in coding. Time zones are generally then expressed in + or – from 0; for example Ontario would be UTC-05.

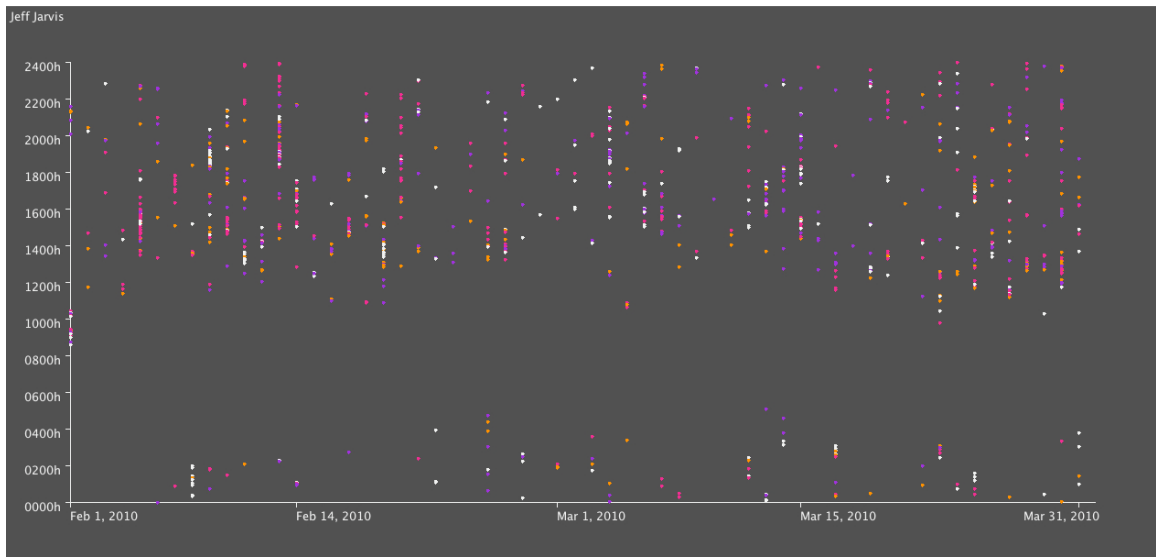


Table 11: Jeff Jarvis scatterplot

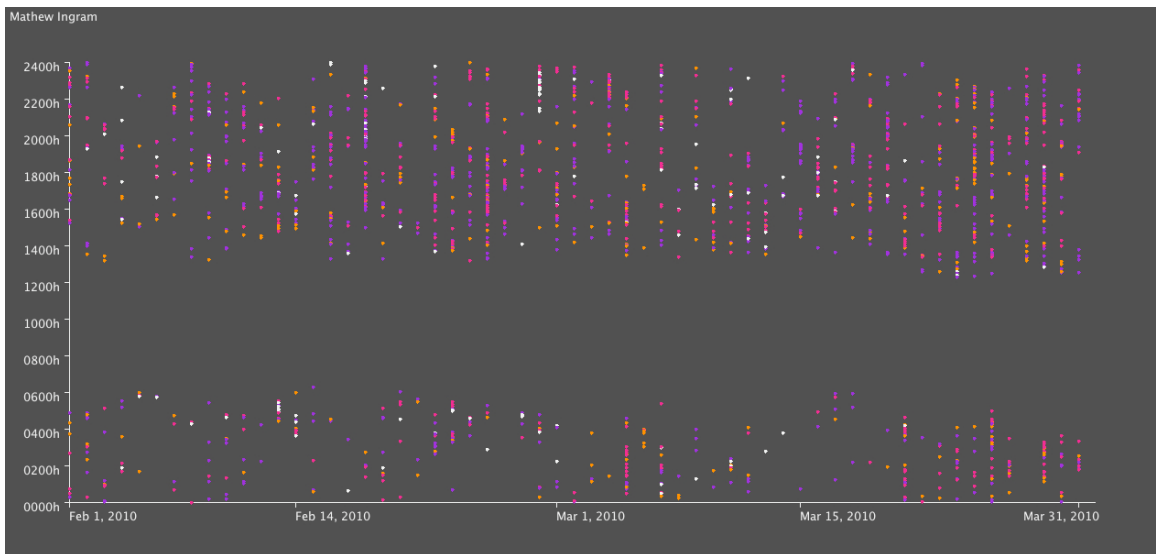


Table 12: Mathew Ingram's usage scatterplot

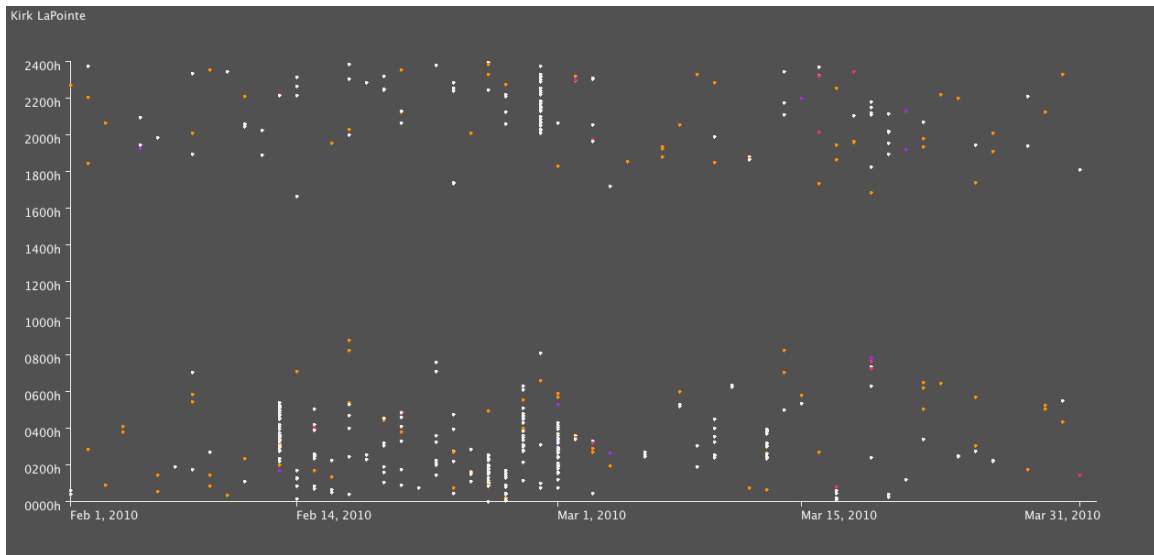


Table 13: Kirk Lapointe's usage scatterplot

One can argue that being a journalist is more of an ideological identity than a profession. A journalist is not just a journalist while they are at work. It is part of who they are, and is ingrained in the language they use, the way they perceive things around them and how they navigate through the world (Deuze: 2005). Participation is also a prominent theme that will be discussed in the second section of this chapter as it is a strong focus of debate as the media experts struggle with the participation of the audience in their craft. Through the proliferation of blogs and recording equipment such as smartphones, small video cameras and digital audio recorders, it is possible for the audience to become active users and start creating their own content. This participation is perceived in at least two ways – one as positive where anyone can participate in the news, the other as negative where there are too many amateurs creating sub-par quality content. There is no consensus within the group about which way to view this participation.

In the following examples taken from the data, the idea of negotiation of meaning discussed as one of the indicators of a community of practice is exemplified first through an exchange between Jay Rosen, Alex Howard and a third user (@laurengilger) who is not in the data set so her tweets were not captured.

@jayrosen_nyu: "If I may, @laurengilger: Why are citizen journalism, hyperlocal, crowdsourcing buzzzzwords for you? Do they defy definition? Make no sense?"

@jayrosen_nyu: "For future reference, @laurengilger: Crowdsourcing: when a job normally done by pros in house is outsourced to the crowd."

At this point Alex Howard, interjects to challenge Rosen's definition of crowdsourcing as missing an integral component of the concept:

@digiphile: "@jayrosen_nyu @laurengilger Defining crowdsourcing without referencing the role of IT is incomplete, IMHO: <http://j.mp/dqRL4u>"

@jayrosen_nyu: "FYI, @laurengilger. Hyperlocal: news about the places where we live, work, shop and walk around. None of these terms is especially elusive."

@jayrosen_nyu: "Also @laurengilger. Citizen journalism: When the people formerly known as the audience use the press tools they have to inform one another."

Rosen does not respond to Howard, although just by interjecting Howard may have successfully ensured that the users involved in the conversation and anyone else following that particular discussion would see the mention of IT and check the link which leads the reader to a series of tech blogs about knowledge exchange. This example also demonstrates the boundaries to participation for outsiders in the discussion. Rosen appears to be annoyed by Gilger's questioning of the usage and definition of these terms. He curtly responds to her questioning. It is worth noting that Gilger is a grad student in journalism and thus would have

knowledge of these terms which makes Rosen's response even more disparaging.. The negotiation of meaning is hard to judge without having captured Gilger's responses to the conversation but Rosen does not allow for a debate, he asserts they definitions as they are set in stone establishing the boundary between inside the community of practice and outside.

Another important illustration of the use of Twitter by the experts to negotiate meaning is through the lead-up, duration and after effects of the yearly South by Southwest (SXSW) conference. SXSW promotes itself as an "emerging technologies" gathering that annually brings the top thinkers to Austin, Texas to discuss the newest and hottest developments in the intersections between technology and other sectors (such as journalism). In March 2010, Rosen was part of a panel discussion entitled "The Future of Context" which set out to tackle the idea that in this new online medium, it is possible for journalists to present information in a new way that would give the audience more context to the stories they are reading. The panel set out to discuss what barriers currently exist to obtaining true context as well as to brainstorm ways to fix these issues⁴¹.

In the lead up to the conference a website was launched in conjunction with Twitter promotion and encouragement from Rosen to create a vibrant backchannel in advance of the panel. Backchannels generally exist for the duration of an event and then go inactive but discussion continued on Twitter up until at least August 4, 2010 and the archive listed 1141 total tweets with the designated hashtag:

⁴¹ <http://www.futureofcontext.com/>

#futureofcontext. The tweets leading up to the event were used to promote and raise awareness:

@jayrosen_nyu: "... @howardweaver calls it an issue that's emerging as the most important topic in news. <http://www.futureofcontext.com/> Catch us at SXSW."

@jeffarvis: Relevant to #futureofcontext: my post asking whether journalism is storytelling: <http://bit.ly/8PyKR0> Are we story enablers?

@howardweaver: "A star is born: see the comments on #futureofcontext. Important for all journalists."

The entire conversation, both online and in person during the actual session was a function of negotiating meaning, one which looked at the very base unit of what journalists write day in and day out: the article. The main focus of the conversation centered on the new ability provided by the internet to significantly alter the way journalists tell a story. The panelists and online participants (both those tweeting from the session as well as those participating from afar through Twitter) were discussing the idea of changing the basis of how information is presented by moving away from the atom of the article and its inverted pyramid style toward the presentation of information that would give the reader background. Their tweets highlighted what they thought was the most important information coming out of the dialogue and allowed for those who were not present to be included in the discussions:

@jayrosen_nyu: "For the news to be informative... people have to be informable. A stream of newsy updates won't get them there <http://www.futureofcontext.com/>"

@mathewi: "RT @jayrosen_nyu The current (old) news system is an artifact of the era of industrial production #SXSW #futureofcontext"

@digiphile: "@moniguzman Harris' object-oriented' reporting hints @ idea: form atomized news to narrative, embed media, link research? #futureofcontext"

@jeffjarvis: "+ personalization + relevance RT @jeffjarvis: #sxsw #futureofcontext: are the solutions participation, curation, presentation?"

Of the experts used in this study, eight participated in this specific debate through Twitter, but also by writing blog posts and a few by attending the panel in person. Kommons⁴²-founder, Cody Brown, used the event to meet people in person and then at one point introduces himself to one of the panelists through Twitter to ask him to meet for a coffee to continue the conversation. The shared experience that the community of journalists participated in through the negotiation of what writing with context means and what that might look like in the future for online news can be considered as what Wenger defines as socialized learning which sees a group working together to solve problems.

@codybrown: "Big thoughts forming around-The Future of Context-from @jayrosen_nyu and others, Kommons is obsessive about this issue <http://bit.ly/aTaEVd>"

@jayrosen_nyu: "Okay, news nerds: From the inverted pyramid to the tumbled pyramid. More on #futureofcontext themes: <http://jr.ly/ya5p> hat tip, @BoraZ"

Wenger (1999) discusses the importance of locality to the formation of communities of practice and warns against the overuse of the term as an analytical term. The main issue preventing this group from qualifying as a community of

⁴² Kommons.com was a beta question and answer site that aimed to harness the power of Twitter by allowing users to ask questions of other users in an attempt to improve two-way conversations. As of December 2011, Brown has moved onto a new project, Scroll (<http://www.scrollmkr.com>).

practice in Wenger's definition is that they live all over North America and thus are not in constant physical contact. In his study of Usenet, Murillo (2008) comes to the conclusion that "extra-organizational communities of practice can emerge spontaneously in the social areas of the Internet, just as they emerge in organizational settings and that true communities of practice are not inherently limited to face-to-face interaction" (Murillo, 2008:1). It can be argued that the relationships built and sustained through Twitter, blogs, email, the telephone and other methods of communication provide enough shared experiences to overcome this.

Another example of negotiating meaning took place during another panel at South by Southwest discussing what happens when the New York Times dies. Interestingly, the question was not posed as "if" the NYT dies as pointed out by JD Lasica in one tweet where he says he's surprised by it as he predicts the NYT moving online in 2011 (though we now know they aren't there yet).

@JDLasica: "Audience member: I don't think anyone in this room thinks Twitter is going 2 fill the void left by the NY Times. Applause. #endtimes #sxsw"

@NYT_JenPreston: "RT @jdlasica: Be careful about us (bloggers) vs. them (pro journalism) & focus on bigger coexistent ecosystem. #endtimes #SXSW"

@yelvington: "RT @mthomps: I worry less that the NYT dies; more that public's willingness to seriously engage w/ information dies. <http://bit.ly/9SSlyQ>"

@JDLasica: "Markos: People have to be more savvy [news] consumers. Yes, media literacy now falls to all of us. #endtimes #SXSW"

@jayrosen_NYU: "#endtimes If it had a simpler task, DESCRIBING the complex new ecosystem of which the Times is a part, this panel and its people would shine"

@NYT_JenPreston: "Go it right: RT @jayrosen_nyu: #endtimes panel's task should have been DESCRIBING complex new ecosystem of which NYT is a part... #sxsw"

It's worth noting that the last two tweets show how the platform can be edited as Jen Preston retweets something Jay Rosen said to fit within the character requirements but she rephrases in a way that adjusts his meaning from being an observation to having an opinion. The four experts who were in attendance at the event were trying to unpack what the loss of what is considered to be the leading newspaper would mean to society, Jay Rosen talks about the New York Times representing investigative journalism as a totem for public service, while JD Lasica cautions about an 'us' versus 'them' mentality. There are no tweeted conclusions to the event, and as an external witness merely watching Twitter and not actually sitting in the room it is difficult to follow the panel discussion.

Negotiating meaning plays an extremely important role in this digital world as change is occurring at a dizzying pace. The experts are trying to cope and analyze the altered landscape within the community and this affects what they do day in and day out.

Practice

A community's practice revolves around both existing knowledge as well as new developments in the field and represents a set way of doing things, such as common approaches and shared standards (Wenger et al., 2002). Practice involves artifacts like books, web sites, articles, behaviours, and ethical stances. Artifacts like the *New York Times* and the media news aggregating site Mediagazer⁴³ are viewed

⁴³ <http://www.mediagazer.com>

as required reading for all members of the community. One of Twitter's most common uses is recommending and linking people to the things that one is reading.

@dangillmor: "why not? RT @AriMelber: Just what our media DOESN'T need: a whole site aggregating media about media. Mediagazer <http://bit.ly/cv82Ri>"

@kirklapointe: "Very impressed with the breadth of mediagazer.com. Not sure I love the layout, but content catches most everything in one place."

@codybrown: " @cdixon I havent finished Wealth of Networks yet either. It, like The Bible-is meant to be consumed slowly-Reach for it in times of need"

Although like most things in a community not everyone agrees but even then the community is there to try to convince the others they should read it:

@howardweaver: "Mediagrazer's RSS feed is called Firehose. How apt -- a giant flush of loosely related information. #filterfailure"

@jayrosen_nyu: "Sure, it's a crowded field but I'm getting a lot out of <http://www.mediagazer.com/>"

The idea of shared standards arose from the data by the way of a coding category called 'journalistic values'; it appeared 138 times discussed by 15 of the 18 experts. This category reflects the community's benchmarks for what it means to be a successful journalist and also seemingly acts as a way to set boundaries for comportment among the group. These boundaries are under constant negotiation through action and reaction, through back and forth on Twitter. In the data the values are often represented through the polarization of other people's work and also in more general statements about what it takes to be a journalist.

@dangillmor: "Dear journalists: Your anonymous sources give me more insight into you (and it's not flattering) than the people/issues you cover..."

@digidave: "People give me credit for being open/transparent. I can't hold a light to @copress and @danielbachhuber See postmortem: <http://bit.ly/aDFcsS>"

@jayrosen_nyu: "Notice, @mikeorren: web editors lower print standards by not fact-checking but do print editors lower web standards by re-purposing content?"

@yelvington: "@hatchjt @macloo It's not about the skill. It's about being a self-starter and a motivated problem-solver, requirements for journ success."

These tweets give a sense of the policing that the experts do of the boundaries of what they see as proper practice and good journalistic standards. They award good behavior as exemplified by @digidave's tweet, while @yelvington is discussing what makes a good journalist. @Jayrosen_nyu by asking if the same rules apply online as they do in the offline world when it comes to repurposing content for one platform and using it elsewhere.

Community

A community of practice can be seen as a unit of people working together on a problem. Wenger (1999) outlines three aspects or dimensions of practice that are required to fulfill the community aspect: mutual engagement; joint enterprise and shared repertoire. Mutual engagement refers to the fact that membership in this community relies on the participants being directly engaged with each other to solve a problem, like the uncertainty surrounding the future of the newspaper. This topic holds a great importance for the group as mostly ex-newspaper people who

have become early-adopters and innovators in a new medium. The mutual engagement portrayed by this community of practice can be described as being less concerned with saving the newspaper, and more for finding solution to preserve the journalism that newspapers represent for the future.

@mathewi: "got a new post up: What Does The Future Hold For Newspapers? -- for some, opportunity; for others, disaster: <http://is.gd/b3Mzs>"

@stevebuttry: ".@michelemclellan @jcstearns @lavirusik Underlying & faulty premise of saving journalism discussions: important journalism = newspapers."

Another issue related to the future of the newspaper that consumed the experts was whether or not anonymity should be allowed for commenters on a news site. It was a debate that began with a tweet from Alex Howard (@digiphile) posing a question on commenting and linking to a blog about anonymous comments and trying to verify an individual without identification. It was at this point Mathew Ingram (@mathewi) replied to another user who was not part of the data set - Howard Owens (@howardowens):

@mathewi: "I think anonymity is a red herring, @howardowens -- it unnecessarily restricts potential engagement (both positive and negative)"

This conversation spanned five days and involved nine of the experts, a non quantifiable number of Twitter users who were not part of the study, 93 tweets by the experts and four blog posts that themselves received many comments making it the largest discussion that occurred during data collection. The entire debate is available in appendix 4.

@mathewi: "@howardowens, what's ethical about preventing people from commenting who might be afraid of repercussions if they use their real name?"

@mathewi: "@howardowens @stoweboyd @johntemplepn: FB Connect doesn't affect whether or not you can ban someone. My view is real names are irrelevant."

@CodyBrown: "@mathewi @stoweboyd @johntemplepn - the challenge is verifying whether someone providing their first/last name actually is that person"

@Mathewi: "@howardowens @stoweboyd @johntemplepn: why not use Facebook Connect for comments? persistent identity is the key, not verified identity"

Although the conversation began about commenting it extended into a larger philosophical discussion dealing with important themes of anonymity, privacy, participation, leadership in discourse and engagement. Although the debate surrounding the online comments stayed mostly convivial, there was a lot of disagreement between Ingram and Owens with the experts tending to agree with the former. There were two instances where some anger appears through the tweets – once from Steve Yelvington and a somewhat out of context comment from Jeff Jarvis that hints at some previous strong conflict between the users:

@yelvington: ". @howardowens No virtue in anonymity? Tell that to an Iranian dissident. You have followed your argument over a waterfall."

@jeffjarvis: "@howardowens I did block you long ago because of your then-uncivil behavior. Forgot about it. I've unblocked you."

This debate underlines that communities of practice do not only emerge from consensus and negotiation but also from conflict and dispute. This debate can be considered a philosophical one that tackles questions of authority and power relations. The experts are all sitting in a position of power as academics, journalists

and media experts and thus it is worth noting that in only once in their discussion about commenting and anonymity does anyone referencing asking the audience what they would want.

Conversely to the need for negotiation, a community of practice can also be examined through the sharing and helping that the members extend to each other. Through Twitter participants can provide a simple link to an article that someone else in the community has written. They can give advice or solicit help from a particular community. One of the coding categories was “compliments” in which there are 41 different tweets where the experts commend another user on something they’ve done.

@howardweaver: “@jayrosen_nyu You’re definitely well along the right path, Jay. I think manufactured balance is the biggest sin, but there are many.”

@yelvington: “Recommended: The Google Newsroom <http://bit.ly/9swuOB> (translated) via @jayrosen_nyu and reax <http://bit.ly/bAxvMR> (francais) by @mikiane”

@outing: “Jarvis, Rosen named to Journal-Register advisory board. <http://goo.gl/L4GZ> Why'd newspaper co's not do this years ago???”

@davewiner: “@howardweaver -- dan is one of the good guys. the people you should be hitting on are the ones who limit choice in the name of open.”

@jeffjarvis: “Hearing the star of journalism’s future, @digidave, @ #sxsw. Next to @jenny8lee, @jakejarvis”

@dangillmor: “Is Dave on a roll or what? RT @davewiner: How to fix URL-shorteners. <http://r2.ly/tzid>”

There are also examples in the comment debate where presumably Owens feels ganged up on by the end so the experts soften their language:

@mathewi: “@howardowens: my pleasure, Howard. While lots of people talk about it, you are one of the few who is actually busy doing it :-)”

@stevebuttry: "I'm not as hardline as @howardowens on anon comments, but I know he's right for The Batavian because he stakes his business on his approach."

This is not to say that all Twitter interactions are positive, it is often that users engage in very public and sometimes fiery debates⁴⁴. There was minimal disagreement within the 18 members of the community of practice during data collection. The aforementioned commenting debate was the most inclusive during the data collection and that was very mild. This debate is a good example of "participation" within the community. A shared practice connects the members of a community to each other in a diverse set of relationships that can be complex (Wenger, 1999). The mutual engagement of all participants when faced with radical change within their profession helps to solidify the community of practice by laying out the membership of the group.

Joint enterprise is another factor that helps tie the connections between people in the community together. Wenger (1999) says this is the collective process of negotiation that the members define for themselves as they discuss issues amongst themselves. As there is no institutional direction or pre-conceived hierarchy within the community on Twitter, the production of practice is left to be steered by the community itself. The formation of the community is based around the debate on what the future of the newspaper will look like and by extension about what the future holds for journalism as a profession and innovation within journalism. Almost all the experts involved in the study are ex-newspaper people.

⁴⁴ These online fights occur enough they have received their own terminology. Flame wars are often perpetrated by trolls who are considered to be particularly cranky web users who enjoy being inflammatory mostly without cause.

They have come together to tackle what some view as the death of their industry while others view the current situation as an exciting time full of new opportunity. As illustrated by the tweets below, there is a sense of hope although some of the experts are definitely more positive of the outcome than others:

@stevebuttry: ".@michelemclellan @jcstearns @lavirusik Underlying & faulty premise of saving journalism discussions: important journalism = newspapers.

@stevebuttry: "Absolutely. RT @michelemclellan Agree saving newspapers does not = saving journalism. Let's hope valuable newspaper jrn talent makes it."

@dangillmor: "but days of aggregator of record are just beginning RT @johnrobinson: The days of the newspaper of record are over."

@JDLasica: "Audience member: I don't think anyone in this room thinks Twitter is going 2 fill the void left by the NY Times. Applause. #endtimes #sxsw"

@davewiner: "@JEFFJARVIS @bradflora @adrianholovaty at #sxsw talking online news of future. From algorithms to citizen journalism. A BIG space."

As the community has formed around discussing the uncertain future, they spend a lot of time discussing new platforms, content creation and the new skills required to survive the change with mutual accountability for the topic. There is a strong sense of sharing the challenges amongst the community to overcome the battles. This mutual accountability draws parallels with the community of practice's strong allegiance to the idea of transparency. As a coding category "transparency" was mentioned by 15 of the 18 experts in 29 tweets. It is viewed by the experts as something that must be championed as a standard to all journalists no matter what

their affiliation. As such the group spends a lot of time reinforcing its importance amongst themselves and their online audiences.

@howardweaver: "Jeff jarvis on an essential transformation: to transparency: <http://bit.ly/aNRajl>"

@mathewi: "@Chanders: agreed -- transparency is good, even when it's incredibly boring :-)"

@digiphile: "A huge step for journalism - @ProPublica publishes their reporting recipe-@rachelsterne <http://bit.ly/a2JBSV> /via @acarvin"

@jayrosen_nyu: "My transparency and disclosure post, a Q & A at PressThink that tells people where I'm coming from <http://jr.ly/kjkd> Some may be interested."

The third characteristic for a community, according to Wenger's framework, is shared repertoire which is exemplified by the resources the group develops or adopts through practice, for example words, routines, artifacts or stories.

One example is an article that advises the traditional newspaper to 'burn the boats' and stop printing on their own accord before external factors force them to shut down. Burn the boats is a reference to Cortes and his move of burning the boats when they were exploring to force his men to forge ahead into unknown territory. While the historical reference is actually flawed, the debate surrounding the metaphor was an interesting one among the experts. Of the experts, eight linked directly to the article, and two more joined the debate that began about the article and progressed into a debate on platforms and innovation.

@codybrown: " 'Every news organization in the country should set a date to drop its print edition. If you don't, someone else will.' "<http://tcrn.ch/ax87Ho>"

@dangillmor: "Fury over Marc Andreessen's harsh advice to news orgs tells me some critics are missing central point..."

@mathewi: "@ryansholin: the burn the boats analogy has a life of its own -- it no longer has anything to do with Cortes and what he did or didn't do"

*@yelvington: "Skip the part about junking presses -- this Andreessen conversation has an important point about the iPad.
<http://bit.ly/cN8yTp>"*

This helps highlight content delivery as a recurring theme that the experts spend much airtime discussing. One debate between Dan Gillmor and Howard Weaver concerned whether journalists should avoid using Apple as a platform because of their policies for deleting content they do not agree with. There is also a subsequent debate within the data between Weaver and Jeff Jarvis on whether Google or Apple is more dangerous to the developing Internet world.

@howardweaver: "Because doing so well w/o Apple? RT @hwy395: rt @dangillmor: news orgs that get in bed with content-control freak apple begging for trouble."

@yelvington: "Point is, open systems always beat closed systems. Don't imagine you can re-create the past when the Web is right there."

The above selected quotes from Howard Weaver and Steve Yelvington demonstrate how the experts are also able to steer the conversation. As people that are viewed as influential in the debate surrounding the future of the newspaper they are able to encourage the conversation to go down specific paths. In this case, Ingram is moderating the conversation insuring it does not get side-tracked from its original direction while Yelvington takes the opportunity to re-direct the conversation toward the virtues of open systems versus closed, or restricted ones. There seems to be a general acceptance amongst this group of experts that a lack of innovation is what is

holding the future of the news back. Moving to online is the first step in a longer process toward the unknown future of journalism.

@howardweaver: "@yelvington People won't pay for what they already won't pay for. Okay. Anybody tried offering something worth buying something different?"

@howardweaver: "@yelvington @davewiner @dangillmor et al make much more telling criticism, about Apple's probable control of the non-web channel."

Concurrent to the idea of change, the move online also now encompasses the skills required in broadcast and print as well as new skills. The "new skills" category in the coding involved 18 sub-categories ranging from live blogging to branding and backchannel to curation⁴⁵. The community of practice works together to share links to online training and best practices, to seek advice as well to promote their own successes but also their failures. In fact the category "best practices" was in the top ten of the most discussed topics overall (see page 109, Table 15 for the full top ten list).

One good example of how the community of practice uses Twitter as a learning tool is the opening story about Gordon Lightfoot. His death was falsely reported by Twitter and many of the Canwest⁴⁶ newspapers websites. The Internet, and Twitter specifically, has an unparalleled speed in information dissemination and thus was extremely quick to spread this information through the networks

⁴⁵ Curation is a concept that extends the idea of information collection and dissemination to place the gatekeeper as the filter and administrative side of the content, like curating a gallery or a museum, it is one of oversight and less of creation.

⁴⁶ Canwest has since changed its name to PostMedia and has been purchased by Shaw Communications: <http://www.thestar.com/business/companies/canwest/article/831653--canwest-newspaper-chain-to-be-called-postmedia-network-paul-godfrey-says>

based on the fact that the information was coming from someone who had influence and authority as a journalist. The diffusion of news is an interesting factor itself but not the point of the story in this case. When it came to light that Lightfoot was in fact not dead, Twitter was equally quick to correct the error. It also quickly jumped to trace what went wrong and to get to the bottom of how the error spread.

Transparency is important to the experts in this case as well as learning from their mistakes.

@mathewi: "Rebecca Fleming writes about being the first to tweet that Gordon Lightfoot had died: <http://is.gd/9g2KW> [via @jenniferhollett]"

@hermida: "Clearing things up RT @mathewi: David Akin on the Gordon Lightfoot rumour, his role in spreading the story & Twitter: <http://is.gd/8GpId>"

@mathewi: "agreed -- RT @marissanelson: Shouldn't make invisible changes or simply delete stories, folks. Even u were wrong re. Gordon Lightfoot."

@mathewi: "hey Twitter -- was Gordon Lightfoot a successful example of journalism as a process, or a failure of crowdsourced news?"

@mathewi: "lots of people answering both -- thanks a lot :-) although that might be true. Twitter repeated, but paper should have checked."

@mathewi: "good question -- RT @ivortossell: Would Lightfoot rumour have spread so quickly w/out @davidakin (and thus CanWest's) credibility behind it?"

@hermida: "The real story behind the falsely reported death of Gordon Lightfoot dissected by @iancapstick: Twitter didn't kill him, Big Media did"

"RT @dtopping: Blaming Twitter for spread news of Lightfoot's death is like blaming trees for an incorrect newspaper article [via @wicary]"

@stevebuttry: "I think the Lightfoot case, rather than showing Twitter to be inaccurate and unreliable, illustrates (again) how quickly it corrects."

Also noteworthy from the above tweets is that the people involved in the discussion are all journalists from different newspapers – Ivor Tossell is a freelance journalist at the *Globe and Mail*, @marissanelson is Marissa Nelson who was then at the *Toronto Star* and @dtopping is David Topping from *The Torontoist*. The time is taken by the journalists to assess what happened, figure out what went wrong and then to try and come up with a best practice on how to cope with this the next time.

Identity

The question of identity is one of the central themes that resurfaced often throughout the data set. It can be divided into two parts: first, who is a journalist? As discussed in an earlier chapter, this is a conversation that has been on-going for years. Second, if anyone can be a journalist what does that mean for the concept of audience? This theme is developed both directly and indirectly in discussions surrounding commenting, user-generated content and citizen journalists. As a profession that does not require accreditation thus presenting a low barrier to membership, participation is therefore open to anyone who wants to perform acts of news sharing. This has resulted in the lines becoming increasingly blurred in the new digital world where the cost of distribution has been effectively reduced to the cost of an internet connection and a computer (some may argue that a library card would even negate these costs). There is no agreement among the experts on who belongs and who does not. Andrew Keen self-describes as the anti-Christ of Silicon Valley and spends most of his time attacking what he perceives as the techno-utopians. He believes in the professional class and writes about the cult of the amateur creating mediocre content and laments the refusal of the masses to pay for

quality (Keen, 2007). As such it is common for his tweets to show the other side of most arguments, as he and Cody Brown's tweets reflect how they have different opinions on whether or not bloggers can be included as journalists:

*@ajkeen: "what's the difference between a blogger & a journalist?
<http://bit.ly/dx8ZFz> one reports the news, the other talks about
reporting the news."*

*@codybrown: "Frankly, in 2010, I can't even begin to express the
difference between bloggers and journalists outside of regular salary
@jamesseddon"*

In addition to the confusion between bloggers and journalists, there is also the larger question of participation from what Rosen has termed "the people formerly known as the audience"⁴⁷ as well as what happens when the barriers are completely removed.

*@jayrosen_nyu: "Bloggers are increasingly credentialed as press, but
that means we need a reliability index even more than we did before
<http://jr.ly/xtxd>"*

*@jayrosen_nyu: "The idea that citizen journalism is somehow opposed
to, or in conflict with, traditional journalism is now clearly past.
<http://jr.ly/xyua>"*

*@dangillmor: "Heyward: In world where everyone can be journo, not
clear how to distinguish quality #paleynews"*

*@digidave: ""The pros and cons of newspapers partnering with 'citizen
journalism' networks <http://post.ly/PpPq>"*

There is also an interesting dichotomy within the community when thinking about the identities of the participants – as the group of experts seemingly reflects the change in the professional world as there are many non-traditional journalists

⁴⁷ The People Formerly Known as the Audience, <http://www.prssthink.com/>

involved in the discussion but there are also what would be deemed “print people” as well. It is becoming increasingly difficult to put the experts in categories as in the past you were either in print (newspaper, magazine) or broadcast (radio, television) and now there is online.

@yelvington: “Damned near. RT @howardowens: Steve, aren’t you about one of the last of the old line New Media people still working at a newspaper company?”

@jayrosen_nyu: “If a print person hasn’t touched digital yet, what is that saying about them? <http://jr.ly/yavs> What’s a print person anyways? You know?”

Rosen’s tweet introduces that idea that there is a whole new set of skills required that come with the online realm, the most common of which are technical skills, for example being able to program computers to automatically pull data from the web, and it may go without saying, the use of social media. Social media continues to expand at exponential rates and its many different iterations and platforms require journalists of all stripes to adapt. This socialization of news creates a shift of power away from the news media toward the audience that allows them not only to participate and share in the spreading of information but also gives access to the journalist. This shift has resulted in an acknowledged transfer of control and power in favour of the audience and has left journalists to discuss the resultant adjustment in identity as what was once a very narrowly defined profession is being eroded by the web. Journalists are playing their old role as well as the new ones technology is creating. At the same time some of their traditional role has been appropriated in part by the former audience.

@hermida: "@agahran Tell them social media is about connection and community, rather than traditional journalism mindset of control and content."

@dangillmor: "Citizen journalism now utterly routine: Local TV announcers asking their audience in Hawaii to be eyes and ears, use Twitter etc. –"

@ajkeen: "lasted 1995-2010 RT @tolles: the age where journalists don't have to worry about audience or profits, is happily nearing an end."

@hermida: "Interesting post on deep-linking RT @paulbradshaw The BBC and linking part 1: users are not an audience <http://bit.ly/doxPuq>"

Conversely, there remain many questions about how much actual reporting is being done through social media and what real influence social media has.

@ajkeen: "Social Media Bubble Giving Us Artificial Connections, Thin Relationships <http://bit.ly/chfNKw> by @umairhaque of all people (via @loscalzo)"

@digiphile: "Citation by @aschwa02 of study in MD that social media is mostly repeatage, not reportage. Happy to report that. Er, repeat it. #FOMwkshop"

@jeffjarvis: "Jousting w/ Duncan Watts @ #brite re Twitter influenced research. Makes me think there are no influencers. False God of social marketing."

There is a certain level of irony in Jeff Jarvis saying that there is no influence through social media. In combination with his book sales and near constant speaking engagements, there is no doubt that his 47,691 followers⁴⁸ believe he has influence. His Twitter account is the equivalent to the circulation of a small town newspaper. His usage varies, on some days he only tweets twice while on one day he tweeted 60 times. Jarvis spent 1/3 of his time on Twitter engaging with that

⁴⁸ Retrieved from www.twitter.com/jeffjarvis on August 23, 2010 which has since grown to 69,993 as of June 1, 2011.

community, plus an equivalent amount of time retweeting other people's comments. Jarvis exemplifies one type of Twitter user who is not solely about direct self-promotion or broadcast, although he does regularly engage by retweeting what other users are saying about him. In Table 14, his tweets are broken down by Directed (where he is speaking directly to someone by using the @ sign); Mentioned is where he speaks about someone but not necessarily directly. This can also include retweeting other users comments. Links are tweets that include a link to other content and other is any tweet without any of the above-mentioned features. Jarvis has a good mixture of engagement, information and link sharing. Other members of the data set were not so diverse, for example @kirklapointe who uses Twitter almost solely for broadcast purposes.

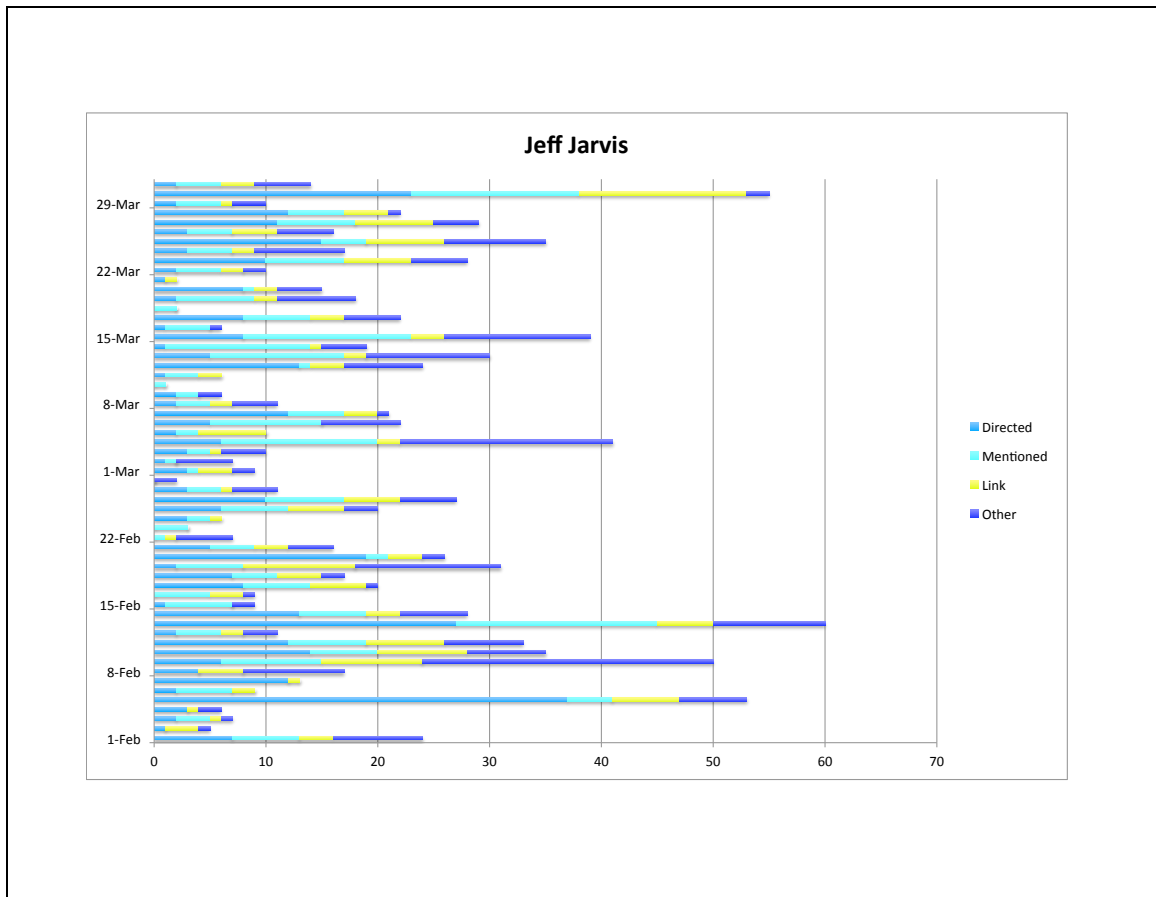


Table 14: Breakdown of Jeff Jarvis' type of tweets by day.

Another part of the community of practice is the shared knowledge of domain specific language. As experts in their field many words are developed to represent the new concepts being discussed within the group. The average citizen may not recognize words that are thrown around by the experts; some examples are words such as lifecasting, mindcasting, live-blogging, micro-blogging, beatbloggers, and crowdsourcing. These types of words and turns of phrases will be discussed in the following section.

Computer-mediated dialogue

There are two types of influence on discourse in a computer-mediated environment: medium (technological) and situation (social) (Herring, 2007). In this

case the technological is separated from the human aspects to explore if the specific system features affect communication and in what ways that may play out. Twitter is an asynchronous system that does not require users to be logged in at the same time in order to send and receive messages, as each user's stream is archived and searchable for three weeks⁴⁹. This is important to recognize because of the study's media experts all lead busy professional lives, as well as not living in the same time zone. As such they tend to tweet at different times but because Twitter is asynchronous it means that the order and time in which something is read is not predetermined.

Another technological factor that must be taken into consideration according to Herring (2007) is the granularity of the units sent out by the platform. Twitter is a message-by-message system that does not hint to other users if someone is composing a response, or even if they have read it. It is possible that messages are never read and it also means that the receivers cannot interrupt or otherwise engage simultaneously thereby making this transmission "one-way" (Cherny, 1999). To further complicate the process of sending and receiving messages, research shows that only 6% of all tweets are reacted to, that is to say a user either retweets or replies to another user's message (Sysymos, 2010). That leaves a massive number of tweets to remain unanswered, possibly read but without any way of knowing.

⁴⁹ There are many different Twitter applications that store content for longer. In June 2010, the Library of Congress assumed the entire history of Twitter into its archives about 11 million tweets at the time: <http://blog.twitter.com/2010/04/tweet-preservation.html>

As mentioned earlier, the amount of time that each tweet is stored also has influence on the discourse as it occurs. This “persistence of transcript” (Herring, 2007) on Twitter is three weeks as a searchable item and then it is no longer stored online in a searchable format. Each tweet is assigned an ID number and is forever online and therefore searchable with the username and the aforementioned ID by *www.twitter.com/username/status/IDnumber*. Persistence of transcript also refers to the length of time the message stays visible to other users and this is far more varied on Twitter as it would depend entirely on the program the user was using to read their feeds. It also depends on how often the user is checking their feed as well as how many people they are following. If a user wanted to go back and read all tweets by a user they can search backwards within the aforementioned time limit. Each user also has the ability to personalize their own stream of information through lists, hashtag searches, columns and groups. The number of users in a category and their activity level will affect how fast messages scroll past. For example in Tweetdeck, which is one of the most popular programs used for Twitter, a column keeps 200 messages at a time meaning that when you log in, you can only view the past 200 messages. The only true way for a user to be certain someone saw a message is when the user replies back or if they retweet the message. In the same vein there is also the ability for users to privately message each other through Twitter that is unavailable for analysis. Often private messages are used to convey thoughts not considered to be suitable for a wider audience in a form of self-censorship that could indicate that what the user really thinks may be far more

radical than what they portray on the broader channel. There is no way to track the private messages.

One of the most remarked and unique traits of Twitter is its character limit. The limit has historical roots to its original reliance on SMS technologies and although that is no longer the case, it has, to some users' chagrin, retained its limitation. This SMS limitation has been researched by Sherri Condon and Claude Cech (2001) as quoted in Herring (2007); "smaller buffers often mean shorter messages and different discourse organizational strategies; small buffers also increase the likelihood that language will be structurally abbreviated (p. 9)." Some are critical of the restrictions:

@davewiner: "@jaredhanson -- yes you should be wary of other company's patents. read the piece for the rest. 140 chars is a nightmare for discourse."

@dangillmor: "RT @davewiner: URL-shorteners are at best a temporary workaround for a limit Twitter shouldn't have <http://r2.ly/xbtg>"

Winer is the expert most often vocal about the limitation of being able to express himself in such a narrow space and frequently he replies that he is unable to respond. Often Twitter messages are short quips or links to longer form blog posts. User driven convention often sees the use of (1/2) and (2/2) to signify that a post is a continuation of a longer thought or to post multiple tweets in succession. This is not necessarily a criticism of Twitter but rather to identify a parameter or limitation for use. It affects discourse but for the most part the tweets are thought out in advance and words are chosen carefully to fit within the character allowance. There are also many forms of Twitter specific short hand that have developed (MT =

modified tweet and h/t = hat tip⁵⁰). It requires the author to be succinct and get to the point without mincing words. This can have both positive and negative effects, as it is very possible to misread intonation and intention of a tweet or in some cases, misunderstand the author's point. One way of tackling this is the use of emoticons though most of the experts do not use them with the exception of Mathew Ingram, Howard Weaver and Alex Howard who use them quite liberally both to convey positivity as well as to soften otherwise potentially harsh tweets.

Within Herring's (2007) classification system a section is devoted to "norms" which she defines as "conventional practices within the computer-mediated environment" (p. 12) divided into three types: organization, social appropriateness and language. The first loosely applies as the only formal administrative protocol within Twitter and is the necessity for a user to register for an account, which is an automated process that requires no human interaction or intervention. There is no formal moderator or leader although the system has been set up to allow users to self-police and report spammers as well as abuse or misuse of the service. As such there is a formal administration of the service, but it is done invisibly on a global scale. The norms of social appropriateness are, as discussed earlier in the community of practice section, informally set and policed by the other members of the group.

The final section is the "code" which refers to the language used in the computer-mediated interaction. Communication through Twitter was originally

⁵⁰ Due to the character limit Twitter users have adapted short hand. Modified Tweet means that the original tweet has been edited, usually to enable the user to add their own comments. H/T is shorthand for giving credit to someone else, usually for the content of the tweet or the link.

established in English although the service has added many other languages in the past two years.⁵¹ The data set for the future of the newspaper was entirely done in English with the exception of a few German tweets from Jeff Jarvis. Stylistically there is a mix of colloquial, journalistic narrative and academic discourse that is dependent on the content and context of the tweet. The language variety is North American English with two exceptions – Andrew Keen and Alfred Hermida who are both British by birth but who’ve both spent many years in North America. As journalists and authors, all the experts are extremely proficient writers. The writing system used in Twitter is also worth noting as there is only one font and no ability to use any specific effects on the text – as in bold or italics. This requires participants to choose their words even more precisely. Weaver recognizes this difficulty and suggests it would need to be more than one specific typeface:

@howardweaver: “@jeffjarvis @Chanders Recall how Mencken wanted an ironics typeface to signal irony? We’d need a half-dozen specialty fonts on Twitter.”

Herring (2007) also notes the importance of turn taking, and this can be furthered on Twitter as seen in the debate on anonymity where Mathew Ingram mentions that he played with his kids over the course of the conversation:

@mathewi: “@rhh: definitely been fun -- love to have a good debate in between going to the pool and playing shuffleboard and bocce with the kids :-)”

The conversation occurs even if he isn’t there, and he is required to catch up to be able to comment. Twitter means that a conversation can happen among a wide variety of people and it does not mean that everyone is included in all parts of the conversation. It is possible to use the syntax c/@username to include the originator

⁵¹ <http://technorati.com/blogging/article/twitter-now-speaks-in-french-too/>

of the topic but that uses up the precious 140 characters the user has to work with. Twitter is a network of loosely interconnected conversations that are diffuse through time, space and place.

What does the discourse say?

The coded categories span a wide breadth of subject matter with many content topics though all relate back to the changing nature of journalism and the future of news generally. Overall there were 151 coded nodes – free or tree nodes. Free nodes can be considered the outliers as were considered important but did not fully fit within the overarching categories of Boundary, Business Models, Changes in Journalism, Community, the Future, Identity, Technology and the Past.

As the initial data entry import was too large for Nvivo to handle, the sources were split into two, so each user is listed as a source twice giving a coding category up to 36 sources (each of the 18 users count as two sources). The table below shows the top 10 categories with the data sorted by number of mentions by sources and then further sorted by the number of references per coded category. These categories are not yet sorted into trees according to theme but just according to frequency of discussion.

Node	References	Sources
Business models	364	31
Future of newspaper	360	31
Future of online news	317	22
Twitter	294	35
Debate	290	32
Change in communication methods	285	32
Changes to journalism	259	27
Google	243	32
Best practices	224	29
Media critiques	212	26

Table 15: Top 10 most discussed subjects as coded from data

Business Models

The most often coded category was from an economic perspective, and a general catch-all for business models as the most discussed. One of the largest issues facing online news is the lack of a way to monetize. This is a category where the experts definitely do not agree on what is the right way to advance. Of the experts that discussed pay walls, most agreed that it was not the correct way forward, but at the same time many of the experts do not agree with giving content away for free.

@howardweaver: "The internet exposed hard news for what it is: a lousy standalone business. <http://bit.ly/aYmu7H>

@stevebuttry: "Murdoch plan to transpose old business models to this new business reality is simply insane, @jeffjarvis says. <http://bit.ly/9mN2Qv>"

@ajkeen: "lasted 1995-2010 RT @tolles: the age where journalists don't have to worry about audience or profits, is happily nearing an end."

@howardweaver: "@yelvington People won't pay for what they already won't pay for. Okay. Anybody tried offering something worth buying something different?"

@jay_rosennyu: "Alas, @SusannaSpeier, I have no simple view on charging for online news. Don't think it's a solution. Or a sin. But it's HARD to pull off."

@stevebuttry: "Using figures from Daytona Beach News-Journal, @newsosaur's formula for estimating newspaper value. (-93% in 4 years) <http://bit.ly/aMVYkT>"

There has been a panicked search for a business model that will support the newspaper industry online. Among the topics that arose often were different monetization systems such as paywalls, tip jars (donations), advertising, or government subsidies. There was no single economic model that the experts agreed on. The main agreement was that the system needed to innovate quickly to find what does work.

@steveouting: "@Kachingle getting some buzz at launch. Please Kachingle steveouting.com ... DailyCamera.com too! (1st newspaper to try it)"

@mediatwit: "According to @digidave, Spot.us raised micro-donations and grants that equal 1.3 of original Knight grant: <http://bit.ly/99xZdt>"

There were also fundraising tweets that were directed at people supporting the cause of crowd-funded journalism for the greater good.

@outing: "Alt media story crowd-funding: Send Ted Rall Back to Afghanistan to Get the Real Story: <http://kck.st/avqzfW> (\$21K pledged so far!)"

@outing: "Hey, Boulder tweeps! DailyCamera.com has only 11 Kachingers. Can we show newspapers that crowd-funding can work? Kachingle 'em."

The theme of innovation, experimentation and journalism start-ups run throughout the data as it appears not just in terms of business models, but also for the act of journalism as well as technology used by journalists in terms of tools and platforms. Innovation as a category has 136 references, but also within related

categories like journalism start-ups which 16 of the 18 experts discuss with 120 references as well as experimentation which has a total of 128 references coded.

@stevebuttry: "Interviewed a programmer candidate today. Had to tell him what we're doing is remedial, not innovative, and newspapers' mobile efforts suck."

@jayrosen_NYU: "Flip cameras for every reporter, innovation labs at 6 newspapers, profit-sharing for all workers: some of @jxpaton's moves <http://jr.ly/uafd>

@mediatwit: "Big news from @digidave: Spot.U.S Adds Assignments, Widgets, Story Updates in Revamp <http://bit.ly/99xZdt> #idealab"

@stevebuttry: "@chriscobler Content innovation is doing better than revenue innovation. But neither has done enough. Success rest in doing both better."

@outing: "I love this! From Harvard Business Review: How to Kill Innovation: Keep Asking Questions <http://j.mp/cPDVNX> (a.k.a. Just Do It!)"

The sentiment of fail fast and fail often underlines the panic the experts feel about the future of their craft. As the ground shifts under journalists in a changing landscape, economics was the most discussed factor but only by a few references, as the future of the newspaper was the next most discussed topic.

Future of the newspaper

As a coding category there were data present from all of the experts and there were 360 references coded, making it the second largest category in the data collection. All the data is related to the new news ecosystem and thus even the above discussion on business models is interrelated to the future of the newspaper. The tweets directly coded to the future of the newspaper range from philosophical to prophetic to factual.

*@codybrown: "Every news organization in the country should set a date to drop its print edition. If you don't, someone else will."
<http://tcm.ch/ax87Ho>"*

*@DanGillmor: "but days of aggregator of record are just beginning RT
@johnrobinson: The days of the newspaper of record are over."*

@howardweaver: "@davidfolkenflik For the record, genuine evolution is the opposite of sink or swim. It's not instantaneous or even quick."

@JDLasica: "Odd that moderator's premise is that NY Times will go away. I see the Times moving its business model online starting in 2011. #endtimes"

@kirklapointe: "NADBank says Canadian newspaper readership remains stable and strong, précis at <http://www.mediamanager.com>"

@jeffjarvis: "@johnpgarrett: I don't think we should define ourselves by our medium; that's limiting & possibly deadly. Be everywhere you can be."

@jeffjarvis: "@johnpgarrett I'm not killing newspapers. They're sadly killing themselves. I'm just the messenger (don't kill me)."

@jayrosen: "Clay Shirky's big idea at @sxsw: Institutions will try to preserve the problem to which they are the solution. This does apply to the press."

*@yelvinton: "RT @mthomps: I worry less that the NYT dies; more that public's willingness to seriously engage w/ information dies."
<http://bit.ly/9SSlyQ>"*

The rampant theme that runs through all the discourse is of change being inevitable and that newspapers, while trying to change, are falling short. Those experts who are still work at a newspaper have an obvious bias and generally put forth a different view on things (@kirklapointe, @steveouting, @yelvinton, @NYT_JenPreston, @howardweaver and @stevebuttry). It is worth noting that most of the aforementioned people are editors and thus on the management side of things and also tend to be on the technology side of things – one is a social media editor

and another is in charge of the interactive division of his newspaper. When @stevebuttry switches to an online only news source he tweets that he will no longer be fighting against paywalls as he is obviously sick of the long-standing battle against the newspaper paywalls:

@stevebuttry: "Headed to a digital op, I'm finished criticizing newspapers trying to charge for content. I welcome paywalls now. <http://bit.ly/dpmlGv>"

The idea that institutions will preserve the problem to which they are the solution is an interesting one for the future of the newspaper. Shirky (2009) has argued elsewhere that the entire system needs to undergo revolution and that during revolutions things get broken faster than new things are invented. In the above tweets, Howard Weaver is talking about evolution and not revolution. JD Lasica writes that the *New York Times* will move its business model online. Both these statements are on the preserving side of the spectrum while Cody Brown and Jeff Jarvis' quotes are talking about a world without newspapers. It is important to note that no one in the data claims to know what the solution will be. That's not to say that each expert doesn't have a distinct opinion on what is going to happen but for the most part during the data collection no one comes out and says directly what they believe the future of the newspapers to be.

Rhetoric of doom (aka the proclaimed death of the mainstream media)

One of the other coding categories for this study that had data from each expert was 'rhetoric of doom' and it embodies a collection of tweets that use language that would be considered to be melodramatic when speaking of impending

tragedy. These tweets are mostly reflecting what the experts see as a dramatic shift in the journalism industry. They are not solely about the newspaper industry and often it is the case that the tweet is discussing mass media, that is, traditional media as a whole. The experts often tend to include magazines, television and radio in their discussions of the end. While considering these tweets, there is value in keeping in mind the limitations of a tweet as well as the common accusation that the media as a whole tends to sensationalize events to get readers.

“Metaphors are grounded in social shared knowledge and conventional usage. Particular metaphors may help to identify cultural domains that are familiar ... they express specific values, collective identities, shared knowledge, and common vocabulary,” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 86). In the data set there were a great series of metaphors used to describe the state of the media industry; some examples are “burning the boats”, “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic”, “euthanizing the news”, and “like a death in the family.” These metaphors and similes draw a grim picture of what the experts perceive as happening around them in the journalism world.

@stevebuttry: “Metaphor alert to @bergus: Newspapers as Burger King. (Comments better than the post.) <http://bit.ly/d2HGHr>”

@stevebuttry: “Have we had a carriage/car metaphor for the news biz yet, @bergus? <http://ow.ly/16Rped>”

@stevebuttry: “RT @davewiner Metaphors: horse carriages and a really dumb quarterback. <http://r2.ly/ydn5>”

@stevebuttry: “Last time u rode a horse? RT @jmestepa Great metaphor: newspapers=horses, Internet=cars. We didn't kill off horses because cars came along.”

These metaphors all hint at the demise of the newspaper, though not the complete end as there are still horses and carriages in the world – just many less and they are viewed as antiquated. Beyond these examples there is more dark imagery with language such as the “dry, dead carcass of the newspaper business”, “gallows”, “life support”, “resurrection”, and “the dying cash cow of print ads.”

@steveouting: “<http://goo.gl/EAQJ> NewsCorp-style paywall...dinosaur knows comet coming, thinks, I need thicker armor, I've heard it has a big tail”

@mediatwit: “CJR's melodramatic pitch for fund: How many must die along the way? How do we survive the journey? <http://bit.ly/cpGBAg>”

@stevebuttry: “Newspapers protected prolonged addiction to the dying cash cow of print ads. by @paulbradshaw via @jeffsonderman <http://bit.ly/cIDTNs>”

All of these examples have the tendency to set up a sensationalized view of the current state of the media industry. Without any background in the situation a reader would think possibly that the newspaper industry was about to print its last sheet of paper. While there is a definite shift occurring it is one that is clearly being felt much more in the United States than in Canada and elsewhere in the world. The data in this research is weighted heavily toward the American experience as the majority of experts are from the U.S. thus skewing the results. It is also worth noting that only three times did any of the experts point out that in fact it was not all doom and gloom for the newspaper and journalism industries.

@yelvington: “When writing about newspaper crisis, I wish writers would include the tidbit that nearly all newspapers are very profitable.”

@jeffjarvis: “Scares the bejesus out of me: D.C. asking what government should do re crisis in journalism. What crisis? Stay away! <http://bit.ly/byij1K>”

@yelvington: "With the warming of the economy, newspaper edition shutdowns have stopped. So, is the sky falling, or not?"

Twitter as the discourse

"Twitter" was the third largest coding category involved in the data collection with 244 references and it was actually a subcategory of the broader theme of "social networks and the socialization of news." It makes sense that the new platform upon which the discourse is occurring would be mentioned sometimes but it was surprising just how much it was the focus of discussion. The content of the tweets can be split into a few different subcategories: information and links to news and research about Twitter, discussing Twitter as a platform, criticism of Twitter's character limitation, how Twitter fits into the ecosystem, its usage by journalists, and best practices for users and self-promotion.

@jayrosen: "It's Official: News Media Are Missing The Twitter Boat. @mathewi at GigaOM interprets the Hitwise study <http://jr.ly/43ch>"

@stevebuttry: "@HighTalk Use whatever terms you want, bottom line is the conversation on Twitter frequently precedes the professional news report."

@stevebuttry: "@HighTalk We can chase this around forever. Pro content is not the only valuable or legitimate content. Many value conversation more."

@stevebuttry: "@HighTalk No, that's how communication is changing. Often the news follows the conversation. Example (one of many): <http://bit.ly/Yehi2>"

@yelvington: "Great post from Tim McGuire: Twitter is not killing journalism, journalists are killing journalism <http://j.mp/a59VDq> vis @bigboxcar"

@steveouting: "Stuck in MWK airport (trip from hell) tracking quake/tsunami news. Twitter by far best source. Cable news repetitive, archaic"

@codybrown: "The classic formula for a tweet: Identify a pattern, creatively describe the pattern, add a link. Nice @jayrosen_nyu <http://bit.ly/97pRgS>"

There was much discussion within the data on best practices for Twitter, and the adoption rates for journalists. There were also multiple mentions of a case study in Australia that showed how a political event being contested through Twitter ended up driving many more reporters online. It is not surprising that the early adopters of Twitter are fans of the platform. As discussed earlier, Arceneaux and Schmitz Weiss (2010) discuss whether media practitioners and journalists have a pro-microblogging bias. In reference to this particular research, the amount of time spent discussing Twitter lends itself to answer that question in the positive. These experts do not often criticize the platform except to complain about the glitches and errors due to faulty servers. There is also the complaint that the 140 character limitation should no longer exist which causes the discourse to be "glib" and "like communicating by bumper sticker." The other possibly negative sentiment that came up twice was the fact that Twitter can take a lot of time if not managed properly.

The idea of the ecosystem is also an important one in which the socialization of news plays a large role. The personification of the news ecosystem runs throughout the online conversations and there is much talk of journalism as a living thing that needs to be "rejuvenated" as it is currently on "life support." This also extends to the previously discussed death and killing of newspapers and journalism

generally. Personification is a literary device that is used in this case perhaps to make its possible demise more dramatic and threatening.

@digiphile: "@macslocum Go biological? A tweet as a cell, hyperlink a blood vessel, story as organ, website as body, Internet as news ecosystem? #localj"

Audience and users are able to play a much larger role in this new ecosystem; with a move from one-way communication where the audience consumes content passively with no way to respond, to a many-to-many interactive communication and beyond. This new form of communication allows the audience to interact with the journalist, but also with other audience members without the journalist acting as a mediator. This has had many ramifications for journalism generally. As discussed earlier it affects who can perform acts of journalism and has opened up the gates at least in some places for participation by what Rosen calls the people formerly known as the audience. This shift takes up a considerable amount of the experts' conversations and tweets – sometimes they recognize it directly in conversation while in other instances it is implied without being explicitly stated or acknowledged.

The language used to discuss the audience ranges widely depending on the situation – many seem interchangeable and definitely are more traditional in their application such as "audience", "eyeballs", "kooks", "consumers", and "lunatics". These contrast with more active terms that represent the way most of the experts paint what they conceived to be as the new audience: "interactive news consumers", "producers", "hunter-gatherers of news", "citizen journalists" and "demand-driven oligopoly", to name just a few examples. The perception of the audience by the

journalist has two important effects – first, how they conceive of the people they are working for and second, the way they view the shift in the role of audience. If the journalist views the news process as more of a collaborative conversation, the process is driven much differently than if the journalist views themselves as the sole gatekeeper and authority.

@davewiner: "Someone recently pressed me to say who my target audience is. I don't have a target audience. I write just because I like to write."

@jayrosen_nyu: "Attention and co-presence count... @anildash: I'm a better writer, blogger and thinker when I know there's an audience. <http://jr.ly/xfwx>"

There are ways in which the experts have an easier time accepting audience participation. User-generated content (UGC) and citizen journalism are dismissed at least twice within the data (not originally by the experts though it is repeated by them). To mediate the UGC, there are also a few established ways to include the user: the hotly debated online commenting and as the one to ask questions.

@kirklapointe: "Putting Prime Minister Stephen Harper on YouTube was OK as first step. Not fab questions (very soft) but at least direct to an audience."

@dangillmor: "GroundReport.com's Sterne: most UGC is terrible #paleynews"

@digiphile: "@newmediajim From afar, it does seem @umairh's #SXSW Q&A w/@ev was not well-received. Doubt that he asked audience for q's, like @sarahcuda."

@dangillmor: "Citizen journalism now utterly routine: Local TV announcers asking their audience in Hawaii to be eyes and ears, use Twitter etc. –"

@mediatwit: "Benkoil: Isn't it a given that journalists have to care about the audience? Are we still in an era when they don't? <http://to.pbs.org/9khoGc>"

@dangillmor: “@homofaber to be clear, i don't [think] the CNN guy is ignorant. but he obviously thinks his audience is ignorant”

@mediatwit: “The right approach is to KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE and create a product for THEM. AOL's approach is not centered on this <http://bit.ly/9hAkjy>”

This last tweet is particularly telling as it is still about creating content for an audience and not about collaboration or transparency. The link between the experts' perception of the audience and the debate mentioned earlier on commenting is tightly connected. Within the commenting debate (see appendix 4), there was very no mention of what the audience might want. The journalism experts are discussing what role the audience should play according to what works for the industry and not what is necessarily best for newsgathering or according to the audience's wants or needs. They are prescribing what role they feel would work best. The type of participation that is mostly available to the audience within traditional media currently is walled off from the professional news products to ensure that journalistic values and practices are not undermined (Hermida, 2011).

In the new digital world, as has been previously mentioned, the role of gatekeeper is being challenged with the online news tools available to the audience. Some journalists are struggling with their identity and their role but also with the identity and role of what they used to mostly think of as a passive consumer and not as an active user.

@jayrosen_nyu: “What we want from readers has a huge role in helping us decide what we do with anonymity and identity. <https://jr.ly/uca2> A key point.”

@jeffjarvis: “@mathewi @howardowens: Part of the problem is timing,

*not anonymity: we *allow* people to comment on *our* work when it is *done.* *insulting"*

Hermida (2011) dubs the new role for the audience as "active recipients".

The shift in gatekeeping has ramifications for many aspects of how journalists function and do their work; it is not solely about an opening up of access to publishing. There is also a shift in media accreditation where bloggers now can gain access to stereotypically closed locales such as press galleries and press conferences. Journalists' interactions with sources are also affected since bloggers now have the ability to go direct by publishing or leaking their own information⁵². In addition, there is also more competition for advertising dollars as the distribution platform is no longer solely owned by the media companies.

@mathewi: "RT @scottros: @Chanders It isn't about who links to whom. It means sources tell their own stories. It's Revenge of the Misquoted"

@howardweaver: "100% agree RT @jayrosen_nyu: we badly need the distributed trust network articulated here <http://jr.ly/2u37> This is a key problem, people."

What remains unanswered for the experts is whether or not their profession is going through a simple evolution or if they are facing a revolution. What is clear is that it is a chaotic time and that the experts spend a lot of time discussing the changing nature of journalism.

⁵² Wikileaks has offered a very high level of disruption of news gathering as well as raising many tough ethical issues. It has been discussed as the true removal of gatekeeping at all costs and levels as it is a total distribution of information without any filtration. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WikiLeaks>

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This thesis sought to identify what are the key issues discussed by the community of practice that has formed around the future of newspapers through Twitter. It found that business models was the most coded category, which parallels the apprehension felt by the media experts in the quest to find a way to monetize online news systems thereby ensuring the continuation of employment for journalists. While most agree that paywalls are not the way forward, no one has found the solution but the consensus was that experimentation and innovation are key.

Twitter was also an extremely popular topic of discussion. So not only do the experts spend a fair amount of time discussing business models and the future of news, they also focus on the platform on which they are holding the conversation. Twitter has supplemented the news ecosystem as a tool that allows news to travel at previously unparalleled speeds. It also opens up the previously black box of journalism process to allow the audience to see parts of the information gathering, interviewing process and at the same time allows the audience to become more active participants. Although it is not the elimination of journalistic gatekeeping and the democratization of the news process that some celebrate. While Twitter allows for a more open and transparent news gathering and reporting process, these journalists and media experts pick and choose who they interact with and often discuss the audience as if they are a separate entity as illustrated by the commenting debate.

The web has provided a disruptive process of change for the newspaper industry that encompasses not just distribution platforms, but also economic structures, and the boundaries between audience and user. The need for innovation and experimentation in the newspaper world -- to test and fail as quickly as possible -- feels like a mild form of panic in the ranks. The experts are split on whether journalism is going through evolution or revolution. There seems to be a consensus that whichever it is, there are going to be many growing pains in the process. Most seem to agree that these pains will be the eventual loss of the printed word, at least in the structure we currently recognize as the traditional mass media version of a newspaper. This is not to say that the future of the newspaper is written in stone or necessarily bleak but that the internet provides an improved platform for news gathering, story telling and dissemination.

This thesis set out to examine the community of practice that has formed on Twitter to better understand how the platform effects their discourse, what their key issues are and how it is changing participation in news gathering. While Twitter exists in duality as both a threat to current journalism models and an aid to journalists, it also acts as an animator of the community of practice. It offers improved research tools, more efficient news dissemination, wider audiences, new ways of collaborating and more transparent news creation. It also allows the community of practice to face the uncertain future together as it provides them with a tool to collectively negotiate and work together to make sense of the changes happening all around them. While social media and specifically Twitter are often discussed as the equalizer for democratizing many realms of life and culture,

journalists still play an important role as gatekeepers and context-givers. Journalists hold the majority of the gatekeeping power and influence even though Twitter offers the ability to experience the news gathering process more transparently, there is less direct evidence that the average news consumer can fully participate. For example, in the commenting debate, it is barely mentioned that the audience should be asked what they want. It is far more prescriptive than collaborative. The level of engagement varies between the different experts – some are far more willing to reply to the average user while others use Twitter purely as a broadcast medium. A community of practice is by its very nature non-inclusive, as it uses specific language, rules of engagement, shared experience which all contribute to the function of being an insider.

It is necessary to differentiate between the future of the news and the future of the newspaper. They are interrelated subjects that often get discussed interchangeably but it is important to think about them as separate issues. They are indeed closely related, but the two are not mutually exclusive, as the former can indeed survive without the latter. This is a key point for this research. Though the experts do not agree on whether their profession is going through a simple evolution or a full-on revolution, they see the current period as chaotic and recognize that everything is changing rapidly.

With a slow crawl of economic recovery in North America, the newspaper industry has stopped hemorrhaging jobs in the short term. For the time being the business has seemingly begun to level out. In the meantime, the threats of social media and the Internet were exactly what the industry needed to reluctantly

embrace change. With over 30% of Canadian journalists using Twitter (CNW Group, 2010), it has obviously earned a spot in many reporters' toolkits to complement and expand the way they gather and disseminate news.

Twitter offers the news world many opportunities, as it makes sharing news and headlines easier and speeds up the reportage of events by eyewitnesses and journalists alike. It also acts as an animator of the community of practice of journalists that undoubtedly pre-existed the web, but makes it ultimately far more public than it has ever been before. It also extends its scope geographically and spreads the discussion both over space and time. Having this community of practice function in the public allows those who are interested to bear witness to more of the news-making process and at times be involved. This research shows, however, that the heralded democratic nature of Twitter may not play out in practice all the time.

There is much evidence within the data that the formation of these media expert groups is seemingly an extension of an elite leadership from the non-digital world and some suggest that Twitter may not be entirely the leveling, democratic space that it has been celebrated as. While it is possible to come to the conclusion that the ecosystem presented by social media does in fact open up the dialogue so that more people can witness it, it was less obvious how much more participatory it is. There are at least two factors that can be discussed in respect to the perceived level of participation. First is the conversation among many of the experts around the use of commenting at the bottom of articles and whether users should be allowed to comment anonymously. Secondly, is the level of engagement of the specific media experts, some are far more accessible than others. One expert used

their Twitter account almost solely as a push mechanism to promote their own writing, while another less traditional journalist tweeted on average 50 times a day and engaged in conversation with many different Twitter users. These of course are the two extremes with the rest of the 18 users falling between the two poles. For journalists Twitter is like any tool, how you use it dictates its effect. For the users who engage with those outside of their usual circles through Twitter it is possible to see the highly celebrated democratic space, while those more traditional journalists who use it as a push tool are not expanding the discourse or the participatory nature of journalism.

By its very nature a community of practice is a non-inclusive grouping that has boundaries to entry that include the use of specific language, negotiated comportment, shared experiences, and common knowledge; all of these things raise a barrier to participation through the function of being an insider. It is not immediately obvious that all of the journalists involved in this CoP are entirely at ease with sharing the space with the audience. The journalist still holds the gatekeeping power by the nature of their influence, audience size, and established authority. In the cases of non-journalist users breaking news, it can easily be cast as the traditional act of being an eyewitness or by the journalist lending their own authority by retweeting, investigating and verifying the news. Also, even in the new acclaimed participatory journalism there remain specific ways the audience can involve themselves such as commenting on the bottom of an article or emailing in their video. These submissions are always run with the caveat that it was user-generated and therefore not professional quality content. The other common way to

include the user is to allow commenting on the bottom of an article. This segregates the audience's submissions in two ways, one it places it at the bottom of the article and second, it appears as an afterthought. The audience is not included in the news gathering process but is given the opportunity to comment on a final product. The walls are maintained between the professional content created by the journalist to ensure differentiation between the products.

The methodological structure of this thesis was designed as an attempt to capture data on a then-new platform. It was the very early days of Twitter and many lessons were learned in undertaking this study. In coding and assigning the tweets to categories, it was sometimes difficult to be sure of the writer's intention mostly due to the character limitation but also because the provided links were not included in the study. The original intention had been to include links but the data capture was too large at over 16,000 tweets. If this study was to be done again, the focus should be narrowed and the links should be followed and their content included as well as the comments on the blogs mentioned. This would ensure the full discourse is captured. In addition, it would be beneficial to capture the users each expert is exchanging tweets with, as with much of the data, the experts are speaking with people who are not included in the top 20 and thus the other half of the conversation is lost. Often without the two pieces mentioned above context was lost by just reading the experts' Twitter streams.

Another limitation in the data collection was the high percentage of tweets that had nothing to do with the topic. After filtering for relevant tweets, under 25% of the total tweets had to do with the future of the newspaper and online news. This

can partially be attributed to the loss of context due to the 140 character limit and not having captured the full conversations. While there are limitations imposed by the way Twitter conversations are distributed in what can be best described as a never pausing stream of information, its public nature and 140 character limitation means that generally the information that the user puts out is often very concise and to the point. This can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations in discourse, as it does not lend itself to long or complex explanations. In addition to that, the way in which the community of practice interacted with each other was not highly intensive. Just under 300 tweets had them in conversation with the others members of the group. This does not preclude that they may also be speaking to each other privately or on other platforms – Twitter direct messages, Gmail chat, email, telephone to name a few. Twitter is limiting for discourse. The character limitation is restrictive for complex thoughts and research has shown that only 6% of all tweets receive direct feedback (Sysymos, 2010). This means that a lot of tweets are either going un-read or are not deemed interesting enough to merit a response. As a system that does not provide feedback on whether people are reading what you are writing, it often feels like writing into a void. On the other hand, a vibrant community has organized itself on Twitter around the issues interrelated with the future of the newspaper. Business models, the future, Twitter itself and change are the most popular categories that the experts discussed.

Twitter is an increasingly popular and influential tool in media spheres that offers much opportunity for further research. With the popularity of Twitter-hosted chats, like #journchat and #wjchat, it would be valuable to do an analysis of the

communities that form around these events. This would also lessen the loss of context that following a specific group of people without getting those they were interacting with and easily provide a solution by offering a way to capture the conversation in its entirety. It would be important to tweak the methodology if following a group of media experts in the future to program an application that captures not only their comments but draws the circle wider by capturing their interactions with others, to archive both sides of a discussion.

Another on-going debate in which much more research needs to be done is the way influence works in social media. There are all sorts of Twitter applications that claim to measure influence, like Klout and Tweetlevel, but they all use different formulas. A look at influence to determine what qualifies as true impact would be interesting and valuable because the act of retweeting as a simple measure of influence, or for example, the number of followers an account has versus the number of people they follow does not offer a true reflection of a user's sphere of influence. In part use dictates influence, but there are also other factors that are not captured such as name recognition, status, influence in the real world as well as how much time you spend on the platform – the more effort and time that is put into Twitter, the more engagement and interaction occurs.

Another avenue of study yet to be pursued is to look at whether the journalistic communities of practice that have formed through Twitter are causing a disservice to journalism from the point of view of making the connections too close. That is to say, are journalists sharing too much information with each other and taking away their cutting edge in terms of competition with each other? Part of

journalism has always been to be the first to break a story, to find and chase down an angle that no one else has yet thought of. One could argue that the sense of shared enterprise and mutual engagement could negatively effect the participating journalists. The challenge would be to find a way to compare and contrast pre-Twitter and present day.

A further study could be undertaken by using a similar methodological structure but instead of computer-media discourse analysis, applying a critical discourse analysis to further explore the discourse around the future of the newspaper. This could result in an even deeper understanding of the conversations taking place and allow the researcher to more deeply investigate the power dynamics of the mainstream media being forced to let the former audience into their domain. The CMDA allowed for a full assessment of how Twitter functioned as a platform for discourse and explored how the community of practice works together to produce meaning as a group. It also allowed for a basic understanding of how sense making performed as a community of practice means that it is collectively negotiated.

Twitter can be framed as a threat to journalism but at the same time it is also a boon. For the first time in the history, news can travel almost instantaneously. News of a bombing in Mumbai, halfway around the world from Canada, is heard within minutes of the event, and an earthquake is experienced around the world in as long as it takes for someone to type 140 characters or less and hit send. The impact of speed combined with a platform that allows communities to form around specialized topics has given rise to a news market where specific niches are

increasingly viable. It has also given journalists and news practitioners a faster, more regular way to communicate with each other, to use the communities of practice that already existed pre-Twitter through conferences, email and phone calls, to discuss their craft, to compare notes and to learn from each other. The CoP can now extend its boundaries outside of an individual newsroom or organization and include journalists from different mediums and geographic regions. All this to say that while the future of the print newspaper may not be rosy, the future of the news has never been brighter. As Philip Meyer remarked to a room full of journalists at the 2011 annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Journalists that while he could promise the newspaper business would adapt and not die, he couldn't promise that it would come in a form that you could wrap a fish in.

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Appendix 1: Top 25 Twitter Rank as of April, 2010

User name	following	followers	tweets	klout	tweet level	klout 2	tweet level 2	topsy	bio
davewiner	1,277	29,698	24,439	80	72	80	71	highly influential	Bi-coastal Media Hackerer, Twitterer, NYU scholar
jayrosen_nyu	599	33,964	11,964	79	70	69	71	highly influential	I teach journalism at NYU, direct the Studio 20 program there, critique the press and try to grok new media. I don't do lifecasting but mindcasting on Twitter.
jeffjarvis	862	40,123	9,741	75	69	75	69	highly influential	blogger and j-school prof
mathewi	1,807	12,834	22,899	68	70	60	66	highly influential	I'm a senior writer at GigaOm, a former journalist with the Globe and Mail and co-founder of the mesh conference in Toronto
cheeky_geeky	801	15,343	35,386	66	67	66	64	highly influential	Director of Innovative Social Engagement at Microsoft U.S. Public Sector. These are my very personal, very cheeky thoughts.
digiphile	3,053	19,476	19,199	57	67	55	64	highly influential	IT journalist. Intrigued by technological change, taken with ideas, cooking, the great outdoors, books, dogs, and media, in all forms.
ajkeen	6,268	12,922	6,336	59	64	59	58	highly influential	The Anti Christ of Silicon Valley
dangillmor	239	9,119	5565	60	58	60	62	highly influential	Bio and disclosures: http://dangillmor.com/about (Photo by Joi Ito)
jdlasica	4,316	10,652	9,561	54	60	54	58	highly influential	Strategist, marketer, author, journalist, speaker. Founder of #1 social media blog Socialmedia.biz & Socialbrite.org for nonprofits/causes. Blogging since 2001.
mediatwit	655	8,757	4,691	50	61	50	58	highly influential	Executive editor of PBS MediaShift and Idea Lab; writer, editor, dad, singer, ridiculous-maker.
yelvington	528	3,439	5,566	50	58	50	55	highly influential	New media strategist, newsroom change trainer-coach, disruptive influence.
stevebuttry	1,244	3,220	11,464	42	58	46	57	highly influential	I'm Director of Community Engagement at Allbritton Communications

kirklapointe	636	3,333	3,503	48	51	42	52	highly influen- cia I	Managing Editor of Vancouver Sun, blogger of themediamanager.com, adjunct prof at UBC School of Journalism. runner, goalie, happy as can be in BC.
NYT_JenPreston	923	23,870	2,082	41	58	47	52	highly influen- cia I	Social-Media Editor of The New York Times, Mother-of-Twins, Adjunct for Columbia University New Media and Author.
digidave	1,970	6,436	5,870	48	49	48	49	highly influen- cia I	Recovering tech reporter: Now running Spot.Us a new biz model for journalism. Personal blog: www.digidave.org I love you.
hermida	466	2,280	4,036	45	51	45	46	highly influen- cia I	Digital news pioneer, award-winning journalist and professor of integrated journalism at the University of British Columbia.
david_a_eaves (changed to daeaves)	300	1,770	2,011	44	51	44	45	highly influen- cia I	Connecting: public service renewal, public policy, open-source, open data & government, negotiation, collaboration, life, fun and rockband drumming
steveouting	558	3,277	1,746	41	52	41	49	highly influen- cia I	Business: reinventing news. Pleasure: 2 wheels.
CodyBrown	282	2,060	2,218	42	50	42	47	highly influen- cia I	Founder of Kommons.com and NYU Local. On Twitter to plan a news media coup d'état
howardweaver	300	1,676	8,250	37	55	38	53	highly influen- cia I	Writing, editing, projects. Strategic advice for media enterprises.
scottros	260	3,253	2,257	34	54	34	45	highly influen- cia I	Director, MediaBugs.org; Editor, MediaCritic.com; blogger; author, Say Everything, Dreaming in Code; Salon co-founder
chanders	602	1,102	3,889	36	49	36	48	highly influen- cia I	Assistant Prof. of Media Culture, CUNY
adamwestbrook	968	2,046	3,634	28	54	28	51	highly influen- cia I	freelance journalist, multimedia producer, lecturer, blogger; wondering what next for journalism
StKonrath	19,088	19,981	2,675			58	52	n/a	Tweeting About the Future of Journalism - The Next Big Thing: #News3.0
jen_mcfadden	651	631	2,324	11	43	11	37	influen- cia I	Looking@intersection of media & tech; Ex-NYT cog;Co-founder http://www.yale.edu/yei http://jenmcfadden.tumblr.com www.newsinnovation.com/models

Appendix 2: Export of Tree Nodes from Nvivo

Main Category	Secondary Category	Subcategory	Subcategory	Subcategory
Boundary				
	Anonymity			
	Audience			
	Commenting			
	Crowdsourcing			
	Democracy			
	Echo chamber			
	Engagement			
	Gatekeeping			
	Participation			
	Privacy			
	Public sphere			
	User-generated content			
Business Models				
	Advertising			
	Crowdfunding			
	Financial requirements			
	Foundation			
	Free			
	Fundraising			
	Government subsidy			
	Micropayments			
	Non-profit			
	Pay services			
	Paywall			
	Tip jar			
Changes to Journalism				
	Aggregation			
	Change in communication methods			
	Effects			
	Experimentation			
	Filter failure			
	Hyperlocal			
	Intellectual property			
	Layoffs			

	Linked data			
	Networked journalism			
	Niche news			
	Online standards			
	Personalization			
	Piracy			
	Plagiarism			
	Policy			
	Resistance to change			
	Slow to innovate			
	Social media and socialization of news			
		Ambient journalism		
		Crisis or disaster reporting		
		Death of Gordon Lightfoot		
		Ecosystem		
		Facebook		
		Twitter		
		Wikipedia		
	Technology			
		Apps		
		Innovation		
		New tools		
		Tech news		
	Web standards			
Community				
	Big questions			
	Compliments			
	Debate			
	Education			
		J-school		
		New skills		
			Backchannel	
			Branding	
			Collaboration	
				Wide scale projects
			Computer assisted reporting	
			Curation	
			Engagement	
			Leadership	
			Lifecasting	
			Live Blogging	
			Location-based	

			Mobile	
			Moderating	
			Multimedia	
			Reputation	
			Storytelling	
			Transparency	
			Trust	
		Next generation		
	Hashtag			
		#Endtimes		
		#Journchat		
		#Paleynews		
		#Processjournalism		
		#Wjchat		
	Media critiques			
Future				
	Future of books			
	Future of context			
	Future of institutions			
	Future of media			
	Future of newspaper			
		Rhetoric of doom		
	Future of online news			
	Future of radio			
	Future of television			
Identity				
	Algorithm			
	Blogger vs. journalist			
	Citizen journalism			
	Influence			
	Journalism as a role to play			
	Journalistic values			
	New skills			
		Backchannel		
		Branding		
		Collaboration		
			Wide scale projects	
		Computer assisted reporting		
		Content creation		
		Curation		
		Engagement		
		Leadership		
		Lifecasting		

		Live blogging		
		Location-based		
		Mobile		
		Moderating		
		Multimedia		
		Reputation		
		Storytelling		
		Transparency		
		Trust		
	News as conversation			
	View of traditional journalists and journalism			
	What is journalism			
	Who is a journalist			
The Past				

Appendix 3: Total Tweets by User

User	Total Tweets
digiphile	2505
mathewi	1778
cheeky_geeky	1548
davewiner	1538
dangillmor	1137
jeffjarvis	1111
jdlasica	912
howardweaver	795
Jayrosen_nyu	709
yelvington	570
mediatwit	568
stevebuttry	537
codybrown	530
kirklapointe	474
ajkeen	461
Jenpreston_NYT	422
daeaves	336
hermida	277
digidave	100
steveouting	87

Appendix 4: Commenting discourse

Jay Rosen 3/25/2010 20:25

What we want from readers has a huge role in helping us decide what we do with anonymity and identity. <http://jr.ly/yca2> A key point.

Alex Howard 3/21/2010 15:53

Great comments on anonymous comments: @mathewi: <http://j.mp/d7m4JD> & @howardowens: <http://j.mp/cA3eV3> @SteveButtry: <http://j.mp/8WWSPX> #meta

Dan Gillmor 3/21/2010 15:45

Re identity/anonymity: when is the last time a newspaper reporter asked for an ID when quoting the fabled person in the street?

Steve Buttry 3/21/2010 15:45

Really thoughtful & Howard lives his viewpoint in his biz. RT @howardowens I've added a comment to @mathewi's post <http://bit.ly/95iZth>

Steve Buttry 3/21/2010 15:37

I'm not as hardline as @howardowens on anon comments, but I know he's right for The Batavian because he stakes his business on his approach.

Steve Buttry 3/21/2010 14:50

Great discussion (in the comments, of course, by full name & not) on my blog post on comments. <http://bit.ly/c5kg7s>

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 14:20

@jayrosen_nyu: thanks, Jay -- it seems we are in complete agreement then :-)

Jay Rosen 3/21/2010 14:17

@mathewi I agree about persistent identity. I agree that hosts getting involved is key. And I think that anonymity has become a big problem.

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 14:07

@jayrosen_nyu: would love to get your thoughts about the debate @howardowens and I had on anonymity: <http://bit.ly/95iZth>

Jay Rosen 3/21/2010 14:05

I talked to John Temple, @Shoq. It's a little more interesting than TechCrunch said. They're want to be two-way without anonymous comments.

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 13:33

RT @stevebuttry: I join yesterday's discussion: Anonymity or identity: Which is the best way to handle comments? <http://bit.ly/b12kCh>

Steve Buttry 3/21/2010 13:30

I belatedly join yesterday's discussion: Anonymity or identity: Which is the best way to handle comments? <http://bit.ly/b12kCh>

Steve Buttry 3/21/2010 12:13

If you couldn't keep up with the anonymous comments discussion yesterday, @mathewi summarizes & extends it here. <http://bit.ly/95iZth>

Alex Howard 3/21/2010 4:23

Anonymous Comments: Are They Good or Evil? <http://goo.gl/fb/TNMR> Great twitdebate summary by @MathewI. Commented - as myself.

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 4:13

okay, my blog seems to have recovered -- power of my argument on anonymity and comments once again available here: <http://is.gd/aQYvW>

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 4:11

unfortunately, the power of my argument on anonymity appears to have taken my blog down (sad face)

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 4:03

@howardowens: indeed, was very stimulating -- thanks for playing :-)

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 3:57

@howardowens @yelvington @stevebuttry @johntemplepn -- my take on the debate on anonymity and comments here: <http://is.gd/aQYvW>

Cody Brown 3/21/2010 3:55

@mathewi as I said before. Anon is possible online it just is a different beast. For regular comment systems just compare NYU Local to Bwog

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 3:50

@chrisheuer: not sure I agree -- I've had lots of respectful conversation in anonymous forums. key is engagement w. users/moderators/admins

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 3:43

@chrisheuer: you can't say it depends -- you must choose! good or evil! there can be only one! :-)

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 3:42

for anyone interested in the Twitter debate @howardowens and I had about anonymous comments, I wrote a summary here: <http://is.gd/aQYvW>

Cody Brown 3/21/2010 3:39

@mathewi I agree that a news site could integrate with a slashdot level of sophistication, I thought we were talking about the status quo

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 3:37

[blog post] Anonymous Comments: Are They Good or Evil? <http://goo.gl/fb/TNMR>

Steve Buttry 3/21/2010 1:44

Commenting: An ounce of leadership is worth a pound of management | yelvington.com <http://bit.ly/cWYgIP>

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 1:43

@rhh: definitely been fun -- love to have a good debate in between going to the pool and playing shuffleboard and bocce with the kids :-)

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 1:42

@CodyBrown: why is it a different beast? just uses different technology to handle anon. comments -- no reason news sites can't do as well

Cody Brown 3/21/2010 1:19

@mathewi slashdot is an *entirely* different beast than newssite comment sections. It's designed to cope with alias/anon names

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 1:17

@brunoboutot: agreed -- point is there are systems that can blend anonymity with reputation management, let commenters level up etc.

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 1:12

@howardowens: might just have to take a crack at that :-)

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 1:05

Just want to make it clear I am not picking a fight with @howardowens over anonymity and comments -- important issue and debate is good

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 1:01

RT @yvelington: I get cranky when disagreements about process get painted as ethics. Anonymity is not unethical

Alex Howard 3/21/2010 0:59

@howardowens Geo-community means rooted in a locale, as opposed to topical? Ok. So: Why does running a local news req. actual identities?

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 0:57

@howardowens: conversation is conversation, and same rules should apply -- standards of behaviour are what matter, not anonymity.

Alex Howard 3/21/2010 0:47

@howardowens Untrue. I respect your exp. & patience today. I understand the context of the Batavian. That said, does community req: real ID?

Alex Howard 3/21/2010 0:40

@howardowens Does that mean you dislike sites like @slashdot, @BoingBoing or Gawker Media, rife with presumably fake people w/pseudonyms?

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 0:18

@howardowens: you say there's a fundamental right to know who a commenter is, but I don't ask people to prove identity before I talk to them

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 0:14

@glichefield: I think real (or at least persistent) identity is important, and FB Connect and OpenID can help

Mathew Ingram 3/21/2010 0:09

I was talking about online communities such as Slashdot and Metafilter, @CodyBrown, which have anon comments but do not suffer as a result

Steve Buttry 3/21/2010 0:02

RT @howardowens I want to repeat this point: Real identity with credible news org is a standard, not an aberration.

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 23:47

... but I feel no REQUIREMENT that I host comments from anyone who break my rules, or abuse from anyone, regardless of identity

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 23:46

I post under my own name, but I don't condemn those who may have their own reasons for doing otherwise.

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 23:44

EFF.org outlines why anonymity can be important to individuals:
<http://www.eff.org/issues/anonymity>

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 23:39

So, was Ben Franklin unethical when he wrote under a pen name for his brother's paper?

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 23:35

The problem with anonymity isn't ethics -- its a practical problem. Is the conversation productive, or not?

Cody Brown 3/20/2010 23:34

@yelvington this isn't about a right to anonymous speech it's about what will make a better comment (or 'response') section on a news site.

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 23:34

I get cranky when disagreements about process get painted as ethics. Anonymity is not unethical.

Cody Brown 3/20/2010 23:31

. @mathewi can you link me to your examples? What general or local news sites that allow anon result in better comments?

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 23:29

Small towns can be vicious places in which to voice a nonconforming opinion.

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 23:29

I'm all for standing behind what you say, but many people face repercussions ranging from job loss to cross burnings and worse.

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 23:27

Iranian dissidents are an extreme example of where anonymity helps. How about someone whose spouse is employed by a government agency?

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 23:24

. @howardowens No virtue in anonymity? Tell that to an Iranian dissident. You have followed your argument over a waterfall.

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 23:11

agreed -- RT @agoracom: comes down to how hard you work at establishing rules of engagement within your community. Anonymity is a scapegoat

Cody Brown 3/20/2010 22:58

. @mathewi anon = the fastest way to turn an otherwise normal person into a snide weasel. It can be used but it's a different game.

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 22:54

Agreed -- frank is good: RT @kyigit: anon is important, despite signal to noise issues. anon = more frank, almost always

Cody Brown 3/20/2010 22:52

Anon leads to platform decay RT @rowlandr I get emails cause ppl don't want to compete with 'lunatics' commenting on newssite

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 22:48

Yes, sorry about that, @Rodney_Barnes -- the debate between @howardowens and I wasn't planned, just kind of occurred :-)

Cody Brown 3/20/2010 22:37

@jeffjarvis Of course. That's a much deeper piece of the issue. However, I don't think the article unit is dead-it will just be less common

Steve Yelvington 3/20/2010 22:26

New post: Commenting: An ounce of leadership is worth a pound of management
<http://tinyurl.com/yz5lox6>

Jeff Jarvis 3/20/2010 22:23

@CodyBrown Or better to open up earlier in the process to enable people to collaborate rather than just comment.

Cody Brown 3/20/2010 22:10

It might be best for news sites to move away from the word 'comment' all together. Call them 'responses' @johntemplepn @mathewi @jeffjarvis

Cody Brown 3/20/2010 22:03

Bingo. RT @jeffjarvis Part of the problem is timing: we *allow* people to comment on *our* work when it is *done.* insulting

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 21:15

agreed -- RT @greglinch: Beyond resources you allocate to moderate & engage in comments, it's also about empowering users to self-police.

Jeff Jarvis 3/20/2010 21:00

@mathewi @howardowens: Part of the problem is timing, not anonymity: we *allow* people to comment on *our* work when it is *done.* insulting

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:56

@howardowens: what's the ethical issue? I think it's unethical to exclude members of your community who want to comment w/out real names

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:53

@michelemclellan: I'm all for investing in community and moderating -- that has nothing to do with whether comments are anonymous or not

Steve Buttry 3/20/2010 20:53

Great discussion by @howardowens, @mathewi & others on comment moderation, anonymity, etc. Great fodder as we plan how to deal with comments

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:52

@danielbachhuber: and if you charge for the ability to comment, you restrict your prospective pool of commenters even further

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:51

I still think anonymity is a red herring, @howardowens -- lots of healthy communities allow anonymous comments; the key is engagement

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:45

@howardowens: it sounds like it works for you, Howard, and possibly other small sites, but not sure it would work for everyone else

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:39

@vincrosbie @howardowens: I totally agree that hiring moderators would be great - good luck selling that to the board or the shareholders

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:38

@howardowens: but how could you possibly know who is being excluded by your policy? they would just go elsewhere I assume

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:33

@howardowens: we got as many as 10,000 comments a day -- how would you suggest a newspaper should manage that?

Mathew Ingram

3/20/2010 20:31 @howardowens: that may be true, but I'm not sure it's right to exclude the latter because you don't want the former

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:28

unlikely perhaps, but not impossible -- RT @howardowens: Civility is impossible in an environment that allows anonymous comments.

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:05

@johntemplepn: not sure whether FB has helped, but at least FB Connect ensures a persistent, quasi-verified identity of some kind

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 20:02

@jeffsonderman @CodyBrown: that's a big issue -- how do you verify identity? using SSN/credit etc. is cumbersome and doesn't scale

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 19:55

@billdinTO @howardowens: that's fine for smaller sites, but it doesn't scale

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 19:47

@johntemplepn: pretty sure USA Today does FB for comments -- we were looking at doing it before I left the Globe, via Pluck

Cody Brown 3/20/2010 19:27

@johntemplepn @mathewi @stoweboyd how will peer news verify identity? This is a deep challenge with a lot of different layers

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 19:16

@howardowens: so you'd rather hear from elected officials -- who already have a public forum to comment in -- than average citizens?

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 18:24

@danielbachhuber: I know that many readers told me they would not use our newspaper's comments if required to give their real names

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 18:23

agree: RT @digiphile: IMO issue with comments isn't anonymity per se: It's persistent ID with social capital in community

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 18:20

@howardowens @brianmanzullo: I'm sure it has increased engagement, but by whom? Only those who use real names, so inevitably some left out

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 18:12

@howardowens: the flipside is that many people will not comment if real names are required, and their comments could be valuable

Alex Howard 3/20/2010 18:07

@mathewi Don't fuss; switch to Tweetie2. IMO issue with comments isn't anonymity per se: It's persistent ID with social capital in community

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 17:18

@howardowens, what's ethical about preventing people from commenting who might be afraid of repercussions if they use their real name?

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 17:16

@howardowens @stoweboyd @johntemplepn: FB Connect doesn't affect whether or not you can ban someone. My view is real names are irrelevant.

Cody Brown 3/20/2010 17:09

@mathewi @stoweboyd @johntemplepn - the challenge is verifying whether someone providing their first/last name actually is that person

Cody Brown 3/20/2010 17:08

@mathewi @stoweboyd @johntemplepn - @nyulocal has only allowed comments from first/last name for the past 2 years. It's night/day.

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 16:37

@howardowens @stoweboyd @johntemplepn: why not use Facebook Connect for comments? persistent identity is the key, not verified identity

Mathew Ingram 3/20/2010 16:33

I think anonymity is a red herring, @howardowens -- it unnecessarily restricts potential engagement (both positive and negative)

Alex Howard 3/20/2010 14:02

@mathewi How many anonymous comments does @Gawker allow? Good thought by @stoweboyd on Peer News: try to verify w/o ID: <http://sto.ly/cUAg1F>