8 Live Blogging and Social Media Curation:

Challenges and Opportunities for Journalism

Einar Thorsen

"Ladies and gentlemen, we can rebuild it. We have the technology. We have the capability to build a sustainable journalism model. Better than it was before. Better, stronger, faster."

Vadim Lavrusik (21 December 2011),
Journalist Program Manager at Facebook

In the early years of the web it would have been inconceivable to break news online before print or broadcast, never mind using online public platforms to source and verify stories as they unfolded. Yet this is increasingly becoming accepted practice for many journalists in an online, real-time news environment. Today journalists monitor social media for insight into political processes and as an instant indication of "public sentiment", rather than waiting for press releases and opinion polls. Citizens are actively participating in online news reporting too, through publishing eyewitness accounts, commentary, crowdsourcing and fact checking information. Established professional values are being recast in this rapidly evolving relationship between journalists, elite sources and citizens. Within this landscape some journalists have been adopting alternative forms of newsgathering and storytelling through the internet. They are facing challenges to preserve traditional standards of journalism, such as verification of information and sources, whilst also capitalising on the opportunities afforded by the immediacy, transparency and interactive nature of the internet communication.

This chapter will begin by discussing how blogging and so-

cial media has contributed to a realignment of the relationship between journalists and their audiences. Attention will be on different forms, practices and technologies used, with particular focus on the way in which the internet has been utilised by journalists in their news gathering and integrated within news websites. This will followed by a discussion of two case studies: Andrew Sparrow's Guardian live blog and Andy Carvin's use of Twitter to report on the "Arab Spring". The chapter will discuss the challenges facing journalism in relation to social media curation and the opportunities presented by emergent forms and practices.

Journalism, Blogging and Social Media

Social media is "a nebulous term", according to Hermida, "since it can refer to an activity, a software tool or a platform" (Hermida, 2011:2-3). Indeed the very meaning of "social" in this context has been widely questioned, since all media necessarily have an element that could be considered social. However, "social media" include attributes such as "participation, openness, conversation, community and connectivity", which in Hermida's view "are largely at odds with the one-way, asymmetric model of communication that characterized media in the 20th century" (Hermida, 2011:3). In other words, social media is generally understood as something that "enables people to be more than simply members of an audience" (Heinonen, 2011:53). This "culture of participation extends well beyond journalism", according to Heinonen, and "is a broad social phenomenon" (Heinonen, 2011:53).

The term "weblog" is widely attributed to Jorn Barger who coined it in December 1997 to describe a list of links on his website that "'logged' his internet wanderings" (Wortham, 2007). Since then it has been abbreviated to "blog" and used to describe "a website with regular entries, commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order" (Singer et al, 2011:203). Having evolved from online journals in the mid-1990s, blogging is often informal and personal in style, covering any topic imaginable. Despite predating the popularisation of the term social media, blogging is sometimes seen as one part of this broader definition as outlined above. Popular blogging platforms and directories include Blogger, WordPress, LiveJournal, Movable

Type, Drupal, and Technorati. Blogs differ from news websites in writing style and also by prioritising the most recent post, rather than the most important as defined by editors.

Blogging has become increasingly popularised, with several websites built entirely around this form of publishing. Some of the most famous blogs in recent years include: The Huffington Post, Gizmodo, TechCrunch, TMZ.com, Engadget, Boing Boing, Perezhilton, Beppe Grillo, Xu Jinglei, The Drudge Report and Guido Fawkes. This popularisation of blogging has also lead to news organisations appropriating the practice, with most major news organisations' websites now also featuring blogs from their editors or journalists. Live blogging, as will be discussed later in this chapter, is a specific style or genre of blogging that can be defined as "A single blog post on a specific topic to which time-stamped content is progressively added for a finite period - anywhere between half an hour and 24 hours" (Thurman and Walters, 2013:2). These updates are usually presented in reverse chronological order within the single post and may integrate audio-visual material, links and third-party content.

Social networking sites meanwhile, has been defined as "an online service enabling people to create profiles, post information and identify friends, with whom they can easily share content and links" (Singer et al, 2011:208). Examples of social networking sites include, to name a few, general networks (e.g. Facebook, Google+, Orkut, Renren, Bebo), general short message or micro-blogging sites (e.g. Twitter, Sina Weibo), business or professional networks (e.g. LinkedIn, Yammer), dating websites (e.g. PlentyofFish, Match.com), content specific networks (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest, last.fm), and location-based networks (e.g. Foursquare). Many of these social networking sites have overlapping functionality, interconnectivity and cross-posting functionality. Moreover, the field of social networking is evolving rapidly, meaning continuous changes to features and availability of services – with frequent launches of new social networks, mergers or acquisitions, and closures of unsuccessful networks.

This chapter is particularly concerned with Twitter, which describes itself as "an information network" (Twitter, 2012). Users of the service can post 140-character messages called Tweets, which can also include hyperlinks, direct links to vid-

eos and images. Conventions include retweeting (reposting someone else's message with or without adding a comment) and use of hash tags to indicate a topic (e.g. #jan25). Twitter has openly embraced the connection with breaking news, even suggesting: "It's like being delivered a newspaper whose headlines you'll always find interesting – you can discover news as it's happening, learn more about topics that are important to you, and get the inside scoop in real time" (Twitter, 2012).

The rise of blogging platforms and social networking sites has simplified access to publishing tools for ordinary citizens and subsequently increased visibility of demotic voices to both national and global audiences. People's news consumption habits are changing as a consequence too, with the internet becoming the most popular source of news for UK 16-24 year olds according to the 2012 Reuters Institute Digital News Report. Entry point for news audiences are increasingly not the website homepage, but rather individual stories that have been shared on social networking sites. Often shared by friends, family members or a direct connection between an individual and the news organisation. Of those who access news online "20% (one in five) now come across a news story through a social network like Facebook and Twitter, with young people much more likely to access news this way (43%)" (Newman, 2012). Moreover, people who access news via social networking sites are also more likely to engage in news sharing – with Facebook accounting for 55% all news sharing in the UK, email 33% and Twitter 23% (Newman, 2012). This is a remarkable impact considering Facebook was only launched in 2004 and Twitter in 2006.

The Reuters Institute study also identified a small number (7%) of "news absorbed users in the UK who access significantly more sources of news, are more likely to comment on news, and twice as likely to share news" (Newman, 2012:11, emphasis in original). These tend to be male, 25-34 years old, interested in international and political news, more likely to own a tablet (30%) and use Twitter (44%). However, whilst Facebook has become "the most important tool for referring traffic" to news websites, "Twitter has become a crucial tool for journalists" in their day-to-day newswork (Newman, 2011:6). According to Newman, Twitter "has spread rapidly through newsrooms, and now plays a central role in the way stories are sourced, broken and distrib-

uted – contributing to a further speeding up of the news cycle" (Newman, 2011: 6). Some news correspondents are also "gaining new authority and influence through their expert use of social media", Newman notes. Some even attract significant audiences in their own right, independently from the brand of their parent organisation.

The rate of adaptation by both journalists and their audiences means blogging and social networking is gradually becoming a normalised part of media landscapes across the world. In so doing, these forms of internet communication have dramatically altered the relationship between journalists and citizens, in particular when sourcing news events as they unfold. Most noticeably, such internet communication has facilitated access to eyewitness reporting of events where journalists were not present or in countries where international news organisations are either banned or restricted in their reporting.

The Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004 and the London bombings in July 2005 both provided UK news organisations with a wealth of iconic images and eyewitness accounts provided by citizens caught up in events (see Allan, 2006; Allan & Thorsen, 2010). The BBC's Director of Global News, Richard Sambrook, recalled an incredible response of "more than 1,000 photographs, 20 pieces of amateur video, 4,000 text messages, and 20,000 e-mails" (Sambrook, 2005). In his view, "audiences had become involved in telling this story as they never had before".

> *"The quantity and quality of the public's contributions moved them beyond novelty, tokenism or the exceptional [...] Our reporting on this story was a genuine collaboration, enabled by consumer technology – the camera phone in particular – and supported by trust between broadcaster and audience."*
> (Sambrook, 2005)

This remarkable admission demonstrates not just citizen journalism coming of age, but also an acceptance by traditional news organisations that audience material is integral to online news reporting – not least in times of crisis. In the years that followed, several high-profile events were driven by eyewitnesses accounts circulated on social media and submitted to news organisations – including explosions at the Buncefield (UK) oil depot in December 2005; the execution of Saddam

Hussein in December 2006; the attempted suicide attack at Glasgow airport in June 2007; the Burma uprising in September-October 2007, also known as the 'Saffron Revolution'; and the Mumbai attacks in November 2008.

In 2009 the disputed Presidential Elections in Moldova and Iran were both followed by civic uprisings, in part mobilised by social media use (see Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu, 2009; Mortensen, 2011; and Andersen, 2012). Twitter in particular became the hub for first-hand accounts of demonstrations and violent crackdowns on protests. Such was its perceived importance in Iran that the US State Department even asked Twitter to delay scheduled maintenance as it was seen as an important tool for protesters.

With much of this audience material published directly into the public domain, journalists had to resist the pressure of immediate republishing of images and personal accounts, allowing time to verify its origin and authenticity. Reflecting on the Iranian elections, editor of the BBC News website, Steve Herrmann, noted that Twitter allowed journalists to tap into "a huge ongoing, informed and informative discussion in Iran between people who care deeply about what is happening there and who are themselves monitoring everything they can, then circulating the most useful information and links" (Herrmann, 2009). However, for Herrmann this was more than simply a space for public discussion and information sharing:

What really stands out is the range of sources, voices and angles to be looked into. There's no hierarchy: everything's on merit, and there is of course a new set of challenges for our staff - chiefly editorial challenges, as well as a kind of chase as social media services appear and disappear (Herrmann, 2009)

Tapping into social networking platforms to gauge the sentiment of public debate debate is also increasingly common for domestic and non-crisis news too, such as the 2010 UK General Election. The intertextuality of platforms was exemplified in this case by attempts to use social media to enhance interactivity with audiences during broadcasts – television stations including ITV famously experimenting with a superimposed graph (dubbed "the worm") to indicate live approval ratings of participants in the televised leader debates (Newman, 2010; Coleman, 2011).

However, most forms of online journalism and social media had by now become such naturalised parts of the UK media

landscape that they no longer necessarily registered as unique campaign interventions newsworthy in their own right. Yet the transformation for journalists has been significant. "In terms of journalistic practice," argued Newman, "this election has seen yet more giant strides in the integration of internet techniques and thinking – in particular social newsgathering and marketing" (Newman, 2010:52). These practices are no longer the preserve of early pioneers such as Krishnan Guru-Murthy at Channel 4 and Rory Cellan-Jones at the BBC. Instead, he noted, "More and more journalists are now researching, and then selling and marketing their stories directly through Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, thereby reaching larger audiences and achieving greater notoriety than they would do by relying on their employer alone" (Newman, 2010:52). This "hybrid news system", according to Chadwick (2011), saw "journalists operating in a hypercompetitive environment, interacting with each other and ordinary citizens in public, breaking stories and new information on the web, on their own blogs, or on Twitter, hours before they appeared in scheduled broadcast news bulletins" (Chadwick, 2011:18).

Different ways of understanding contemporary news dynamics have been explored, all of which challenge traditional ways of thinking about news and journalism – for example "networked journalism" (see Beckett, 2008), "process journalism" (see Jarvis, 2009), "citizen journalism" (see Allan and Thorsen, 2009), "participatory journalism" (see Singer et al, 2011), and "ambient journalism" (see Hermida, 2010). Common for these concepts is an emphasis on active participation of citizens in news work and civic life. This is not restricted to news organisations facilitating online spaces for citizens to engage in public debate (itself an under researched topic), but includes our rethinking of journalism practice in light of the enhanced interconnectivity fostered by forms of internet use.

Axel Bruns has similarly argued that we are seeing a shift away from the traditional journalism practice of gatekeeping to one of "gatewatching" (Bruns, 2005). To his mind, this is driven by "the continuing multiplication of available channels for news publication and dissemination [...] and the development of collaborative models for user participation and content creation" (Bruns, 2011:120). In so doing, "news users engaged in organising and curating the flood of available news stories and newsworthy information which is now available from a multitude of

channels [...] participate in a loosely organised effort to watch – to keep track of – what information passes through these channels" (Bruns, 2011:121). In other words, citizens are engaged in gathering, processing, selecting, commenting on and distributing information to people they are connected to in a similar way to journalists. This is not replacing journalists, however. Indeed, "journalists and editors, in turn, are engaged in a form of internal gatewatching which tracks the outcomes of this crowdsourced process of investigation to identify any particularly relevant, interesting, or outrageous findings to be explored further through more conventional journalistic activities" (Bruns, 2011:121).

Bruns' notion of gatewatching is useful since it helps conceptualise an emerging practice of online real-time curation of news[1]. This can be performed in a multitude of different ways, by journalists and ordinary citizens alike. This chapter will now turn to discuss two examples of how journalists are operationalizing such a curator role, through live blogging and social media respectively. In both instances the journalists are occupying a gatewatching role by transparently harnessing information from a range of different sources and directly engaging with their audiences in the process of newsgathering and verification.

Example I: Andrew Sparrow: Live Blogging Politics

The British national newspaper award for Political Journalist of the Year was in 2011 presented to Guardian political correspondent, Andrew Sparrow. Not for his contributions to the paper, but for his meticulous live blogging of the 2010 UK General Election on the Guardian website. During an election campaign dominated by the country's very first series of televised leadership debates, his blog provided an online meta-narrative of the day's events as they unfolded - combining his own and fellow Guardian correspondents' analysis and commentary with a curation of news reports, links, blogs and social media. Indeed, one of the examples used in Sparrow's submission to the Press Awards was his live blogging of the televised debates, further demonstrating the intertextuality of the practice and synergies with other media platforms.

With entries sometimes up to 14,000 words long, Sparrow's election live blog attracted between 100,000 – 150,000 page views on a typical day, with a peak of around 2 million page views on election night (Sparrow, 2010). At most the live blog

received some 335,000 unique visitors, around 34,500 more than the Guardian's daily newspaper circulation at the time. Those visitors also contributed several hundred comments each day, with some readers even providing "useful material" for the blog and responding to questions from the journalists.

Sparrow was not the first Guardian live blogger, with the practice having been used for live reporting of sports since 1999 and for select breaking news since 2005 (see Thurman and Walters, 2013). However, starting with his politics live blog in August 2008, Sparrow has been a significant contributor to popularising the format within a news context. Emily Bell, the former director of digital content at Guardian News and Media, recalled that Sparrow had "wanted to move online because he saw that political reporting and the internet were highly compatible but not being used particularly well" (Bell, 2011). In her view, live blogging "created a form of news reporting which had both the depth and context it was hard to cram into one space constrained article". Commenting on Sparrow's award, she proclaimed:

This is not just a reward for really sparkling journalism, but the validation of techniques now open to journalists such as liveblogging. To be adding context and knowledge to real time events, was the best way to report the election. (Bell, 2011)

Reflecting on the success of his live blog election coverage, Sparrow noted how the instantaneous publishing of reports, online before print, was an integral part of this new practice. It also invited audiences to witness and engage with the process of journalism, which to him enriched the experience of being a journalist. He commented:

"During the first leaders' debate I could spot that Nick Clegg was winning within the first 20 minutes. So could everyone else. But I was in a position to say so immediately. If journalism is the first draft of history, live blogging is the first draft of journalism. It's not perfect, but it's deeply rewarding – on any day, I was able to publish almost every snippet that I thought worth sharing, which is not the case for anyone who has to squeeze material into a newspaper – and it beats sitting on a battlebus."
(Sparrow, 2010)

With live blogging "the journalist moves from a linear, one-off

story to a stream of instant witnessing", according to Director of POLIS at the LSE, Charlie Beckett, "often combined with background context and analysis as well as public interactivity through comments or email" (Beckett, 2010:3). For him, journalism such as Sparrow's election live blog "does much more than aggregate content". Instead, "it is a platform for journalists to add material that otherwise would never be published", which "captures the excitement of covering an event as a journalist and conveys the atmosphere as well" (Beckett, 2010:4).

Not everyone has been celebratory of this emerging form of online journalism that challenges traditional reportorial norms and narrative structures. Journalist and blogger, John Symes, for example has suggested the Guardian's live blogging format is akin to "the death of journalism", since it "is merely just repeating all that's wrong with 24 hour rolling news" (Symes, 2011). He further argued:

> "*There is no structure and therefore no sense, and the effect is of being in the middle of a room full of loud, shouty and excitable people all yelling at once with all the phones ringing, the fire alarm going off and a drunken old boy slurring in your ear about 'what it all means.' It really is a bizarre way to run a media circus.*"
> (Symes, 2011)

Symes concluded his blog post in dramatic fashion by dismissing the Guardian's "radical rewriting of the rules of journalism" as "nonsensical unstructured jumble". For him, this perceived failure was further legitimation of "the traditional inverted triangle news structure [that] has been tried, tested and still stands".

Guardian's lead user experience and information architect, Martin Belam, was "obviously bound to disagree", but responded that the value of the live blog often depends on the topic. Moreover, he agreed that the "strict reverse chronology of entries whilst a live blog is 'active' can lead to the more important chunks of the content getting buried" (Belam, 2011). Whilst musing about different ways to display summaries and signposting "conventionally formatted stories" within the live blog, he concluded that the problems are arising in part due to "the way that the journalistic usage of live blogs has evolved well

beyond what the CMS [content management system] tools were intended for" (Belam, 2011).

Concurring with this view, freelance journalist and former digital research editor at the Guardian, Kevin Anderson, expressed concern "that some of the aggregation that we're doing is really difficult to navigate unless you're a news junkie" (Anderson, 2011). The preservation of traditional journalistic methods was essential to him, so "that a stream of news aggregation doesn't feel like a maddening stream of consciousness". In other words,

> *"Journalists report and choose what they think are the most important bits of information. That's one of the services that we provide, and in the deluge of real-time news, that service is actually more important than before."* (Anderson, 2011)

Rather than undermining traditional journalistic values, it would appear Guardian audiences feel the live blog is reinforcing them. In a survey conducted for the Guardian, Thurman and Walters (2013) found that readers did not consider the time constraints journalists were under to impede on the quality of live blogs. Instead, "Readers liked the neutral tone, the fact that information was corrected quickly, and the balance that they believed the mix of sources provided" (Thurman and Walters, 2013:15-16). Indeed readers considered "articles" to be more "polemical" or "opinion based", whilst live blogs "were seen as 'more factual', as they provided 'statements' readers could 'draw [their] own conclusions from'" (Thurman and Walters, 2013:16). Moreover, respondents valued live blog attributes such as timeliness, tone, community and participation, curation, and their convenience.

Guardian blogs editor, Matt Wells, declared he was "instinctively an enthusiast" of live blogging as they "provide a useful way of telling stories characterised by incremental developments and multiple layers". For him, the most valuable attributes of live blogging are "how it is so transparent about sources, how it dispenses with false journalistic fripperies and embraces the audience" and "even take input from journalists on rival publications". Moreover, these "best elements of live blogging […] are so strong that, rather than foretelling

the death of journalism, the live blog is surely the embodi-
ment of its future" (Wells, 2011).

Yet there are other ways in which journalists can perform
a similar curator role. This chapter will now turn to discuss
a second example of a journalist is using Twitter, rather than
a live blog on their institutional website to conduct real-time
curation.

Example 2: Andy Carvin: Tweeting Revolutions

Senior digital strategist at the US National Public Radio, Andy
Carvin, rose to prominence during 2011 for his prolific use
of Twitter to report on the "Arab Spring" as events unfolded.
He started tweeting about Tunisia in December 2010 when
he had around 15,500 followers. In 2011 he went on to focus
on Egypt, Libya and other countries as protests and revolts
spread across the region.

Carvin's increased profile meant a rapid increase in followers
of his Twitter account, reaching 42,500 in April 2011 and more
than 70,500 in in June 2011 – by which time he had posted some
134,780 updates. Reportedly averaging some 400 tweets a day,
he has been known to tweet more than 16 hours a day, peak-
ing on 18 February 2011 with 839 tweets and 614 retweets in a
single day (The Washington Post, 12 April 2011). Twitter even
blocked Carvin's account assuming it was a source of spam be-
cause of the shear volume of tweets, though the company quick-
ly whitelisted him after he contacted them about the blunder.

Acclaim for Carvin's work was widespread and several
news organisations profiled his social media use. He is "one
of the world's best Twitter accounts", according to Craig Sil-
verman, and "a living, breathing real-time verification sys-
tem" (Silverman, 2011). Megan Garber concurred, arguing
that Carvin "provided a hint of what news can look like in an
increasingly networked media environment" (Garber, 2011).
Brian Stelter of the New York Times described Carvin as "a
personal news wire", noting that his work was "widely praised
in news media circles" (Stelter, 2011). Paul Farhi of the Wash-
ington Post similarly dubbed him "a one-man Twitter news
bureau, chronicling fast-moving developments throughout
the Middle East" (Farhi, 2011). Farhi praised Carvin for draw-
ing on an eclectic range of sources across different platforms

to explain the complexities of events:

> *"By grabbing bits and pieces from Facebook, YouTube and the wider Internet and mixing them with a stunning array of eyewitness sources, Carvin has constructed a vivid and constantly evolving mosaic of the region's convulsions."*
> (Farhi, 2011)

Grappling for a way of describing this nascent form of reporting in terms of journalism, Farhi noted that:

> *"There isn't really a name for what Carvin does — tweet curator? social-media news aggregator? interactive digital journalist? — but that may be because this form of reporting is still being invented. By Carvin, among others."*
> (Farhi, 2011)

Carvin suggested that his Twitter practice was not necessarily new, since "journalists gathering, analyzing and disseminating relevant information isn't new at all" (cited in Stelter, 2011). He would "see that as curation as well", with the innovation being in his use of social media platforms to perform this reporting. Carvin also resisted comparisons likening his tweets to a news wire, instead drawing attention to how his account is an ongoing transparent process of verification with invaluable contributions from his Twitter followers. This collaborative effort is in his view more akin to a newsroom:

> *"I get uncomfortable when people prefer my twitter feed as a newswire. It's not a newswire. It's a newsroom. It's where I'm trying to separate fact from fiction, interacting with people. That's a newsroom."*
> (cited in Ingram, 2012)

Having spent significant time in Tunisia and later Egypt in part through his work with the Global Voices project, Carvin had since 2004 been building up a network of contacts that included local bloggers. This meant he was able to source information quickly, using his knowledge of the local political situation to make sense of eyewitness accounts and acting as a conduit of information when the uprisings began. For Carvin, his Twitter

feed was about presenting the "emotion and atmosphere" from eyewitnesses as they reported on events in "real time":

> *"Part of what I'm trying to do is capture the perspectives of people caught up in the middle of the action in real time. For all of the countries that have experienced revolutions, there are people tweeting eyewitness reports, capturing the emotion and atmosphere of the situation. I retweet a lot of those exchanges, because it's like observing an oral history in real time."*
> (cited in Connelly, 2011)

His formal job as a digital strategist, rather than a reporter, also afforded Carvin the flexibility to experiment with social media tools – including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Storify - and in so doing pushing boundaries of conventional reporting. Reflecting on his platform of choice, Carvin professed that he was actually "really agnostic", noting instead that "it's a matter of whether the people I want to talk to are on there, about who's using it and what information I can glean from it." (cited in Kiss, 2011).

Based in Washington D.C., Carvin did not personally witness or verify information on the ground in countries that he was tweeting about. Making a virtue of not being caught up in events himself, he argued that triangulating multiple eyewitness accounts provided a better overall understanding of what was going on:

> *It's a form of situational awareness, something I noticed in late June when I was in Tahrir Square in Cairo and hundreds of people were injured when the police attacked. I could only tell what was going on immediately in front of me. I could smell it, see it, feel it, hear it, but I didn't know what was truly going on, whereas when I was using social media I felt I had a better sense of what was happening on the ground.* (cited in Kiss, 2011).

Without being present on the ground, Carvin had to develop different strategies for selecting and verifying information from the deluge of messages posted publicly on the internet. Twitter hashtags for example are useful when a story first breaks, allowing him to identify key sources to follow and relevant

context. However, the value of hashtags diminishes as its usage increases, making it more difficult to distinguish content from people directly connected with events on the ground. Sometimes Carvin would challenge people's tweets by prefixing a retweet with "source?", or he would ask his Twitter followers to help translate information or corroborate reports.

In March 2011 Carvin successfully debunked rumours that an image of a mortar shell proved Israeli weapons were being deployed in Libya. He used crowdsourcing to help decipher inscriptions on the shell and confirmed that it was probably of British or Indian origin. Several news organisations nevertheless continued to report the false reports about Israeli munitions being used. "In this particular case", Carvin noted, "a rumor perpetuated by several news sources was easily debunked by a group of people on Twitter who don't know each other and likely will never meet each other in person". Moreover he described his Twitter followers as "smart, curious, and skeptical", and "generous in sharing their time and skills to help me out when I need it" (Carvin, 2011).

Carvin's approach to news reporting has also attracted critics. Sky News Digital News Editor Neal Mann, for example, took a different editorial stance to Carvin when he decided not to retweet a particularly graphic image of two children coming out of Syria. Mann described the footage as "disturbing" and whilst as a journalist he might be used to dealing with such material, he did "not feel comfortable pushing it to those who aren't" (cited in The Telegraph, 2012). Carvin responded bluntly:

> *"War is hell—there's no way around that. And the growth of alternative media, social media, citizen journalism and the like now gives the public many ways to access content that would otherwise have been lost in archives. People now have the choice whether or not they want to bear witness, and I try help them make an informed choice."*
> (cited in Schumacher-Matos & Grisham, 2012)

Other critics took issue with the very notion of Carvin as a journalist, claiming his methods did not stand up to scrutiny. "To have NPR appoint a senior strategist with full knowledge that they are publishing news or information based on tweets

of unknown or unvetted sources is troubling," according to technology blogger, Adam Curry. "Who knows where some of this is coming from?", he questioned, before suggesting the problem was with NPR for allowing him to report in this way:

> *"I'm not saying Andy's a bad guy or has an agenda. But I do think it's worth asking what NPR thinks it's doing."* (cited in Farhi, 2011).

Benjamin Doherty was similarly dismissive: "The troubling thing is that Andy Carvin doesn't appear to do any journalism. Nor is reporting part of his job description at NPR". He questioned the "neutrality" of Carvin's role, pointedly suggesting it would be "difficult to imagine anyone from NPR engaging in similar – apparently symbiotic – interactions with, say, Palestinians organizing protests against Israel and surviving in their job" (Doherty, 2011). In other words, both Curry and Doherty took issue with Carvin's verification process and reposting of unconfirmed reports, as well as his closeness to opposition voices. Carvin acknowledged these were particularly difficult challenges. In his view, however, his sourcing could be justified provided he retained a critical view of his relationships and was transparent about the process:

> *"Some of these folks are working to actively overthrow their local regimes. I just have to be aware of that at all times. Perhaps the answer is transparency, so a certain person might be giving me good information but I should never forget that they are part of the opposition."* (cited in Silverman, 2011)

Embracing transparency and indeed openly admitting errors was for Ingram a refreshing antidote to "restrictive social-media policies" that "seem designed to remove as many of the elements of being human as possible from the practice of being a journalist". For him such moves to restrict and control social media usage were "the exact opposite of what needs to happen if traditional journalism is to survive", with Carvin instead providing "a pretty good example of what one possible future of real-time, crowdsourced journalism actually looks like" (Ingram, 2012).

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed two case studies where nascent "social media" is intersecting with journalism to challenge conventional ideas about news. Whilst "curation" can be understood as partly rooted in traditional journalism practice, the way this is operationalised through live blogging and Twitter are unique. Martin Belam argues that: "Most video news on the internet is essentially the same kind of package that you'd produce for TV, most audio the same as you'd produce for radio, and most text-based news could be printed out". For him, live blogging "feels like a type of news reporting that is emerging as being native to the web" (cited in Wells, 2011). Central to this emerging style of reporting is a renewed understanding of and interaction with audiences – many of whom are contributing to the news process and even acting as citizen reporters themselves. However, rather than displacing journalists, they are working alongside them in a mutual gatewatching process as suggested by Bruns (2005, 2011).

There are obvious opportunities for live blogging and social media curation as highlighted by the examples in this chapter – immediacy, transparency, interaction and crowdsourcing to name a few. Equally, there are many challenges and ethical considerations that journalists need to be aware of when engaging in such practice. For example, ensuring curation is, in fact, curated and not a confusing stream of consciousness. Upholding standards with regards to verification, especially faced with a deluge of apparent eyewitness material. Providing proper attribution for such material and ensuring sources are not exploited. Finding a balance to ensure meaningful interaction with sources and audiences.

Major news organisations are increasingly aware of these challenges and working to support their journalists in adopting elements of social media in their practice. Policies for dealing with social media are gradually being adopted, though with some attracting criticism for appearing to rein in the apparent freedom associated with the internet. Aspiring journalists, Andy Carvin argues, "are going to need to be prepared to not only take really good journalistic practices and make sense of them and apply them online but also understand the strengths of social media". For him, "The tools are important for the hu-

man network they create" (cited in Rowinski, 2011).

Notes

1. It is important not to confuse "curation" with "aggregation", which refers to websites that republish content, often verbatim, from other sources. For a discussion on the challenges associated with news aggregation, see for example Bakker (2011).

Challenging Questions

- What challenges and opportunities do social media pose for journalists?

- To what extent can social media curation be considered a form of journalism?

- How can journalism facilitate participation from ordinary citizens?

- Discuss the ethical considerations required by journalists when live blogging or curating social media content.

- Discuss the forms, practices and epistemologies of live blogging and social media curation.

Recommended reading

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